

BETH BAILEY AND RICHARD H. IMMERMAN, EDS. *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*. New York: New York University Press, 2015. 368 pages. Paper US\$30.00 ISBN 9781479826902.

From their outset, the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have generated a significant body of literature. Given the length and vicissitudes of those two conflicts, much of the writing on the topics is highly politicized and intimately connected to very specific moments in time. Such works are excellent at capturing debates and sentiments surrounding particular issues or periods, but often lack the perspective and conceptual depth one might wish for when trying to develop a broader sense of the conflicts and their relationship to one another. As the United States has worked to extricate itself from both conflicts over the last few years it is becoming possible to develop more detached and ultimately more compelling analyses of these latest episodes of U.S. struggles in the Middle East. Indeed, *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, edited by Beth Bailey and Richard Immerman, is an excellent early effort in this regard.

The book includes thirteen essays organized into four somewhat predictable though appropriate sections: “The Wars and Their Origins”; “The Possibilities and Limits of American Military and Diplomatic Strategy”; “Waging and the Wages of War”; and “Lessons and Legacies.” These follow a well-crafted introduction that recounts the events of the morning of 11 September 2001 before tackling some of the deeper conceptual issues entangled in the Bush administration’s decision to launch a “global war on terror” in response. It is not possible to discuss each of the essays in a review of this length, so let me note that in totality the essays offer a good sense of these conflicts at multiple levels. Some of the authors traverse expected ground, such as the uses of intelligence, changes in military strategy, opposition to the war, the combatants’ experiences, and the role of the media. Others till fresher soil, such as the role of human rights in American discourse and policy, the integration of the wars into popular culture, and how veterans have adjusted after their experiences in war. The essay authors treat their subjects with care and nuance, which is not always the case when tackling conflicts that have become so divisive over time.

All of its strengths aside, the book does have its shortcomings. Some of these, such as references to the continuing search for Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar (60) when we now know he died in 2013, are quite minor and can be attributed to writing about events that have not yet reached their full conclusion. There is also some unevenness in tone and copyediting across the essays. Finally, while not necessarily a shortcoming,

it is important to point out that the vast majority of the content of the essays focuses on U.S. decision makers, U.S. soldiers, U.S. costs, etc. Afghans, Iraqis, and even other participants in the U.S.-led coalitions in each country make very few appearances in these pages. The most notable exception is David Farber's "Fighting (against) the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," which analyzes opposition to the war in the United States and abroad.

A more significant issue, however, remains the inescapable politicization of the conflicts, especially Iraq. While it appears in multiple essays, it is most evident in what is arguably the most provocative and engaging essay in the collection, Stephen Biddle and Peter Feaver's "Assessing Strategic Choices in the War on Terror." Biddle and Feaver critique the notion that the vast majority of U.S. strategic decisions were obviously right or wrong, and instead argue that they might more accurately be described as a series of "fifty-five-forty-five decisions" in which the pursuit of any reasonably acceptable alternative strategic approaches to those taken by the Bush administration "would have produced neither a radically better nor a radically worse 2015 outcome" (99). To demonstrate the point, the authors undertake a series of counterfactual analyses focused mostly on early U.S. efforts in Afghanistan to play out the likely outcomes of decisions not taken. The authors acknowledge the limitations inherent in pursuing hypothetical history, so their judicious usage of it offers an intriguing approach that reflects the complexity of the situations under discussion. The problem, however, is that they largely avoid tackling the most significant—and some might argue the most obviously "ninety-ten" right-or-wrong decision the Bush administration took: the invasion of Iraq. Indeed, it is only in the conclusion of the essay that they finally focus on Iraq, noting that "analyzing other decisions since 2001—such as the decisions that got the United States into the 2003 Iraq War, the decisions that got the United States out of the Iraq War, the responses to the Arab Spring, and others—might generate a very different assessment" (118). Writing an essay examining U.S. strategic decision making and the costs and benefits of paths taken and not, and then avoiding the biggest decision of all that clearly had the greatest costs—in terms of lives lost, resources spent, and perhaps even prospects for victory in Afghanistan—is simply inexplicable outside of its political implications.

Nonetheless, Bailey and Immerman have compiled a fine collection of essays that should serve a wide audience. The essays are accessible to the interested general reader or undergraduate, and can be read individually or collectively. At the same time, they possess the intellectual heft necessary to contribute to emerging scholarly conversations about U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. The editors should also be commended for including

essays that push us beyond the initial impressions we have acquired as participants in or witnesses to these conflicts. In doing so, they have made a valuable contribution that can help push forward our analyses of these two defining conflicts of the early twenty-first century. ✨

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DOUGLAS SCOTT BROOKES AND ALI ZIYREK. *Harem Ghosts: What One Cemetery Can Tell Us About the Ottoman Empire*. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2016. xvii + 310 pages, maps and photos, acknowledgements, glossary, references and sources, index. Cloth US\$86.95 ISBN 9781558766105

In light of the many texts that have been published recently which explore the long history of the Ottoman Empire, *Harem Ghosts* focuses specifically upon making sense of roughly the last 150 years of the empire's existence via the royal tomb of Sultan Mahmud II as a window onto the past. The authors, using original documentation, provide the most detailed written study ever of Istanbul's most prestigious burial ground, which evolved into the national pantheon of the Ottoman Empire, "the Ottoman Westminster Abbey" as one local English language newspaper described it in 1883. The authors also journey to the Ottoman past through burial traditions and customs, the architecture of cemeteries, and the life stories of eminent Ottoman figures. Within art and literature, death was a familiar companion to Ottomans. Thus, Ottomans treasured the site as a "National Necropolis of the Noted" and as a national symbol of the benevolence of the House of Osman toward its subjects. This eternal resting place of members of the imperial family as well as prominent persons from political and literary circles turned out to be an architectural jewel.

The first of the five chapters depicts the death and the burial of Mahmud II, who requested to be buried on Divan Yolu, a public arena which is at the very center of the city, close to public access. Immediately after the burial, his successor Abdulmecid I ordered the construction of the mausoleum complex. The authors agreed that Ottoman archives are notoriously silent when it comes to attributing credit for architecture of this era. Garabed Balian of the Balian dynasty of Armenian architects in service to the Ottoman court in the nineteenth century has been traditionally credited with designing the Mahmud II tomb. The tomb was built during the Tanzimat era when the Ottoman state attempted to "reorganize" itself by borrowing ideas from