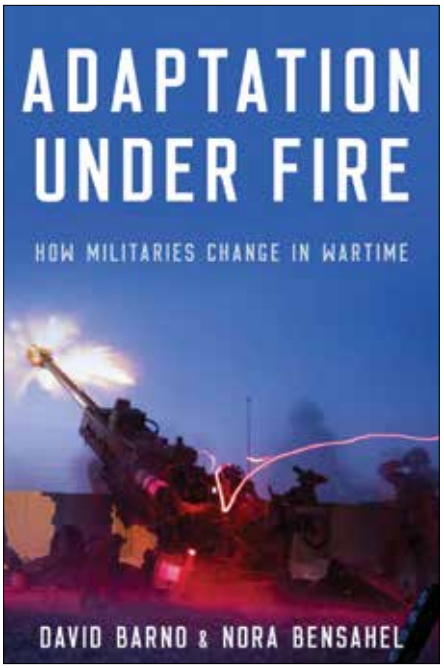


Adaptation Under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime
By David Barno and Nora Bensahel
New York: Oxford University Press, 2020
430 pp. $34.95
ISBN: 978-0190672058

Reviewed by Bryon Greenwald

In the 1970s, the late Sir Michael Howard cautioned military leaders that they would inevitably fail in predicting the conduct of the next war. What really mattered, he opined, was not getting it right, but not being "too badly wrong" and having the individual and institutional wherewithal to adapt to the new or revealed conditions of conflict in time to avoid defeat and ultimately prevail.

In *Adaptation under Fire*, Lieutenant General David Barno, USA (Ret.), and Dr. Nora Bensahel, frequent contributors to *War on the Rocks*, analyze this "adaptability gap" in the American Army with specific examination of doctrine, technology, and leadership at the individual and institutional levels during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The book is a welcomed addition to the field. Although necessarily selective in its examples and case studies, it should generate ample discussion within the military Services and, importantly, their professional military education (PME) institutions.

The work unfolds in three parts. The first section provides a brief summary of the literature on prewar innovation and in-war adaptation, drawing heavily on the work of Allan Millett and Williamson Murray, Stephen Rosen, Barry Posen, and Adam Grissom. Additionally, Barno and Bensahel offer short illustrative examples of success or failure in the adaptation of doctrine, technology, and leadership to prepare the reader for the later analysis of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The second section, the heart of the book, provides the reader with a withering critique of the Army's performance, particularly at the institutional (big Army) level, in adapting its doctrine, accepting new/modified technology, and altering its strategic plans. Perhaps as expected, the individual Soldier and tactical leader (exemplified by Captain John Abizaid adjusting his company's tactical plan in Grenada in 1984) come off well, while the institutional Army performs poorly across all areas, with the possible exception of General David Petraeus's going around the Army bureaucracy to produce the 2006 Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, in record time.

In four excellent chapters, Barno and Bensahel hail the doctrinal and technical adaptability evident in the drafting of FM 3-24, the creation of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, the modification of Apache helicopter tactics to provide close air support in Afghanistan, and the MacGyver-like ability of those pilots in keeping their aircraft flying. Appropriately, they eviscerate the institutional Army (and Marines) for failing to accept the MRAP (mine-resistant ambush protected vehicle) and Palantir Technologies' intelligence system (over Distributed Common Ground Station–Army) earlier during the conflicts.

Regarding tactical leadership, they extol the adaptive thinking of then colonels Sean McFarland and H.R. McMaster in Iraq for changing their tactical approach and applying classic counterinsurgency doctrine in Ramadi and Tal Afar a year before FM 3-24 appeared, and Special Forces Captain Mark Nutsch, for his team's support of Uzbek warlord Abdul Dostum during the early days of Operation *Enduring Freedom*. They also offer withering criticism of Generals George W. Casey, Jr. (commander, Multi-National Force–Iraq, June 2004–February 2007) and David D. McKiernan (commander, International Security Assistance Force, and U.S. Forces–Afghanistan, June 2008–May 2009) for failing to understand the conditions of conflicts they were fighting and adapting their theater strategies to maximize U.S. and coalition opportunities for success.

The third section considers the challenges of future war, particularly the influence of the space and cyber domains; assesses the U.S. military's adaptability today; and recommends how the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Services could improve their individual and institutional adaptability. Their critiques and recommendations will find favor and raise questions. Regarding doctrine, they recommend that the joint force add "adaptability" as a principle of war, integrate adaptation and free play into major exercises, train and test units under degraded conditions, and emphasize resilience across the force. Concerning technological adaptability, they recommend that DOD restore rapid adaptive organizations such as the Strategic Capabilities Office and the Asymmetric Working Group, require all military technology operate in degraded (non-networked, no space link) environmental conditions, and sponsor an annual rapid-adaptation competition. To improve leadership adaptability, they advocate that the Services add it as a rated area on efficiency reports, expand the technical literacy of future commanders, and send more officers to an Advanced Civil Schooling program. And while their commentary on PME is episodic and perhaps dated, they are nonetheless correct in arguing that PME reform would advance adaptable thinking within the military.

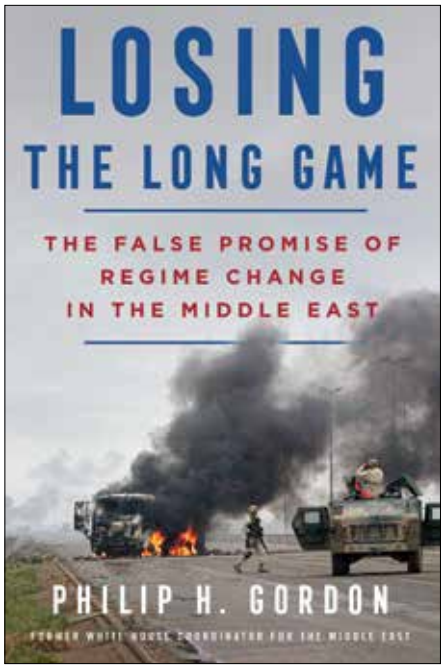
It is with this last recommendation that this reviewer, a retired senior officer

and PME administrator and instructor, quibbles slightly. *Adaptation Under Fire* tends to tar all PME with wide and indiscriminate brushstrokes. As they note, PME should be more academically rigorous, and even fail students, but in their critique the authors fail to acknowledge that some institutions, such as the Joint Advanced Warfighting School, conduct over 40 individual and collective assessments of students and routinely fail colonels out of the war college for academic (nonethical) reasons.

Barno and Bensahel argue for more civilian schooling to avoid the groupthink prevalent among uniformed faculty and students; but beyond stereotyping, they neglect to cite the increasing number of civilian faculty employed at those institutions for the express purpose of elevating academic rigor and infusing curricula with external ideas and attitudes. Like others, they also wistfully compare DOD's PME institutions to the Nation's best graduate schools, like the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), where they teach. For a host of reasons including mission, faculty, student body, political capital, and budget, this is an illogical comparison. SAIS has one of the best and most selective international relations 2-year master's degree programs in the country; its purpose is to prepare much younger students (average age 26, with 2-years of work experience) for lower level work in business and government. The mission of DOD's officer education enterprises, specifically its war colleges, is to educate and prepare almost 600 senior officers annually for positions of higher responsibility. Unlike very selective graduate programs, not every captain (O6) or colonel entering PME is an Einstein or Eisenhower. They are competent, tactically proficient leaders, but not all possess the inherent capacity to become strategic saviors. The task of PME is to improve the critical thinking and communication skills of those individuals such that they contribute to the Nation's defense at the next, if not perhaps the ultimate, level of military responsibility.

Adapting Under Fire is a solid and useful addition to the literature on innovation, adaptation, and change in the military. Its analysis of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are its most compelling and illuminating chapters, but its recommendations should and will generate much worthy conversation and debate. **JFQ**

Professor Bryon Greenwald, Ph.D., is the former Dean of the Joint Forces Staff College and a Professor at the Joint Advanced Warfighting School, where he teaches military theory, history, and innovation.



Losing the Long Game: The False Promise of Regime Change in the Middle East

By Philip H. Gordon
St. Martin's Press, 2020
368 pp. $26.49
ISBN: 978-1250217035

Reviewed by Thomas C. Greenwood

Few authors are more qualified to write on U.S.-sponsored regime change in the Middle East than Philip Gordon, who worked as Special Assistant to President Barack Obama for the Middle East (2013–2015) and as Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs (2009–2013). His book, *Losing the Long Game*, is elegant, thoroughly researched, and comprehensible; it belongs on the syllabus of every war college and policymaker's desk for two reasons. First, the author shines a spotlight on the opaque (sometimes secretive) history of U.S.-sponsored regime change in the Middle East and, in so doing reveals many rich insights. Second, Gordon dispels the misguided notion that American exceptionalism endows the United States with unmatched foresight and wisdom to effectively reengineer Middle East governments in a way that advances U.S. national security interests, promotes regional stability, and strengthens the international order.

Gordon examines seven cases of regime change over the past 70 years: Iran (1953), Afghanistan (1979–1992), Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), Egypt (2011), Libya (2011), and Syria (2011). They all failed to deliver the policy outcomes desired by Washington, made the Middle East more volatile, and more recently, were a strategic distraction from other emerging threats such as China and Russia.

The author explains that these failures did not result from impure U.S. motives (for example, take the oil and run) or even an unwillingness to double down by increasing troop levels and funding, which failed to save the day in either Iraq or Syria. Rather, once policymakers decide on regime change as their preferred option, "they overstate the threat, underestimate the costs and risks, overpromise what they can accomplish, and prematurely claim success if and when the targeted regime falls." Yet Gordon does not ignore the possibility that the costs of inaction (that is, of not intervening and undertaking regime change) could have been higher and more harmful over the long run.

Two of Gordon's most riveting ideas, however, are that regime change frequently fails because of the security vacuums it creates (filled by actors who are often more repressive than the toppled regimes), and the unanticipated consequences that escape rigorous