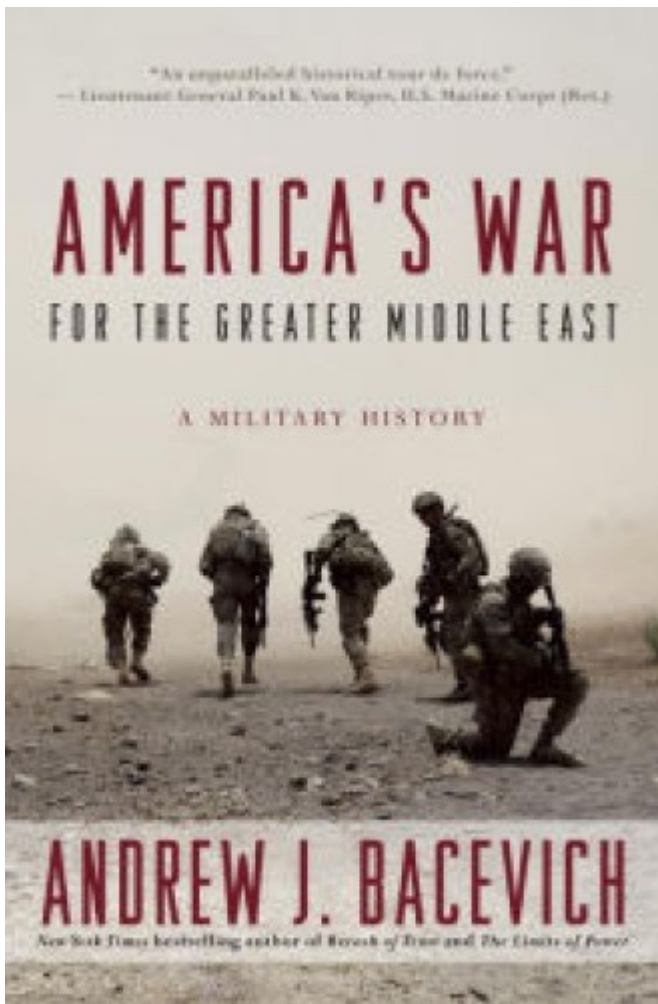


The war we aren't winning

by [David Cortright](#) in the [October 12, 2016](#) issue

In Review



America's War for the Greater Middle East

By Andrew J. Bacevich

Random House

From Afghanistan to Iraq, Libya, Syria, and beyond, the United States has been engaged for decades in a seemingly endless series of wars and military operations that have cost many lives and drained our national treasury but have failed to stop

the spread of terrorism and violent instability in the Middle East and elsewhere. To understand these conflicts and their baleful consequences, elected leaders could find no more insightful guide than Andrew J. Bacevich's latest book, *America's War for the Greater Middle East*. A former U.S. army colonel whose son was killed in Iraq, Bacevich is a gifted writer who has become the nation's most trenchant and influential critic of imperial pretensions.

Bacevich analyzes the many armed conflicts in the Middle East as a single continuous war in the heart of the Islamic world. What began as a means of securing access to oil continues today as a struggle against terrorism and "violent extremism." On the first page Bacevich starkly declares his military assessment of this ongoing war: "We have not won it. We are not winning it. Simply trying harder is unlikely to produce a different outcome."

Bacevich excoriates Washington's "collective naïveté" about the utility of military power. Elected leaders fail to understand that military force cannot solve the underlying political and social crises that lead to many armed conflicts. Nor do they see how our own military interventions often spark armed violence and insurgency. Yet the wars and military operations persist: Obama's Afghanistan surge of 2009, the ill-fated Libya operation in 2011, thousands of drone strikes across the region, a growing number of military operations in northern Africa, and the slow but steady buildup in the number of U.S. troops and airstrikes in Iraq and Syria.

Bacevich does not offer an alternative strategy, but the implications of his searing account are unavoidable. America's war in the greater Middle East is unwinnable and must be brought to an end.

Read all of the responses to "A book I'd like my elected officials to read" [here](#).