

Illusions of Victory: The Anbar Awakening and the Rise of the Islamic State

By Carter Malkasian

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Reviewed by Conrad C. Crane

In *Enforcing the Peace: Learning from the Imperial Past* (Columbia University Press, 2006), Kimberly Zisk Marten recounts the dismal record of Western military interventions that could achieve temporary stability but not foster any lasting political change. Her solution is to lower expectations while extending presence; outsiders cannot shape the course of internal political change but can maintain security for the lengthy period required for equilibrium to be restored after a society is disrupted. The team writing the new counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine for the Army and Marine Corps in 2006 was quite aware of this dilemma and that success in COIN is always a long and costly process. The team listed long-term commitment as one of its most important principles.

At the same time those ideas were being incorporated in what would become doctrine in Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, the war in Iraq was beginning to turn with a movement that would be called the Anbar Awakening. Sunni tribes in that province rose up to resist al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and, along with Soldiers and Marines, eventually expelled those foreign fighters. This result was touted as one of the great successes of the new American approach to counterinsurgency, and a model for future operations. Yet it did not take long after the United States pulled its forces out of Iraq in 2011 for the province again to fall under the influence of violent outsiders, this time from the so-called Islamic State (IS). Carter Malkasian—both a practitioner and chronicler of COIN whose *War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier* (Oxford University Press, 2013) is a modern classic of the genre—has again applied his astute analysis to another region unsettled by an insurgency. He concludes that the Anbar example should be a cautionary tale for anyone who believes the United States can create any kind of a lasting peace with just a short military intervention or change a regime and expect its replacement to stand on its own in just a few years.

He describes his work as “a short book burdened with details.” It is a quick read, but clear in its trajectory. He begins by describing the origins of the conflict in Anbar from 2003 to 2005, with particular focus on tribal dynamics. He then concentrates in great detail on the battle for Ramadi from 2005 through the Awakening and collapse of AQI, much from personal experience. He concludes by describing the rise of IS and what lessons can be drawn from the disappointing experience. Throughout, his narrative is informed by many insights about the roles of key individuals on both sides in shaping the course of events, shaped by first-hand observations.

The two most common explanations for the Anbar Awakening have been that it was the result either of enlightened American leaders who used innovative new tactics, or that AQI incited the

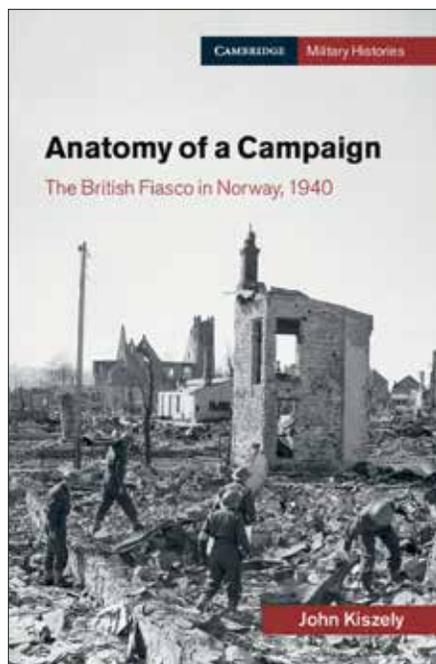
tribal resistance with its own brutality. Malkasian argues that both were necessary for the success of the movement, but there were other important factors as well. One was that as AQI’s power grew, it challenged and marginalized tribal leaders, who then were motivated to regain their positions of influence in a “violent mafia-esque struggle.” Another important condition that is most often overlooked was the “esprit de corps and cohesion within the tribes opposing AQI” during the period of the Awakening. Previous efforts to oppose al Qaeda had failed, but this time losses did not break the resistance, and they persevered through tough trials because of individual determination and social bonds.

Malkasian provides three reasons for the eventual rise of IS and reversal of the success of the Awakening. The first two are directly related to the U.S. withdrawal, which included diplomatic and financial support as well as military forces. Without any outside restraint, the Nouri al-Maliki government quickly moved to marginalize and abuse the Sunni tribes in Anbar. And the tribes fragmented. Without American resources they could not provide goods and services to their people or sustain security forces, while traditional competitive infighting further reduced their strength. IS was not only able to exploit those divisions, but it also took advantage of widespread Sunni popular support for their view of Islam, just as AQI had.

There is much in this short book for military and political leaders to ponder. Despite the apparent success of the Anbar Awakening, in the end the result there must just be added to the long litany of failed Western military interventions that Marten describes. Just as the FM 3-24 team realized, Malkasian argues that policymakers must understand that any American military intervention will have to be lengthy to accomplish any lasting result—and should be planned accordingly. Perhaps a few thousand troops and some money, as some have argued, would have kept Anbar stable and avoided the rise of IS there. He also cautions, however, that “the course of an insurgency, an internal conflict, or a civil war may be determined

by unmalleable internal dynamics more than the actions of an outside power such as the United States.” JFQ

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Anatomy of a Campaign: The British Fiasco in Norway, 1940

By John Kiszely

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Reviewed by Williamson Murray

John Kiszely had an outstanding career in the British army. As a major, he won the Military Cross while leading his company of Scots Guards in the attack on Tumbledown Mountain in the last days of the Falklands War. During his career, he served in the bureaucracy in Whitehall as the Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff and served stints in British operations in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and Iraq, finally retiring as a lieutenant general. He has seen war at both ends: the

hard, sharp end of combat and the making and coordinating of policy and operations. He has brought that wide-ranging experience to bear in an extraordinary account of the disastrous British campaign in Norway in the spring of 1940.

What General Kiszely has managed to do is tie the thoroughly faulty strategic decisions by the British military and political leaders that led to equally faulty operational decisions that placed British troops on the ground in impossible situations. Without a sensible effort to connect ends with the means available, what might have been a major victory floundered from the start, and the initial mistakes only exacerbated those that followed.

In a cabinet meeting at the beginning of September 1939, Winston Churchill, finally added to the cabinet as First Lord of the Admiralty, proposed that the Royal Navy mine the Norwegian Leads (coastal waters) to cut off the flow of Swedish ore that moved through the port of Narvik during the winter when the ports were iced over. It was a sensible suggestion because Swedish iron ore was vital to the functioning of the Nazi war economy.

But with considerable opposition from members of the cabinet, worried about the impact of a violation of Norwegian neutrality, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain refused to make a decision—and this inability sums up British strategic decisionmaking over the next 7 months until the ruthless German invasion of Norway in April 1940. As the future Prime Minister Harold MacMillan noted, “It does throw a piercing light on the present machinery and method of government, the delay, the vacillation, changes of front, standing on one foot one day and on the other the next day before a decision is given. . . . The moral of the history of these three months to be drawn for the future is, to use Burke’s phrase, ‘a proof of the irresistible operation of feeble council.’”

So, the British political and military leaders took council of their fears. Endless meeting followed endless meeting with no decision as to what to do. Chamberlain was incapable as

the supposed wartime leader in pushing his colleagues or, for that matter, himself into action. Chiefs of staff were incapable of providing politicians with coherent or even sensible advice. They were incapable of cooperating, and they did not possess the competence required to provide their masters with nuanced, realistic, or intelligent advice. Churchill was all for action but showed why he would need the irascible Field Marshal Alan Brooke as a minder when he became prime minister to prevent him from making disastrous mistakes. But while all held their endless meetings, the military seemed not to have devoted much time to training unprepared troops for the terrible challenges of combat against the Wehrmacht. Moreover, all the meanwhile in the winter of 1940, the Germans began ruthlessly preparing to launch Operation *Weserübung*, code name for the amphibious assault on the Norwegian ports that would occur in early April 1940.

The denouement came on April 9, 1940, when the Kriegsmarine seized virtually every major Norwegian port. Immediately before the German invasion, the British went ahead and mined the Norwegian Leads, a totally pointless action because the Baltic ice was already breaking up. At least they provided the Germans with an excuse for the actions they were about to undertake. British intelligence provided a rich lode of warnings, all of which the politicians and military leadership totally ignored. After all, it was inconceivable that the Germans would undertake such a risky venture.

While the Germans were seizing the crucial Norwegian ports and airfields, Churchill and Admiral Dudley Pound sent the Royal Navy on a wild goose chase into the North Atlantic in the belief that the Kriegsmarine was attempting to break out there. Had the British reacted immediately, they could have destroyed most of the German invasion force and virtually all the German navy.

What followed was an inexcusable operational muddle as the British attempted to pull together a strategy that would restore their disastrous initial mistakes. Churchill was at his worst with