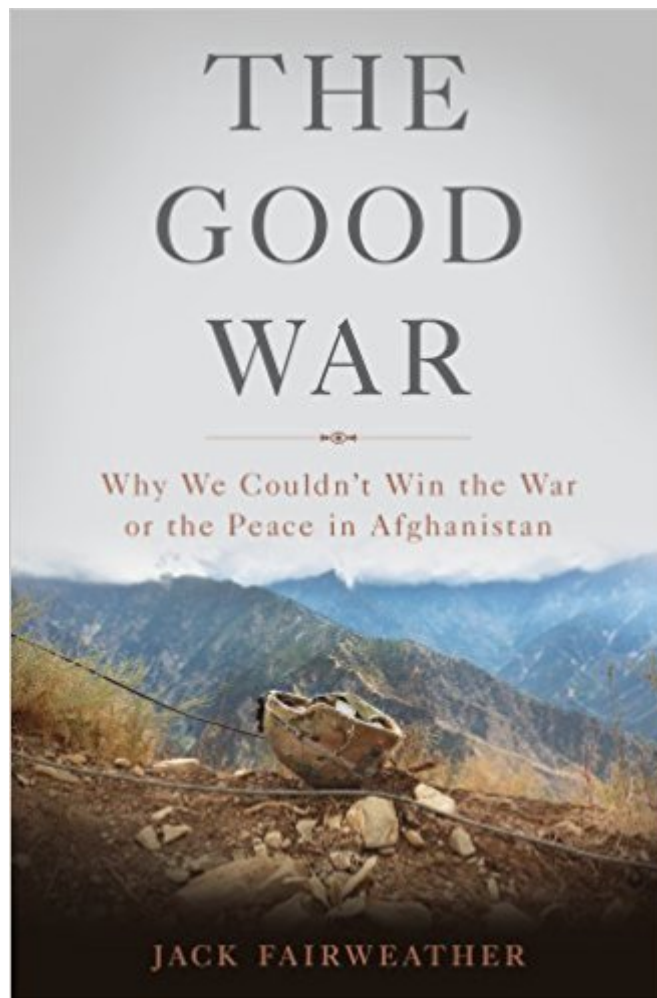




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# **The Good War: Why We Couldn't Win The War Or The Peace In Afghanistan**



## Synopsis

In its earliest days, the American-led war in Afghanistan appeared to be a triumph a good war in comparison to the debacle in Iraq. It has since turned into one of the longest and most costly wars in U.S. history. The story of how this good war went so bad may well turn out to be a defining tragedy of the 21st century yet as acclaimed war correspondent Jack Fairweather explains, it should also give us reason to hope for an outcome grounded in Afghan reality, rather than our own. In "The Good War," Fairweather provides the first full narrative history of the war in Afghanistan, from its inception after 9/11 to the drawdown in 2014. Drawing on hundreds of interviews, previously unpublished archives, and months of reporting in Afghanistan, Fairweather explores the righteous intentions and astounding hubris that caused the American strategy in Afghanistan to flounder, refuting the long-held notion that the war could have been won with more troops and cash. Fairweather argues that only by accepting the limitations in Afghanistan from the presence of the Taliban to the ubiquity of the opium trade to the country's unsuitability for rapid, Western-style development can America help to restore peace in this shattered land. A timely lesson in the perils of nation-building and a sobering reminder of the limits of American power, "The Good War" leads readers from the White House situation room to American military outposts, from warlords' palaces to insurgents' dens, to explain how the U.S. and its allies might have salvaged the Afghan campaign and how we must rethink other good wars in the future."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Fairweather was confronted by big challenges in writing a study of so long a war with such a huge

cast of characters and so many parallel plots. He has surmounted these obstacles with flair, and is a confident, credible navigator in leading the reader through a complicated war.... Fairweather gives his account in a fast-moving, factually detailed style, avoiding any attempt at needless description. His work is all the more powerful for this, yet there is no lack of either humour or poignancy. "The Times" (UK) [A] powerful history of the war. "London Review of Books" Thanks to reporters such as Jack Fairweather, we now know that this Afghan war has been and still is anything but good.... ["The Good War"] combines first-hand war reporting with shrewd analysis of the western conduct of the war. "Financial Times" Well-documented.... Fairweather quite effectively weaves tactical, local-level insights into broader, strategic themes and issues. He leaves the reader with a sense of the challenges encountered by successive attempts by non-Afghans to bring order to this long-troubled country. His is an easy style, making this exceedingly complex study more understandable. "ARMY Magazine" An excellent account. [Fairweather] writes with exceptional lucidity and punch. "Sunday Times" (UK) [Fairweather] has done an invaluable job. The book is very good to read, full of pace and drama. Anyone wanting to get to grips with Afghanistan today, the prime example of what strategists like to call a wicked problem, should start here. It is a brilliant introduction. "London Evening Standard" Jack Fairweather's sweeping account, "The Good War," is one of the first to look at the war as a whole.... His richly narrated history roams from the corridors of the White House to the poppy palaces of the country's opium warlords and the patrol bases of Sangin and Kandahar.... As the West looks at the chaos of Iraq and Syria and once more considers how to intervene, the sobering warnings of this riveting book are more relevant than ever. "Daily Telegraph" This smart, well-researched and well-written analysis explains how the world's most powerful leaders plotted to build a new kind of nation in Afghanistan that was pure fantasy. J. Ford Huffman, "Military Times" A fresh and needed analysis of the political miscalculations and lack of strategic vision in Washington, D.C., and other Western capitals regarding their grand experiment in Afghanistan. Fairweather synthesizes earlier writing with his original investigative work and private interviews to offer a unique and important chronicle of America's longest war in its history. An excellent chronicle of the most significant challenges and...a valuable reflection on the most important lessons learned. "Foreign Policy" [A] gripping and detailed narrative Fairweather breaks new ground with a number of assertions that challenge conventional wisdom. "Publishers Weekly" Recommended for all Americans who want to understand more than a dozen years of an American war in Afghanistan.... Fairweather offers a knowledgeable argument for a more careful and thoughtful response to a complex and dangerous world in which terrorists threaten the stability of many weak societies. "Library Journal" A thorough, elegant reassessment of America's 'irresistible

illusion.' "Kirkus Reviews" There are some timely lessons to be learned from Middle East editor and Bloomberg News correspondent Jack Fairweather's well-told history of the Afghanistan war.

"Winnipeg Free Press" A remarkable account of the longest shooting war in American history. "The Good War" is the kind of book one would not ordinarily expect to see for decades, encyclopedic in sweep and yet rich with colorful detail. Jack Fairweather writes with respect but often damning insight. He seems to have digested everything written about the war, and to have talked with every player, open and clandestine. This timely, absorbing narrative captures the essence of an infuriating place, illustrating once again a seemingly unlearnable lesson: There are strict limits to what can be accomplished by force. Mark Bowden, author of "Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War" It has been America's longest war, yet there is no real history of the conflict in Afghanistan. Now this war has finally found its chronicler. Jack Fairweather has reported deeply from the White House Situation Room to the deserts of Kandahar to tell a riveting story with an outsized cast of characters. It's a sweeping work of history written with great verve. Peter Bergen, author of "Manhunt: The Ten-Year Search for Bin Laden from 9/11 to Abbottabad" At last, an intrepid war reporter has woven together his insights from the battlefield, the unadorned views of grunts, and the political calculations of Washington to reveal the entire history of the war in Afghanistan. The result is a superb history, compassionate, comprehensive, and eminently readable. Like the best accounts of war, it shows how our aims going into a conflict are all too swiftly undercut by reality on the ground. Bravo Zulu! Bing West, author of "The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq and One Million Steps: a Marine Platoon at War" "The Good War" is a tour de force a riveting, clear-eyed account of the troubled US-led war in Afghanistan. Jack Fairweather has shown himself to be a narrative historian of the first order. For anyone seeking an honest appraisal of what went wrong and why, this book is a must-read. Jon Lee Anderson, author of "The Lion's Grave: Dispatches from Afghanistan"

A former foreign correspondent for the "Daily Telegraph" and the "Washington Post," Jack Fairweather won the British Press Award for his reporting on the Iraq invasion and is the author of "A War of Choice." Fairweather is currently a Middle East editor and correspondent for Bloomberg News, and he lives in Istanbul with his wife and two daughters.

If you are like me - reasonably well informed on world events - the Afghan War is pretty much a blur, probably because there was no consistent coverage of events in the US media; things seemed to go from a near instant defeat of the Taliban in the opening days of the conflict to "the surge" about a

decade later. What happened in the interim, and why? Fairweather provides the answers in an eminently readable yet detailed account. Attempting to summarize this whole fiasco would be tedious coming from me (but not Fairweather) but pretty much boils down to Western civilian and military leadership elements sitting in D.C., London and other spots determining "how things should work" in Afghanistan lacking any understanding of how things actually work there, and have for centuries. However, this book is not judgmental, serious mistakes were made not in bad faith, but in error, and what those errors were are clearly illuminated in the book. There are a host of very interesting personalities presented, some generally known political, military and diplomatic individuals, but also a lot of "unknowns" who were active in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, it was the latter group who best understood the dynamics of Afghan society, its complex tribal interrelationships, and how best to carry out reconstruction activities, unfortunate as their advice was generally ignored and instead a tidal wave of money (and troops) was thrown at the country to "get the job done faster," an approach that only led to egregious fraud and failed projects: Fairweather quotes one source that estimates of the \$100 billion of aid pushed in Afghanistan's direction only about \$15 billion actually impacted infrastructure projects, the rest simply "disappeared." Of the main players in the story, the one person I came to view more favorably was Karzai; while not a totally sympathetic person and not without his faults, he usually tried to do the right thing but was often undercut or simply double crossed by the USA and the Brits. (Holbrooke for one, who definitely dropped in my estimation!) All in all a great book with foreign policy implications beyond the specifics of this conflict. One hopes a few folks in D.C. might read it. (I can't seem to scroll back this text so I can't edit it - please excuse typos etc.)

Fairweather begins with the solemn reflections of Hamid Karzai, the President of Afghanistan, in his private garden. His thoughts were about the Americans and himself - more precisely, how he felt being used and then dumped by the Americans who started a war with noble intent (ridding the world of 'terrorists') but losing its way from the distractions in Iraq, and the fading resolve to achieve the objectives that propelled the war. This book examines what went wrong in Afghanistan, pointing out that it took the US and her allies only 3 weeks to depose Saddam Hussein but are packing up in Afghanistan after 13 years. Much blame might be attributed to Donald Rumsfeld's lack of understanding of the country and its people as well as his stubborn conflict with his military advisors. Understanding Afghanistan and its peoples (not just what tribes there are but also their own internecine and violent rivalries) is crucial to any intrusive foreign power. The British tried twice before 2001 and failed to control this country. The Russians thought that they could do a better job,

but they too left, and now everyone else is planning the same exit path. A great deal of the blame for the American failure in the 21st century expedition can be laid at the door of Pakistan. Fairweather explains clearly the ambitions and insecurities of Pakistan with regard to its larger neighbour India and how Afghanistan becomes a tool in Pakistan's endeavours to strengthen itself by getting into America's good books, allowing America to use Pakistan as a base. But segments of Pakistan's own population are sympathetic to some of Afghanistan's tribes. That explains various acts of treachery by Pakistan from the American perspective. The military campaigns and the various strategies adopted including the creation of the 'Provincial Reconstruction Teams' are vividly explained. So too were the damaging rivalries among the allies (the Americans, the British, the Canadians, and the Dutch). In winding down his sweeping historical account, Fairweather writes about the scandalous presidential election in 2009. In the end, America ran out of ideas, and lost interest in Afghanistan. Fairweather quotes Obama's announcement: 'America, it is time to focus on nation building here at home' - but the author believes that America's policy makers should remain committed to engage the world's dangerous places for the sake of peace and the Afghan people. There is one glaring editorial error at page 119. The sentence 'By ordering the next round of more detailed planning, they didn't need to come to an immediate conclusion over Afghanistan' is repeated with 'The predominant mood among the defense chiefs was often one of inertia' in between. This may leave the reader uncertain whether the repeated line was intended to qualify the sentence in between or the sentence preceding the first use.

An extremely well researched narrative, covering the entire war, from its conception to the declared withdrawal of US combat troops in 2014. This book has something for everyone. It gives plenty of high-level context for the casual observer of the Afghan war, but offers new and exciting details for even the most active participants in this field. The vertical integration of strategic to tactical perspective is beautifully woven throughout the book, giving the reader a great sense of context--again, regardless of the reader's experience with Afghanistan. Likewise, the author keeps the narrative on target and consistently brings you back to the main theme, previewed by the book's sub-title. Unlike many books I have read on the topic that I would call "books of opportunity" where the author had a limited, yet interesting, experience in one aspect of the conflict, this book fully integrates all major aspects of the war. His research covers, and comes from, the full spectrum of actors in the conflict: military, political, civilian, tribal, NGO, regional, etc. A very timely release of a complete history of this war.

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