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Norman Friedman. *Terrorism, Afghanistan, and America's New Way of War.*

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Bibliography. Index. \$29.95.

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If you liked Norman Friedman's *Desert Victory: The War for Kuwait* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), you'll love *Terrorism, Afghanistan, and America's New Way of War*. *Desert Victory* was the first published book-length overview of Gulf War I. Although supplanted by studies based on official records and oral histories, *Desert Victory* provided a useful starting point for students of the war. Similarly, *Terrorism, Afghanistan, and America's New Way of War* offers one of the first book-length accounts of the 2001-2002 war in Afghanistan. The author is a well-known defense analyst, Naval Institute *Proceedings* columnist, and author of nearly thirty books. Although *Terrorism, Afghanistan, and America's New Way of War* is certain to be supplanted by studies based on documents and interviews, it nevertheless provides a useful starting point for students of the Afghan war.

Friedman's new book unfolds as a series of insights on related issues rather than as a narrative. The book focuses on five themes: the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the history of terrorism in the context of Islamic fundamentalism, the recent history of Afghanistan, the development of "network-centric warfare," and U.S. operations against Afghanistan in 2001-2002.

Al Qaeda launched the 11 September attack, in part, because its leaders perceived the U.S. government's failure to retaliate effectively to terrorism in the 1990s as

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weakness. Osama bin Laden hoped 11 September would precipitate a violent U.S. response that, in turn, would spark a war between the West and the House of Islam and result in establishment of a global, pan-Islamic caliphate with him as its leader. At the time of the attacks, bin Laden stood as the de facto ruler of Afghanistan.

To the extent that bin Laden could be identified with the Taliban, 11 September represented an attack on the United States by irregular Taliban forces. It is hard to imagine a worse neighbor, diplomatically speaking, than Taliban Afghanistan. Since coming to power in 1996, the Taliban had backed Islamic fundamentalists fighting in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, China, and Russia, and had also managed to alienate Iran. The rest of the outside world considered the Taliban an abomination, for they did little to feed Afghanistan's people during the country's worst drought in 30 years and treated women worse than second-class citizens. The Taliban's odious behavior facilitated George Bush's task of assembling a coalition against them and their al Qaeda "guests."

The Afghan war was both a test and demonstration of an emerging new style of warfare, variously described as "network-centric warfare" or as the result of a "revolution in military affairs." This type of warfare embodied remote sensors on board satellites, unmanned aerial vehicles, and manned aircraft, allowing both headquarters and subordinate commands to attack targets which the attackers might not see directly; quick operations to upset an enemy's timetable and to get inside his decision-making loop; and employment of small forces equipped with precision weapons rather than massive forces and massive firepower. Network centric warfare featured information and communications systems and relatively few, precision weapons arrayed against enemy "centers of gravity," not the mass of his military force. The new way of war depended on good intelligence of enemy political, military, and economic systems, to enable sophisticated targeting of these systems so that they could be destroyed with relatively few weapons. The new way of war depended upon air strikes, with special forces on the ground to provide targeting information. Friedman's thesis is that while elements of this

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new way of war emerged during the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo, it did not fully bloom until the Afghan war.

The swift and decisive attack on the Taliban served notice to terrorists and the governments that supported them that the United States would brook no deadly attacks on its homeland. “The key, it turned out,” declares Friedman, “was U.S. sea power, which provided bases near Afghanistan in international waters. Given those seagoing bases, the United States could fight the war virtually without help. That removed any country’s veto and, paradoxically, encouraged many governments to join the coalition against the Taliban.” (p. 150) The most remarkable aspect of the war was the speed with which the American military began the war and then fought it. Although Afghanistan was 350 miles from the sea, the war was a maritime conflict—featuring Tomahawk missiles launched from surface ships and submarines, Marine amphibious forces, naval aviation, and aircraft carriers as bases. Naval aircraft flew 75 percent of all sorties.

When the war began on 7 October 2001, the Taliban controlled more than two-thirds of Afghanistan. Taliban military weaknesses included few effective troops, leaders who were mullahs and not military men, and few modern weapons. For the first three weeks, coalition aircraft struck the Taliban’s air defense system, land communications lines, ammunition dumps, tank repair facilities, and other strategic targets. Near the beginning of November, the Northern Alliance went over to the offensive as coalition strike aircraft began targeting Taliban formations. The Northern Alliance was motivated less by direct support from the air, than by the arrival of U.S. Army Special Forces A-teams. These A-teams constituted the visible face of U.S. commitment to the war and the glue that held the air-ground combination together. During the first three weeks of November, northern Afghan cities fell like dominoes, with the Northern Alliance entering the capital Kabul on the 13th. The landing of the Marines on 25 November at Forward Operating Base Rhino, located 95 nautical miles from Kandahar, precipitated the fall of southern Afghanistan. “The Marines were the only U.S. troops who could get to Afghanistan quickly enough in any strength,” Friedman writes. “To the extent that their

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presence encouraged the southern warlords to desert the Taliban and rise in rebellion, they were crucial to the success of the war.” (p. 221)

After Kandahar fell, Taliban and al Qaeda remnants fled to the mountains in eastern Afghanistan near the Pakistani border. In December, Afghan fighters bolstered by American airpower went after enemy remnants in the Tora Bora region. Mainly U.S. forces fought on the ground during Operation Anaconda, conducted in March 2002 in Gardez and the Shah-e Kot Valley, the largest ground battle of the war. Meanwhile, coalition warships conducted “leadership interception operations” to capture terrorists attempting to escape by sea. After Anaconda, coalition forces conducted “cave-busting” missions to root out remaining fighters, capture arms caches, and obtain intelligence.

Friedman’s extensive endnotes, constituting nearly 20 percent of the book, largely amplify information presented in the text. Although many of the notes cite sources, much of the information in the text has no discernable source citation. The bibliography lists fewer than two-dozen monographs and RAND studies under “books” and fewer than 100 newspaper and journal articles under “chapters and articles.” Absent from the bibliography are oral histories and official records.

Although Friedman provides a competent introduction to the 11 September attacks, terrorism, and the recent history of Afghanistan, students of these subjects would be better served by monographs such as *Inside 9-11: What Really Happened* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2002), by reporters, writers, and editors of *Der Spiegel* Magazine; *Through Our Enemies’ Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam, and the Future of America* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 2002), by an anonymous senior U.S. intelligence official; Rohan Gunaratna’s *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); and Ahmed Rashid’s *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000). As for the war in Afghanistan, Friedman’s book is much more comprehensive and objective than works like Robin Moore’s *The Hunt for bin Laden: Task Force Dagger: On the*

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Ground with the Special Forces in Afghanistan (New York: Random House, 2003), which is narrowly focused and heavily biased toward its subject.

Books like *Terrorism, Afghanistan, and America's New Way of War* invariably suffer from flaws inherent in "instant history." "The Navy's command center, on the fourth floor [of the Pentagon]," writes Friedman, "was destroyed and all its occupants killed." (p. 1) Actually the Navy Command Center was on the first floor and, while everyone on the watch floor was killed, eight officers, enlisted people, and civilians in the Command Center survived. Other similar errors of fact will emerge as documents on the Afghan war are declassified. Friedman asserts that despite ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity inside Afghanistan, "there is a real national identity" that enabled Afghans to unite and resist foreign invaders. (p. 67) This statement doesn't ring true. Indeed, Friedman later declares, "given tribal and ethnic loyalties, the Afghan resistance to the Soviets could never be unified." (p. 75) More careful editing might have caught such contradictions. Of all the book's foibles, Friedman's extensive use of passive voice proved most annoying to this reviewer. His prose is chock full of statements like "it was assumed that" and "it was claimed that." Apart from violating a basic rule of style, passive voice obscures who's doing the assuming and the claiming and so forth, thus depriving the reader of essential information.

These flaws aside, the historical debate on any given subject has to start somewhere, and Friedman has fired a creditable opening salvo in analyzing the Afghan war and its causes. Generally he gives good, succinct explanations for events and situations. For example, he adroitly untangles the Central Asia region's intricate diplomatic web, offering easily understandable explanations of each country's relations with its neighbors. Friedman's historical allusions are usually instructive, such as his comparison of Islamic fundamentalism with turn-of-the-last-century radicalism. He is particularly good at explaining the meaning of Pentagon buzzwords like "transformation" and "OODA loop," as well as describing how U.S. forces developed at the operational level throughout the 1990s and the Afghan war. Until better books based on official

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records and oral histories supplant *Terrorism, Afghanistan, and America's New Way of War*, Friedman's first cut on the subject will remain the benchmark by which future works will be measured.