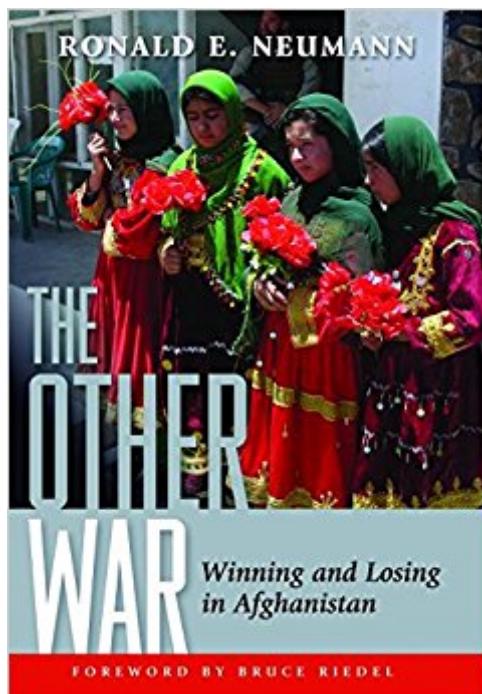


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The Other War: Winning And Losing In Afghanistan



Synopsis

As the bloodshed in Iraq intensified in 2005, Afghanistan quickly faded from the nation's front pages to become the "other war," supposedly going well and largely ignored. In fact, the insurgency in Afghanistan was about to break out with renewed force, the drug problem was worsening, and international coordination was losing focus. That July, Ronald Neumann arrived in Kabul from Baghdad as the U.S. ambassador, bringing the experience of a career diplomat whose professional lifetime had been spent in the greater Middle East, beginning thirty-eight years earlier in the same country in which it ended—Afghanistan. Neumann's account of how the war in Afghanistan unfolded over the next two years is rich with heretofore unexamined details of operations, tensions, and policy decisions. He demonstrates why the United States was slow to recognize the challenge it faced and why it failed to make the requisite commitment of economic, military, and civilian resources. His account provides a new understanding of the problems of alliance warfare in conducting simultaneous nation building and counterinsurgency. Honest in recounting failures as well as successes, the book is must reading as much for students of international affairs who want to understand the reality of diplomatic policymaking and implementation in the field as for those who want to understand the nation's complex "other war."

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Customer Reviews

"Ambassador Neumann has written an extraordinarily important account of U.S. efforts in

Afghanistan during his tenure in Kabul. The book is unmatched in its rich description, frank analysis, and lucid recommendations -- and should be required reading for any one interested in understanding the complexities of America's involvement in

Afghanistan. •Seth G. Jones, author, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (Seth G. Jones 2009-08-07) "From Vietnam combat soldier to Iraq and Afghanistan combat diplomat, Ron Neumann has seen, if not all, then most of it. In his first-person account of his time in Kabul, he recounts the possibilities and pitfalls of an armed nation building." President Obama's strategy for Afghanistan needs to be informed by this tale. Clearly, a vision of a nation is not sufficient to prevail. As Ambassador Neumann indicates, execution and accountability are essential. His thirty-seven years of government service bears this out. Read this book, learn the lessons therein or fail in Afghanistan. •Richard Armitage, former deputy secretary of state and former assistant secretary of defense (Richard Armitage 2009-08-10) "Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann's *The Other War: Winning and Losing in Afghanistan* truly stands apart from the field for its frank insider advice on crafting the most effective policy on Afghanistan. A lucid and personal portrayal of one of America's longest-running conflicts, *The Other War* stands the critical test of a change of administration in the United States and a retooling of Washington's foreign policy. In fact, Neumann's book should be required reading for all interested in the current

administration's AfPak strategy. In this engaging firsthand history of recent events in Afghanistan, the veteran American diplomat reminds policymakers that grand strategies only work when the tactical details have been worked out on the ground." •Amin Tarzi, director, Middle East Studies, Marine Corps University (Amin Tarzi 2009-08-10) "A formidable diplomat, a thoughtful war strategist, and a hands-on operator, Neumann lends his old-world intellect and curiosity to this fascinating insider account of the American struggle to rebuild Afghanistan while coping with the U.S. bureaucratic machine. This is a deeply insightful and thoughtful book, at times amusing and always frank. The United States needs more Ron Neumanns if it is to succeed in Afghanistan. Neumann is the epitome of the soldier, statesman, and scholar on the front line of the war against extremism." •Ahmed Rashid, author of *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (Ahmed Rashid 2009-08-10) "[T]he book is must-reading, as much for students of international affairs who want to understand the reality of diplomatic policymaking and implementation in the field as for those who want to understand our nation's complex engagement in Afghanistan." •Foreign Service Journal (Foreign Service Journal 2009-12-14) "A powerful account of the author's role

as the U.S. ambassador who came to Kabul from Baghdad as the U.S. ambassador with a lifetime in the greater Middle East."Ã¢â€”•Midwest Book Review (Midwest Book Review 2010-01-18)

Ronald E. Neumann, now president of the American Academy of Diplomacy, served previously as a deputy assistant secretary and three times as ambassador, to Algeria (1994Ã¢â€”â€œ97), Bahrain (2001Ã¢â€”â€œ4), and finally to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2005Ã¢â€”â€œ7). Prior to his stint in Afghanistan, Neumann, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, served in Baghdad from February 2004 with the Coalition Provisional Authority and then as the embassyÃ¢â€”â€œs principal interlocutor with the Multinational Command. He lives in Arlington, Virginia.

As the author noted in his book: "This book is a personal and not a scholarly account...it neither pretends nor claims to be an inside account of Washington policy deliberations" [p. xiii]. Sadly, the author is forthrightly honest: the reader is not going to get much insight about any "dirt" about how the staffs of various U.S. agencies (State, the Pentagon, USAID) disagreed over policy goals while the author served as the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan (2005-2007). The author said that he wrote this book while referring to the letters that he had written to his wife. Like most letters written home by soldiers serving in a combat zone, they try to write 'upbeat' letters - so as not to alarm their family members. This book is much like that: upbeat without much drama or trauma. But then, this ambassador-author is a diplomat after all. Throughout his book the ambassador recounts numerous problems of Afghanistan: a weak economy; the impact of hundreds of thousands of displaced refugees seeking both protection and employment; how warlords controlled the opium poppy-trade to fund either themselves or the opposing Taliban; the lack of electricity; the lack of roads for bringing farmers' products to town; the lack of an educated bureaucracy; the lack of a trained military - let alone the lack of sufficient numbers; among many other problems. From reading this book, while the author details his meetings with various international agencies (UN, WMF, IMF, USAID, the European Union, etc.) in seeking funds to rebuild Afghanistan, he doesn't present anything like a 35-page Power-Point Presentation in noting how various programs needed to be prioritized (as the author openly stated, his book isn't a 'scholarly' accounting of the implementation of specific programs and their successes or failures). This book has more of your youthful 'here is what I did during my summer vacation' paper you used to write in grade school, rather anything like a revengeful supermarket-tabloid article exposing the policy misdeeds of the Bush-Chaney-Rumsfield team of diverting attention away from Taliban-Afghanistan to pursue the overthrow of Saddam Hussain in Iraq. He mentions some of the problems with the Pakistani

government in being 'two faced' about its conflicting dual support of Pres. Karzai's government and the opposing Taliban (but doesn't go into details). Frustration, but not any really deep analysis of the international conflicts; sadly, even discussion of the border problem of the Durand Line is left to an endnote [p. 227]. Yes, this is not a sugar-coated book of the ambassador defending his tour - he highlights many of his frustrations with the lack of either funding or White House support, but then, it is very disappointing to a reader who is seeking a back-stabbing, cat-claw scratching, shocking kiss-and-tell revelation of the disputes between the Embassy, State Dept., the Pentagon, and the White House (one gets hints, but no specific 'name calling' - although the author did note that when Sec. of Defense Rumsfeld left office: "We shed no tears in Kabul" [p. 144]). A book better than what I have reviewed here.

Ronald Neumann was the U.S. ambassador in Kabul in 2005-07. The Taliban were stronger at the end of this period than they were at the beginning. "The Other War" fails as history because it does not explain why this happened. The book must have been drawn from Neumann's diaries and letters, because it plods forward week by week, meeting by meeting, with little background information or Afghan context. One gets the impression that Neumann spent his time haggling over budgets with Washington, trouble-shooting mismanaged programs, doing "development tourism," and attending donor coordination meetings. Neumann's portrayal of President Karzai is very thin. Other Afghans hardly appear at all, except as people trying to blow up Americans or as audiences assembled by embassy staff to hear Neumann's banal speeches. Unforgivably, there's virtually no analysis of the Taliban's structure, political/military strategy, or support base. It's an unromantic and U.S.-centric view of the Foreign Service. I liked the book because many vignettes reminded me of my own year in AmEmbassy Kabul. There's no doubt that Neumann was an honorable and intelligent public servant, who deserved better than to work for an Administration that was fixated on quick fixes and obsessed with the unfolding disaster in Iraq. But his book is dry to the point of tedium, and it does little to tell readers how we were sucked into an Afghan quagmire or how we should get out.

Ambassador Neumann is the real deal. This book is authoritative and incisive. It helps when reading it to know something of Afghanistan but this is a clear tale of how the US approached a problem that got bigger, not smaller, as time went on.

THE OTHER WAR: WINNING AND LOSING IN AFGHANISTAN provides a powerful account of the

author's role as the U.S. ambassador who came to Kabul from Baghdad as the U.S. ambassador with a lifetime in the greater Middle East. His account of how the war there unfolded over the next two years considers politics, policies and social issues and pinpoints faults in the U.S. operations there, documenting failures as well as successes. Key for any collection strong in Middle East history and culture.

I picked this up prior to a work trip to Afghanistan to better understand the current political situation, nation-building and counterterrorism efforts. The Ambassador has written an excellent case study for Foreign Service Officers, policy-makers, and those who want to understand the nuts and bolts of nation-building in Afghanistan. It should be required reading at the Foreign Service Institute for those assigned to Afghanistan. It chronicled the day to day decisions an Ambassador makes like how to allocate funding, mediate among tribal leaders and negotiate with Washington for resources. However, for someone wanting a broad overview like me, it was a little too in the weeds. For a broader overview, I'm going to next try reading "In the Graveyard of Empires."

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