



Endless War: Middle Eastern Islam vs. Western Civilization

By Ralph Peters

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Reviewed by

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For more than a decade, Ralph Peters has been one of America's finest essayists—an analyst and commentator with a novelist's skills. This is not something a member of the literati might admit because Peters writes about the true nature of war, not a popular subject outside an audience of national security professionals. But his eloquently phrased insights on current defense issues are now being publicly sought, particularly at conferences and panels that want at least one known contrarian. And as in his books, Peters never fails to deliver what they seek.

Endless War is different in at least two respects from his other book-length collections of articles and commentaries previously published in journals. First, it contains a number of shorter articles—some previously appearing in the military history journal *Armchair General* and online. Second, although Peters has often written about conflicts

and contradictions of militant Islam and about wars of religion, *Endless War* goes further into political incorrectness by using an “inconvenient truth”—*Middle Eastern Islam vs. Western Civilization*—as the subtitle. Peters discusses this religious-cultural conflict as much from a historical perspective as from a current view. His lead essays are assessments of historical wars in which Islamic forces won or lost, and he discusses some of the tactics they used. But the underlying message of this new book suggests that in this endless religion-fueled conflict, the best the West can do is hold to a policy of deterrence and defense of national interests, and that a truly peaceful resolution can only come about by—metaphorically speaking—divine intervention.

However, Peters's publisher wimped out. You will find the subtitle on the title page, but it is nowhere on the cover. In fact, not every essay discusses militant Islam, which makes it a more broadly interesting book.

Particularly thought-provoking is the essay “Better than Genocide,” in which Peters suggests that ethnic cleansing—defined as the separation of warring tribes or hostile ethnic groups—may be the only way of stopping conflicts in failed states. The reality is that this is exactly what happened in Bosnia and Kosovo despite efforts by the United States, United Nations, European Union, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to prevent it—another inconvenient truth. In African countries whose borders were set mostly arbitrarily by colonial powers, redrawn borders (a diplomatic taboo) and ethnic separation would seem to be acts of mercy. This is not something citizens of functioning multi-ethnic societies such as our own seem able to grasp. Since ethnic cleansing is often confused with

genocide and cannot lose its bad connotations in modern minds, Peters inevitably backs off a bit on his support and leaves it as an idea to consider.

More entertaining, but with a serious point, is the essay “The Geezer Brigade,” in which Peters outlines a method of recapturing operational knowledge and experience by allowing retired officers and noncommissioned officers to return to Active duty as advisors and mentors, albeit in a unique rank.

Despite the apparent strategic successes of the current commander of U.S. Central Command and commander of NATO/U.S. European Command, Peters rails against officers with Ph.D.s. His experience with Army officer Ph.D.s leads him to conclude that they are so wedded to academic theories with no validity in war that they have “learned to lose.” I think he might think differently if he had met a Navy Ph.D., but a commitment to jointness prevents me from pursuing that further. Yet at the same time, Peters points out that being a good operator does not necessarily make one a good strategist, and he asks, “Where are the strategists?” The best source would seem to be a blend of operators who are war college graduates sprinkled with a few operationally experienced strategy-related Ph.D.s.

Other essays remain true to the author's commitment to demolishing myths and evangelizing the bloody truth about wars in which we must fight, and choices we need to make to defend our nation and its allies and partners. As profane as it might sound, his prose almost makes it fun to contemplate serious defense issues and controversies. Who else would describe the commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command as conducting an “over-the-beach assault” on

effects-based operations? Peters skewers the wishful-thinking-as-strategy of the Donald Rumsfeld Pentagon and the George W. Bush administration, making “doing the right thing (removing Saddam) look like bullying justified by lies” by cramming “all of its justification eggs into one basket—then waiting for the WMD bunny to appear.” One area of unstinting praise, however, is Peters's judgment and support for our troops engaged in the fight, and the dedication of the individual Servicemember.

Assessing convoluted and ultimately marginally successful strategies, Peters sets an initial standard for sound strategy that should always be kept foremost in mind: We need to be able to “define the mission in plain English.” A great read, *Endless War* can hardly be considered plain writing, and it is its passion and engaging turns of phrase that give it a more profound impact than competing volumes. **JFQ**

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