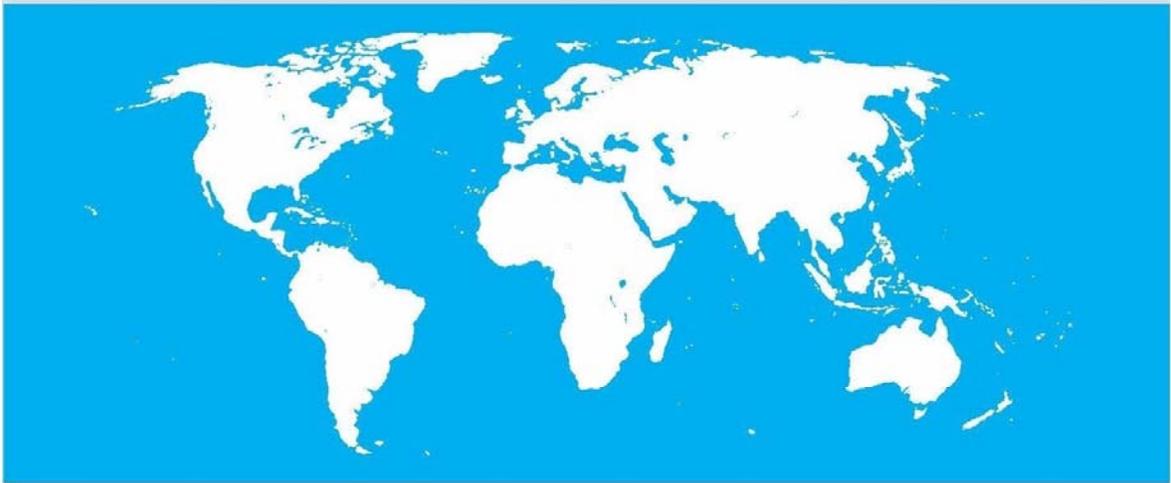


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**War Termination under Nuclear Overhang: A Case Study of India  
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**Book Review**  
**By**  
**HUMA REHMAN**

**Christopher Coker, *The Improbable War: China, the United States and Logic of Great Power Conflict* (Oxford University Press, 2015) pp.217**

The book "*The Improbable War: China, the United States and Logic of Great Power Conflict*," published in 2015, is written by Christopher Coker who is a professor of international relations at London School of Economics. His earlier works include; *Can War Be Eliminated?*, *Future of War*, *Waging War without Warriors*; and *The Changing Culture of Military Conflict*. Divided into five chapters, *The Improbable War* explores the logic of conflict (potential or actual) between great powers. In order to find an answer to this perplexing question Coker analyses the existing international power structure, prevalent world views of nations, and analyses the political causes that had led to military conflicts in the past. His focus however remains on the First World War while discussing what he calls "logic of history in regard to military conflicts between dominant powers".

The author analyses the views of influential intellectuals, who shaped peoples' world view in the period preceding First World War. The prevalent view at the time was that commercial interests of the major powers will trump any desire of the military or political elites to go to war. The author also discusses naval and military buildup of Germany as a possible cause of the great war but shows with historic evidence that none of the major powers had wanted to go to war but some were "ready enough to seize the moment".

The book's themes move around a series of questions including concepts of learning lessons from history such as Thucydidean trap (security dilemma) and whether the concept is relevant to US-China future relationship. If the security dilemma can be resolved to the satisfaction of both the US and China how the two powers would adjust to increasing complexity, volatility and interconnectivity of the twenty first century world. Is national exceptionalism a driver of conflict? Whether grand strategy also involves social intelligence and if China and the United States as a factor into their strategic thinking calculus? Are some of questions explored by the author.

The author looks into probable chances of armed confrontation between China and the US. In his opinion war is not inevitable, nor is it as improbable as many thinkers suggest. He goes on to support his thesis with references to the world war in 1914. His thesis emphasizes the fact that root cause of conflict of the First World War was an ideological divergence between great powers. Furthering his argument the author adds that if a conflict breaks out between two great powers it would not be a normal confrontation under any rules of the international system. Theoretically the author relates the prevailing discourse about US-China confrontation as a precondition based on the perception of the rivalry between the declining sole superpower (US) and a rising great power (China).

Coker identifies the perception of one power of the other power as an important factor that can lead to a conflict between the two states. China at present is in the process of building the nation's identity and focusing on its economic growth. This may also give space to the Chinese leadership for strengthening their concept of nationalism. The author considers emerging Chinese nationalism a danger to world peace. Such a rigid rhetoric could lead China into a conflict with the US and/or US' regional allies for instance Taiwan, which is a symbolic and strategic possibility.

The other aspect discussed by the author relates to China-US relationship as a concept of dominant conflict in which a rising power expands its areas of activities in a manner that has the potential to transform the international system in pursuit of its own interests. He has linked this idea to America's notions of grand strategy. During the G.W. Bush administration, China was perceived as a potential threat to US national security. The US economic crisis in 2008 flipped the narrative to mutual interdependence. Afterwards, Obama administration decided to engage China, sensing China's rise and benefits of their future relationship. According to Coker, this lack of clarity in US strategic policy may connect dots to end up in a Thucydidean trap or security dilemma.

The possible war fronts between the two powers, according to the author, are unlikely to be on land, sea or air but in the cyber domain. Cyberwar could be far more lethal than the Cold War or historic conventional wars, as it can disable strategic defense systems. The author briefly discusses the proxy wars by relating it to ideological differences, political and social mindsets, democratic slogans and

authoritarian approaches. This in view of the author may be the future role of China in certain regions. As it is, currently China is not intervening or involved in a low intensity conflict anywhere in the world. But some traces of this phenomenon can be seen in China's soft power strategy. Beijing is also increasing its economic influence in European countries. Its financial engagements in areas traditionally under the US sphere of influence may become a significant cause for contention between Washington and Beijing. China's economic policies may also challenge US interests in some regions such as Africa.

*The Improbable war: China, the United States and Logic of Great Power Conflict,* is a significant contribution to the historic literature on war and analysis of factors that may have the potential of triggering a war between the USA and emerging power of China. The author has widely discussed economic, social and political dynamics of both these powers which may lead to future confrontation. The extensive knowledge of the author, his references from numerous authentic sources including economic studies, military planners, social and political scientists make a sound support base for his thesis. Coker's well written and well researched book adds to an informed debate on understanding of great powers' mindsets and an emerging strategic environment which may at some point make the confrontation between the US and China inevitable as Coker had concluded from his deep analysis of the great war that "the lessons of WWI had wrongly overestimated human rationality".

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CISS Research Associate*

**Book Review**  
**By**  
**Maryam Zubair**

**Andrew J. Bacevich, *America's War for the Greater Middle East*, (New York, Random House) pp. 453**

America's War for the Greater Middle East is a detailed narrative of the various US operations and policies in the Middle East from the time of the Cold War. The author, Andrew J. Bacevich, is a retired American Colonel and celebrated academic and historian, with several books concerning US politics to his name. He is well-known for his strident views regarding the US foreign policy following the WWII and is critical of US' overreliance on the military to achieve its foreign policy goals. He draws his analyses from his personal and professional experiences over the years and offers informed judgements about the various questions he raises.

In the very beginning, the author cites the first ever operation in the Middle East undertaken by US President Jimmy Carter, Operation Eagle Claw in 1980, which was an utter failure. Of this, he says, that it should've served to dissuade any notions of future involvement in the region, but that "humiliation is a bad teacher." This serves as the main hypothesis of the book; getting militarily involved in the Middle East was a bad idea from the start and has created more problems than it has solved over the years. Although the justifications for each involvement have evolved according to the situation at hand, but military means has remained as an attractive solution to any problems in the Middle East throughout the years, in leaders and masses alike.

The author's target in the book is twofold: one, a critique on the approaches of different US presidents to the problems emanating from the Middle East from the 1970s to present, and two, a detailed insight into the major operations undertaken by the US inside various Middle Eastern countries in pursuit of its "national interests". The book presents a comprehensive account of Presidents' perspectives and visions for tackling each problem that arose from the highly volatile region. The book is useful for anyone, layman and scholar alike, who wants to understand exactly how the US got involved in the Middle East, what

mistakes it made on the way and how each major event unfolded into the present situation.

The book is divided into three parts, each dealing with a specific era and the target regions of US policy during that era. The author includes several African and the Balkan states as a part of the "Greater" Middle East, as these constitute a large part of the Islamic world.

Part 1 of the book titled "Preliminaries" outlines how America's Middle East project started after US' underwriting of Israel's security in the Palestine conflict and the ensuing Arab suspension of oil and America being hit by the worst, unforeseen and never experienced before oil shortage in 1973. So, in the late 1970s began a campaign to legitimately revolutionize warfare for the purpose of acquiring oil from the Middle East, with an evident sense of "self-entitlement", as the author puts it. In the beginning, these ideas garnered little attention as the US was just pulling out of Vietnam and the army was in tatters. The national military advisors did not consider Middle Eastern oil a matter of priority, despite the oil shock and despite the stated goals of Nixon to secure oil for all time, until Jimmy Carter in 1977. Carter's emphasis was on Iran, but the 1979 Revolution and later, Russian involvement in Afghanistan interfered with those initial goals. This is when President Carter's Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF), later rechristened CENTCOM, came into being, with the purpose to maintain a presence in the Persian Gulf to oppose the increasing Soviet presence in the region. This spurred the assumption that the Persian Gulf lacks the capacity to defend itself and that use of America's military might is the only way to do so.

America's presence in Afghanistan stopped being a good enough reason when Soviet president Gorbachev proposed to end Afghanistan occupation. Nonetheless, with the end of the 1980s, Afghanistan was left in shambles and the US "created a monster". However, by this time Saddam Hussein had taken the place of Soviet Russia as the new threat in the region. But getting engaged with Iraq, again, was imprudent because the US was ignoring the greater implications of the region, such as religion and the history of occupation.

Book's part 2 "Entr'acte" explores the foreign policies of George H. Bush and Bill Clinton during the 1990s. At this point, with the end of the Soviet threat and, soon after, as well as Saddam Hussein, America now could shift its focus to other

regions. The American foreign policy in this era was focused in even farther off regions, such as Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Turkey, countries which were suffering turmoil, from domestic sources. America's decision to assist the domestic situation in these countries was driven by a sense of goodwill, such as Provide Comfort in Turkey and Restoring Hope in Somalia. The 1990s were also the decade when Al Qaeda, led by Osama Bin Laden, came to the fore and attacks against various US (started in 1992) targets forced Clinton to take action against Al Qaeda in 1998. The author criticizes Clinton's decision to declare war against Al Qaeda as imprudent, giving it a status and legitimacy that did not help the American cause. It ended in a "phony" war in Afghanistan that mainly served to display US military might and created further rifts within the Afghan society, fostering anti-American sentiment and the cause of whatever calamity might befall America next.

Book's third part "Main Card" is a scrutiny into the Global War on Terror that followed the events of 9/11. The author describes Bush's terming the Global War on Terror as "unhelpful" and "misleading"; nevertheless, a global war ensued. From his targets, all chosen rather irresponsibly, all of them resulted in grave repercussions, (such as the ISIS, which, despite the Obama administration's initial assumptions of success, resurged in 2015). "Main Card" examines closely and explores the shortcomings and mistakes made by the Bush and Obama administrations. None of the places, where the war that started in Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, or the Libyan intervention in 2011, have yet seen peace.

The author raises two important questions in the end; why has America, despite being the greatest military power in the world, not been able to win or leave the war that it started in the Middle East yet? He offers a deep insight into these compelling questions. The US objectives and use of their military in Middle East have never been synchronized; somehow, the US need to indulge in war and employ its military strength has surpassed its need to form a coherent idea about what it entails from the Middle East and that is why, it is stuck with the chaos that now plagues the region.

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**Book Review**  
**By**  
**Sajid Aziz**

**Jason Burke, *The New Threat from Islamic Militancy* (London: Bodley Head, 2015) pp. 281**

*"But actual 'popular support from the Muslim masses' depends on a community's conviction that the extremists are the only people who can protect its economic, social and cultural well-being. This was made much easier if the communities believed they were facing an existential threat which the militants were uniquely qualified to counter."*

Jason Burke's travels in Muslim world, his accessibility to militant groups, his journalistic background and extensive research make him one of the authentic voices on Islamic militancy. He is the South Asia Correspondent for the Guardian newspaper and has been working on Islamic militancy for decades. Besides *The New Threat From Islamic Militancy*, his latest book, Burke has authored three books: *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam*, *On the Road to Kandahar: Travels Through the Conflict in Islamic World* and *9/11 Wars*.

Deconstructing certain myths and misconceptions regarding militant organizations, which reduce them to monolithic entities with static approaches, Burke's main thesis is that Islamic militancy is a dynamic phenomenon, adapting to changing circumstances. In order to neutralize and ultimately defeat radical Islamic groups, it is incumbent on policy makers and security and intelligence authorities to acknowledge this fact and understand the social, political and ideological causes that motivate individuals and groups to commit terrorist acts.

According to Jason Burke, there are currently three broad categories of Islamic militancy in the world. The first category includes major groups like al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS), which have united disparate and fractious groups into an organized force and structure. Besides sharing many commonalities between them, like their aspiration for a Caliphate, declaring current Muslim rulers as apostates and the liberation of Muslim lands from foreign occupation, al-Qaeda and IS, when looked at carefully, have very serious differences. Unlike al-Qaeda, IS does not adhere to the notion of 'Far Enemy,' at least its territorial control of parts

of Iraq and Syria shows that the 'Near Enemy' is its first priority. Abu Bakr Bagdadi does not recognize the leadership of Aymen al-Zawahiri and considers his organization's actions as more of semiotic nature than of substance. Moreover, al-Qaeda has always considered the establishment of Caliphate as a long-term project, but IS after taking control of Mosul declared a Caliphate and selected Bagdadi as its leader.

The second category includes all those active militant groups that have an organized structure. Some of these groups have allegiance with either al-Qaeda or IS, while others are independent of them. There are four major groups that are affiliated with al-Qaeda: al-Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Shabaab in Somalia, al-Qaeda in Magrib (AQIM), and Jabhat al-Nusra in Syria. Though they have allegiance with al-Qaead, they enjoy regional and operational autonomy.

The third category includes what Burke calls 'inspired warriors', the radicalized individuals who are ready to commit acts of violence on individual basis for their supposed ideological and political reasons. The line between these groups is not very clear. There have been times when 'individual warriors' from Europe have received training and weapons from militant bases in Muslim states and gone back to their home countries to execute their plans.

These three strands of radical Islam guide his analysis throughout the book. The most important aspect of the book is that the author contextualizes the origins and motivations of these radical groups and individuals in the social, political and historical setting. Jason Burke argues that religion played an important role in resistance in Muslim world against European colonization. Hasan al-Banna of Egypt couched his resistance against British colonizers in religious idiom, while Deobandi Madrasa worked to protect the cultural values of Muslims in the Sub-continent. The subsequent experiments with Baa'thism, Socialism and Nationalism in the Muslim world in the post-colonial setting failed to deliver economic and political dividends. The changing demographics, increasing populations coupled with dwindling opportunities, provided conducive ground for militant ideology to flourish. This was the setting which Burke calls 'the origins of global jihad' that produced Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian who had fought against Israel in 1967 war and would later fight in Afghan Jihad against Soviet Union, Syed Qutb of Muslim Brotherhood and Farrar, who all propagated Jihad against the iniquities of the local rulers (the Near Enemy).

The subsequent geopolitical situation, in which Afghanistan was invaded by Soviet Union in 1979, brought together militants and jihadists all over the Muslim world. These veterans would later form the core of al-Qaeda and organize militant groups in their respective countries. The political vacuum, deinstitutionalization, and an essentially sectarianized post-war political government in Iraq combined to give birth to ISIS. IS also attracted thousands of young men and some women from all over the world to fight in Syria.

The book *The New Threat* is an important addition on the existing discourse on terrorism and contributes to our understanding of radical Islam. The author, by blending his research and field work and his experience of travelling in the Muslim world, presents a cogent argument in support of his thesis that Islamic militancy is an ever-evolving phenomenon and if we try to neutralize its threat, then a clear understanding of its motivations and adaptability should be required. But there are times when the author seems not to follow his own suggestion. For example, he attempts to build a continuum between the past and present Islamic movements without the nuance and subtlety that such an endeavor demands. It is one thing to derive lessons from history and link it to present events, but building a whole narrative by selectively quoting past and patching them with present to create a logically coherent argument is not helpful. Despite this, it is a serious book that does not rely on clichés and jargons to put across its point and it will help reader to go beyond headlines to understand the underlying factors about terrorism and radical Islamic groups.

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CISS was established in October 2010 and has embarked on a challenging task, that of promoting a better understanding of international strategic issues pertaining to our region, both in Pakistan and abroad. We feel that there is a need now, more than ever before, for objective and impartial analyses and assessment of international issues from a Pakistan perspective.



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