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The Threatening Storm: The United States and Iraq—The Crisis, the Strategy, and the Prospects after Saddam; Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948–1991

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BOOK REVIEWS

THE ARABS AND MILITARY EFFECTIVENESS

Pollack, Kenneth M. *The Threatening Storm: The United States and Iraq—The Crisis, the Strategy, and the Prospects after Saddam*. New York: Random House, 2002. 528pp. \$25.95

Pollack, Kenneth M. *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948–1991*. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2002. 698pp. \$49.95

The U.S. engagement in the Middle East has dramatically escalated due to the recent war in Iraq. These two books provide valuable historical background as well as cogent national security policy analysis that commands attention from military and other national security leaders.

Kenneth Pollack, a highly regarded Middle East analyst, is a senior fellow for Foreign Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution and director of research for the institution's Saban Center for Middle East Policy. Pollack is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations (sponsor of both books), a former CIA analyst, and a former National Security Council staff member. He has been a frequent commentator on the television news and a regular contributor to newspaper op-ed pages, and he has been published in such prominent journals as *Foreign Affairs* and *International Security*. Pollack has considerable expertise in Middle Eastern affairs and skillfully brings it to bear. Both books are well written

and easily accessible to a general audience, and they provide strong analysis. *The Threatening Storm* also contains several soundly supported policy recommendations.

The books came out in autumn 2002, contributing constructively to the debate leading up to the recent war with Iraq. Superficially, it might appear that *The Threatening Storm* is outdated, given the fulfillment of Pollack's recommendation for war. Similarly, the immediate operational value of *Arabs at War* may also seem overtaken by events. However, even though their value was greater prior to the war, discounting their continuing value would be a mistake.

The Threatening Storm is an important policy examination that also incorporates a good, concise overview of Iraq and its earlier relationship with the United States. The book's centerpiece is Pollack's comprehensive and compelling case for war against Saddam-led Iraq as the best of available policy alternatives. However, he provides more than just an argument for war.

Confident the United States would quickly win a war with Iraq at an acceptable cost, Pollack emphasizes that winning the war would not be enough and therefore provides an outline for American diplomatic, economic, informational, and military efforts to support successful postconflict reconstruction. The war has been won with fewer forces than Pollack and many others would have preferred, but the number of forces sufficient to win the war might not be enough to secure the peace. Hence, Pollack's postconflict analysis found in chapter 12 ("Rebuilding Iraq") remains useful. Additionally, in chapter 10 Pollack provides an interesting look into American military operations, particularly regarding airpower in the first Gulf War, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.

Arabs at War is an excellent work of military history. Pollack discusses the military performance of six Arab countries—Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Syria—from 1948 to 1991. Although the record is heavily weighted with episodes from the Arab-Israeli wars, there are numerous other conflicts that support the analysis of Arab military effectiveness.

Pollack's definition of military effectiveness "refers to the ability of soldiers and officers to perform on the battlefield, to accomplish military missions, and to execute the strategies devised by their political-military leaders. If strategy is the military means by which political ends are pursued, military effectiveness refers to the skills that are employed." Pollack explores nine possible explanations for a remarkable record of Arab military *ineffectiveness* since World War II: cowardice, lack of morale, training, unit cohesion,

generalship, tactical leadership, information management, technical skills and weapons handling, and logistics and maintenance. He concludes that "four areas of military effectiveness stand out as consistent and crippling problems for Arab forces: poor tactical leadership, poor information management, poor weapons handling, and poor maintenance." Secondary problems such as poor generalship, training, and morale were recurring but not constant. Even when Arabs did well in these secondary areas, there was little increased effectiveness. Pollack observes that cowardice, weak unit cohesion, and bad logistics have not been significant problems for Arab militaries—Arab units and individual soldiers generally have fought hard, but not well.

The book concentrates primarily on Arab armies in conventional war, particularly ground warfare. Although use of air forces is addressed in many of the conflicts, their limited role and their frequent early failure and exit leave little to discuss. Pollack's assessment of Arab air force performance largely reinforces his general point about the limitations of Arab personnel in handling modern weaponry. Use of naval forces (limited when they exist at all) is inconsequential for the conflict chosen. With the exception of a brief treatment of Libyan-U.S. skirmishes from 1981 to 1989, naval operations play no significant role in Pollack's analysis.

Arabs at War more accurately could be titled "Six Arab States at Conventional War." Although Pollack is on solid ground asserting that these six states comprise the lion's share of conventional Arab military experience since World War II, there is little about Arab military effectiveness in unconventional

war, which places an important limit on the current value of Pollack's analysis. What it leaves out is the numerous irregular forces of the Arab world, who have proven troublesome to foes and who are often more effective in achieving political aims. However, a hint of such analysis shows itself in Pollack's description of Arab conventional military forces as they faced unconventional foes—such as Jordan against the PLO during the “Black September” fighting; Syria against the PLO and Lebanese guerillas; Iraq in numerous clashes with Kurds; and Libya against various forces in Chad. Additional examples of unconventional Arab military actions in Algeria, Afghanistan, Morocco, Lebanon, and Palestine-Israel might profitably be considered to form a more comprehensive view of Arab military effectiveness.

This work has a *Rashomon*-like feel that results from reading about military actions one state at a time, even though several belligerents participated in the same wars, sometimes even fighting each other. Pollack's approach maintains a discrete analysis of national military efforts but creates a disjointed presentation of some events. Readers who are familiar with these conflicts from other sources will have an easier time keeping events in context. The book's focus is on the effective use of instruments of war, particularly ground forces, and provides readers with little about the interplay of policy and strategy. Coalition dynamics also do not figure prominently in Pollack's discussion, although there are hints that in Arab military collaboration the coalition whole was often worth less than the sum of the parts.

Arabs at War and *The Threatening Storm* are excellent works of history and analysis. *Arabs at War* is a valuable work of military history for military professionals and historians. *The Threatening Storm*, its main argument now dated, still serves as a useful history of U.S.-Iraq relations leading up to the war and remains a valuable guide to the challenges of postwar reconstruction.

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Chasdi, Richard J. *Tapestry of Terror: A Portrait of Middle East Terrorism, 1994–1999*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington, 2002. 507pp. \$80

This is a book only a statistician could love. This reviewer is not a statistician. Chasdi, a visiting assistant professor of international relations at the College of Wooster, presents a quantitative analysis of the terrorist phenomena in four regions of the Middle East: Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, and Palestine and Israel. Purportedly Chasdi attempts to examine the antecedent events and conditions in the four subject nation-states with an eye toward understanding why terrorism occurs at the systems or operational level as well as at the state and subnational-actor levels. He hopes that in doing so he will give counterterrorism planners and policy makers data to help them better craft counterterrorism policy in the future. If this sounds complex, it is. Chasdi's complicated quantitative analysis coupled with his turgid and at times unfathomable prose makes the effort even more difficult.

Tapestry of Terror is the second of a projected trilogy studying the root causes of