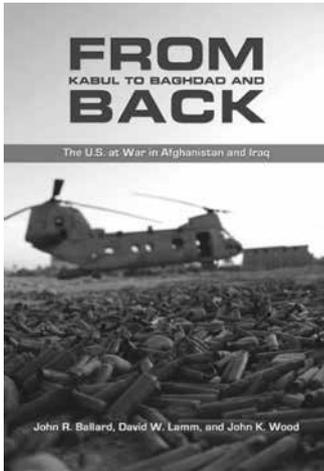


# Book Review



## **From Kabul to Baghdad and Back: The U.S. at War in Afghanistan and Iraq**

**by John R. Ballard, David W. Lamm and John K. Wood**

Naval Institute Press, 2012, 384 pp., \$42.95

**Reviewed by Pratik Chougule and William Cappelletti**

In the decade before 9/11, the prospect that war with Iraq could leave the U.S. vulnerable in other theaters persuaded defense planners to retain the two-war doctrine. In broad outlines, the capability to wage two simultaneous military campaigns had served as a standard for preparedness since World War II. But by 2003, it was unclear whether U.S. forces were, in fact, up to the task, particularly in an international system replete with unconventional threats such as terrorism. The decision to invade Iraq amid ongoing fighting in Afghanistan tested the credibility of post-Cold War, U.S. doctrine. Interestingly though, few works in the voluminous literature have analyzed the Afghanistan and Iraq missions in the framework of a multi-theater conflict. *From Kabul to Baghdad* fills the void with an accessible narrative of both military campaigns through 2012.

The three co-authors are defense academics by background and largely stay within their areas of expertise. *From Kabul to Baghdad* offers insightful critiques on how bureaucratic arrangements, management structures, and chains of command between Washington and the field impacted the war efforts. They err toward institutional explanations rather than focusing on the broad socio-political dynamics of the Middle East or on the types of personalized anecdotes that fill “insider accounts.”

The book’s analysis is enriched with historical background. By describing the simultaneous, multi-theater wars that have occurred since the eighteenth century, the authors consider the Afghanistan and Iraq interventions in proper perspective, highlighting America’s “long experience with dual campaigns.” Their account of the U.S. experience with counterinsurgency doctrine in the 1980s and early 1990s dispels the “common misperception, often repeated and almost considered gospel...that the U.S. military, and in particular the army, deliberately and systematically avoided thinking about counterinsurgency doctrine in an attempt to bury the ghosts of Viet Nam.”

The strongest sections of the book are those that illustrate how events in one theater impacted outcomes in the other. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the authors note, were doubly taxing on the military, since both conflicts, by virtue of their centers of gravity in the greater Middle East, were housed under Central Command (CENTCOM). Thus, CENTCOM was responsible for managing deployments, logistics, and intelligence in both theaters. Its planners were consumed with dilemmas stemming from the reality that certain military assets such as airborne reconnaissance

would be stretched beyond their operational capabilities.

With CENTCOM overtasked, the fates of the two missions were determined in large part by the improvisations of diplomats and commanders in the field. The results were mixed. Notable is the authors' convincing, if somewhat counterintuitive, thesis that the diversion of attention from Afghanistan to Iraq actually contributed to successes in Afghanistan between 2003 and 2005. Resource constraints incentivized Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and General David Barno to leverage "all elements of national power" available to them through the collaborative efforts of "a true interagency team." The wide autonomy that Khalilzad and Barno enjoyed due to Washington's focus on Iraq allowed them to shift from a counterterrorism to counterinsurgency mission, with little bureaucratic resistance. The authors succeed in showing how "a uniquely structured U.S. country team that seamlessly blended diplomatic, informational, economic, and military means" enabled the U.S. to cajole Afghan leaders on sensitive issues such as national elections, warlords, and the building of national security forces.

However, lessons from the 2003–2005 Afghanistan experience only haphazardly informed operations during the duration of the U.S. wars in the two theaters. Greater oversight from Washington notwithstanding, the Iraq mission in its early stages went awry due to the dysfunction between the Coalition Provisional Authority and Combined Joint Task Force 7. When more cohesive teams arrived in Baghdad, counterinsurgency lessons from Afghanistan contributed to the turnaround in Iraq. But by then, disengagement from Washington, which had provided Khalilzad and Barno with room to innovate, backfired when a less dynamic country team took charge in Kabul, and NATO allies assumed greater responsibility from the U.S. in Afghanistan during the peak of the civil war in Iraq.

While the book's military analysis is generally persuasive, the authors' final assessments of the two wars' outcomes are more mixed. On the positive side, the authors capture the scope of the transformation that the military underwent through the wars: "The full integration of irregular and conventional capabilities and techniques exhibited by American forces in both Iraq and Afghanistan represented a new way of warfare at the tactical and operational levels."

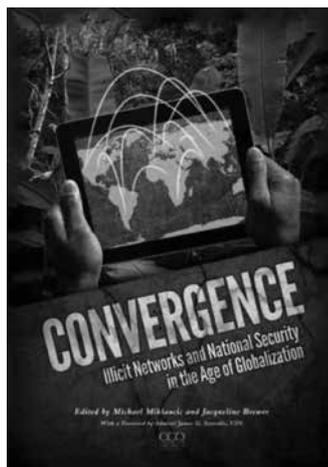
The book's underlying skepticism of the decision to fight simultaneously in Iraq and Afghanistan, however, is too often influenced by debatable assumptions that the authors fail to defend. At times, the authors attribute missteps to operational handicaps imposed by simultaneous operations in the two theaters when more pertinent explanations are found simply in context-specific misjudgments. An example is CENTCOM Commander Tommy Franks's failure to deploy Army Rangers at Tora Bora in December 2001.

Dubious too is the authors' rather sanguine assessment of Pakistani intentions. "Pakistan had hoped to develop strategic depth in Afghanistan, but it most likely will reap increased instability..." the authors predict, without recognizing that fomenting instability could in fact be consistent with Pakistan's idea of strategic depth. The authors' evident under-appreciation of the Pakistani threat may explain the book's remarkable theory that the U.S. "would have been prudent to have withdrawn its forces from Afghanistan in 2005 after the departure of David Barno and Zal Khalilzad from Kabul." Such a bold claim requires, at a minimum, answers to questions that the authors do not address. What would have happened to fragile coalition and Afghan gains had U.S. forces not been available to impede the onslaught of Pakistan-backed insurgents? How would the Iraq War have unfolded in a strategic context in which emboldened terrorist networks like al Qaeda had filled the vacuum from a U.S. drawdown in Afghanistan?

These shortcomings however do not detract from the book's enduring value. Even if future presidents agree with the authors that the U.S. should "fight two enemies simultaneously...only under the most dire of circumstances," history points to the uncomfortable reality that more multi-theater wars could be on the horizon. **IAJ**

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## **Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization**

***Edited by Michael Miklaucic  
and Jacqueline Brewer***

Center for Complex Operations, National Defense  
University Press, 298 pp., \$29.95 or download free  
at <http://www.ndu/press/convergence.html>

***Reviewed by Richard E. Berkebile, Ph.D.; Heather R.  
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*Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization*, a collective work of nineteen different authors, is topical, not collaborative, so there is plenty of overlap and some helpful divergence in perspective. The stated aim of the book is to educate national and international security leaders on the current and growing threat from the hybridization of organized criminal, insurgent, and terrorist groups or rapidly-formed, symbiotic relationships among them—in a word convergence. The book is largely successful on this score. Although the effort to persuade on the danger of convergence is often overwrought, readers will walk away convinced of the real damage to economies, governance, and victims and the beneficial aspects of the globalized international system.

The book is descriptive in its content; audiences seeking theories and causal mechanisms will need to look elsewhere. A recurring theme is the need for a networked response to a networked threat. Nonetheless, the networks described are horizontal among agencies of the national government or multilateral among states. There is little more than a passing description of vertical networking to local governments, commercial interests, or the private sector. The collection makes several sound proposals for making better use of existing interagency, diplomatic, and military tools, but does