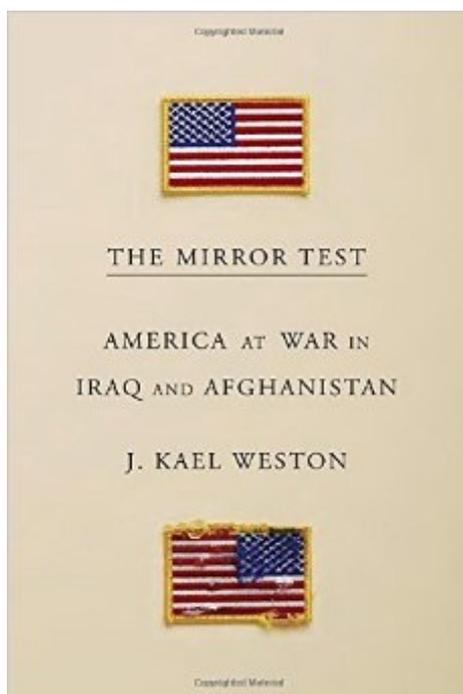


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The Mirror Test: America At War In Iraq And Afghanistan



Synopsis

A New York Times Editors' Choice
A powerfully written firsthand account of the human costs of conflict. J. Kael Weston spent seven years on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan working for the U.S. State Department in some of the most dangerous frontline locations. Upon his return home, while traveling the country to pay respect to the dead and wounded, he asked himself: When will these wars end? How will they be remembered and memorialized? What lessons can we learn from them? These are questions with no quick answers, but perhaps ones that might lead to a shared reckoning worthy of the sacrifices of those "troops and civilians alike" whose lives have been changed by more than a decade and a half of war. Weston takes us from Twentynine Palms in California to Fallujah in Iraq, Khost and Helmand in Afghanistan, Maryland, Colorado, Wyoming, and New York City, as well as to out-of-the-way places in Iowa and Texas. We meet generals, corporals and captains, senators and ambassadors, NATO allies, Iraqi truck drivers, city councils, imams and mullahs, Afghan schoolteachers, madrassa and college students, former Taliban fighters and ex-Guantánamo prison detainees, a torture victim, SEAL and Delta Force teams, and many Marines. The overall frame for the book, from which the title is taken, centers on soldiers who have received a grievous wound to the face. There is a moment during their recovery when they must look upon their reconstructed appearance for the first time. This is known as "the mirror test." From an intricate tapestry of voices and stories "Iraqi, Afghan, and American" Weston delivers a larger mirror test for our nation in its global role. An unflinching and deep examination of the interplay between warfare and diplomacy, this is an essential book "a crucial look at America now, how it is viewed in the world and how the nation views itself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Mr. Weston has provided us with a true depiction of war, loss, and disappointment. The stories come from every side of the American conflicts that define the early 21st Century. We hear the stories of Marines, American civil servants, American families, and especially the side we do not often hear: that of the Iraqis and Afghan people who many writers ignore or over-simplify. The stories of sacrifice by young Marines and Iraqi and Afghan patriots are painful but need telling. Mr. Weston's use of the term "mirror test" is a perfect analogy for what all of us should do after a decade and a half of war. Some of us have done it since the beginning, but it has felt like a house of mirrors to some (confusing and frightening). To others it may seem like the Evil Queen's mirror and tells us what we want to hear until the ugly truth finally reveals itself. Mr. Weston's writing brings out that truth and allows you to observe the folly of our political leadership, the naivety of our society, and the impact of our Imperial actions on the American Homefront and on Iraqis/Afghans alike. This work is a graphic and realistic depiction of our time in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the aftermath back home. He writes in an easy to read manner that only becomes difficult due to the emotion that his prose stirs. The reflection you begin to see as you read it is testament to his literary skill. This is not a book written by a policy wonk or fresh-faced journalist wanting to pontificate on his/her view of a world seen in books, peer reviews, or the couple weeks they may have spent in Baghdad enjoying a salsa night or country/western dance at the Embassy. As you read this work, you will see that Mr. Weston bled on the pages with us all.

Powerful. I've read a lot (100+) of military history/political intrigue books and this is right up at the top of the list. I consider it a must read. The experiences conveyed by the author are sobering and many times hard to get through. In a day with so many rah-rah shoot'm up books, with very little focus on the personal sacrifices of war. This book is a refreshing, as it is a deeply personal look at how war affects people at all levels of involvement, from the most powerful Presidents, Politicians, Generals, Diplomats, to the Grunts tasked with carrying out the will of the nation. I really respect that this book shows us what happens to the other side when the might of the US Military is unleashed. It gives voice to those who never have a platform from which to speak. For example, the views of a young boy left to watch-over his grandfather, who refused to leave his ancestral home in Fallujah, and was killed (collateral damage) as a result. No blame on the US or condemnation from the boy just the realization that War is ugly and his only request, that his grandfather be given a proper

burial. The rational side of me says, he was told to leave and he should have. But I can't help feel for the boy and what toll the war had on him and his family. The book really got me to think and ask questions of myself. Would I leave my home if a foreign power told me to do so? Would I be willing to give my life to better my community (like many of the Fallujah city council and those in Afghanistan were willing to do)...This book covers more ground and has more depth than any I've read to date concerning the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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