

DEEPAK TRIPATHI

AFGHANISTAN AND THE VIETNAM SYNDROME

COMPARING US
AND SOVIET WARS



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Foreword

In this book, Dr. Deepak Tripathi draws the broad contours of the long wars fought by the United States, first in Vietnam, last in Afghanistan. To cover this vast canvas and also discuss the US role in the Arab Spring prior to the sudden American withdrawal from Kabul in 2021, he draws on the skills acquired as a seasoned journalist, as well as his academic credentials. The latter were earned by a PhD and a trilogy of books, *Breeding Ground*, *Overcoming The Bush Legacy in Iraq and Afghanistan*, and *Imperial Designs*.

In the present study, inspired by the logic laid out in Paul Kennedy's *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, and the subsequent amendments to that theory, Tripathi concludes that "the idea of war without end eventually confronts reality, beyond which war cannot continue." This predicament has plagued the United States on several occasions, and it may well be that in the longer-term perspective, the forward push against the former Soviet Union and Russia which began in 1945, and continues today in the struggle waged over Ukraine, the same logic will in the end call a halt to that protracted campaign too.

The original Vietnam Syndrome, the presumed lack of will to impose US preferences on the world by military means, in the author's view was rooted in the alienation of the American public from its military, and was to shape the particular form of subsequent US foreign interventions. On the other hand, and in line with his theoretical point of departure, Tripathi argues convincingly that this "syndrome" is too US-centric. It is a general feature of great powers exhausting themselves in protracted wars.

Well might the elder Bush claim, at the close of the First Gulf War, that the Vietnam Syndrome had been buried definitively. But it already contained the seeds of another disaster—Afghanistan. "In a state of hubris," writes Tripathi,

“the United States risked living in a world of its own imagination. But a country in such a state renders itself oblivious of failure lurking around, ignores early warning signs, and long-term costs in the years to come. America was entering that phase [in 1991], as future events would demonstrate.”

Exploiting his intimate knowledge of South and Central Asian as well as Middle Eastern affairs, the author roams far beyond the direct topics of Vietnam and Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, exploring related topics, such as the Cold War, Chinese-Soviet rivalry, and others.

Detailing the abuses that America’s military adventures entailed, which “drained America’s moral capital,” the book provides insight also in the role of Pakistan, especially its pivotal intelligence service ISI that sought to turn Afghanistan into a strategic asset providing depth in the confrontation with India over Kashmir. An overview of events in the Arab Spring, appendices with chronologies, and relevant documents concerning the closure of the Afghan War make this a highly valuable, timely book recommended for close study and further debate.

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Kees van der Pijl

Preface

This is a sequel to my book, *Breeding Ground: Afghanistan and the Origins of Islamist Terrorism* (Potomac, 2011), and adds to a Middle East trilogy that includes two other volumes, *Overcoming the Bush Legacy in Iraq and Afghanistan* (2010) and *Imperial Designs: War, Humiliation and the Making of History* (2013). These works reflect my interest in the vast region that is South and West Asia, and great power rivalries there. This interest stems from my life, travels, and work since I was in my early twenties. Born in India, I was fortunate to secure a job in the South Asia Branch of the Voice of America in Washington in 1974, and spent three formative years in journalism. It was a turbulent period in America's domestic politics and foreign affairs—the Watergate scandal leading to the resignation of President Richard Nixon, the worldwide economic crisis triggered by the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and OPEC's oil ban, and the US military withdrawal from Indochina and the fall of South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos to communist nationalist forces. In 1977, I moved to London to work for the BBC, where I was to spend more than two decades until 2000.

My interest in Afghanistan goes back to the late 1970s. The country endured communist coups in 1978 and 1979, an invasion by the Soviet Union in December 1979, and a proxy war between the Soviet occupation forces and US-backed Afghan Mujahideen. The Afghan conflict was the last major East-West confrontation of the Cold War, ending in the Soviet Union's defeat and withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989. The Soviets left behind their client regime of President Najibullah in Kabul, and the civil war continued between the communist rulers and fundamentalist Islamic groups that made up the Mujahideen movement.

In January 1990, the BBC sent me as its correspondent to Kabul, where I set up a bureau, making it possible for the corporation to establish a permanent presence in Afghanistan. I traveled via Moscow and Tashkent, and landed in Kabul, where the climate was hostile and destruction of war was to be seen everywhere. During the fifteen months based in the Afghan capital and traveling in the country, I learned a great deal about the Afghan people, their culture, their hospitality, and indomitable spirit when fighting the enemy. That character has shaped the history of Afghanistan, which has lured great powers and, at the same time, thwarted their attempts to subjugate the country over centuries. Foreign interventions and wars have rendered landlocked Afghanistan into a devastated country in a state of extreme poverty. But Afghans have maintained their own way of life despite repeated attempts by others to change it.

My book *Breeding Ground* was about the Afghan conflict during the Cold War and its aftermath leading to the first Taliban regime (1996–2001), and their overthrow by US-led international forces. Based on a study of Cold War Soviet and American National Security archives, it attempted to show how Afghanistan became a terrorist sanctuary in a series of conflicts lasting over three decades. The attacks on September 11, 2001 created such shock and revulsion that the United States and allies invaded Afghanistan, with the backing of the United Nations Security Council, and an overwhelming majority of UN members. Many people thought a total reformation of the Afghan state was possible. It could be made a modern peaceful country, leading to a new era.

How unrealistic those hopes were became clear as the Americans and their allies soon found themselves entrenched in war with a resurgent Taliban. Afghanistan and external players near and far showed little signs of change in their motives and behavior. The Afghan conflict entered a new phase and merged with the overarching geopolitical ambitions of the United States. The expansion of war by the George W. Bush administration and his successor, President Barack Obama, once again demonstrated a failure to learn from America's past experiences. Those experiences tell us that the tendency of great powers to get involved in foreign wars and to remain there comes with inherent risks, especially when the occupier is perceived as dictating the occupied for too long, having overstayed its welcome.

Western Europe, chiefly Germany, and Japan after WWII were apparent exceptions. But the circumstances and the manner of America's role in both cases had marked differences. First, the level of Europe's societal development, pool of expertise, and history were in a different league. The Nazi rule did not change that, even though the war brought enormous destruction. Second,

there was the Soviet threat. The victory against Nazi Germany was achieved by the Allies, among them the Soviet Union. But soon after WWII, the USSR brought eastern Europe under its own control, becoming the main adversary of the US-led Western bloc. Somewhat similar circumstances existed in the Far East, where Japan's defeat came with the emergence of not only the Soviet Union, but also communist China as major powers. These factors convinced the new ruling classes in both Europe and the Far East that America's presence and massive assistance were essential for their defense and reconstruction. Even so, the repercussions of the Soviet empire's breakup were not entirely peaceful in Europe, as the conflict in the 1990s in former Yugoslavia, and more recently the Russian aggression in Ukraine in the face of NATO expansion, showed.

Outside Europe, in South and West Asia and North Africa, the magnitude of crises in the post-Soviet era turned out to be much more complex and serious. Populations in these regions have very different values, beliefs, and sentiments that determine their behavior. They have very different political and social environments. Countries are ruled by authoritarian strongmen, not liberal democracies. Local customs rather than constantly evolving laws are the primary source of governance. Internal conflicts instigated or fueled by great power interventions influence these regions. Vulnerable and unstable, they are more likely to succumb to great power politics. From South Asia through the Middle East to Africa, the Soviet Union's disintegration created conditions in which rulers, once reliant on Soviet patronage, found themselves without Moscow's guarantees, luring the United States in to fill the vacuum.

The main substance of my Middle East trilogy went back to the 1970s, a decade of major upheaval that left a lasting effect in the region. In particular, 1973 was a watershed year when the Arab-Israeli War in October ended in an Israeli victory, but at great cost to the United States and the world economy after the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) led by Saudi Arabia imposed an oil embargo on the United States and allies. That war brought a US-Soviet nuclear confrontation closer than at any point since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. The economic consequences of the 1973 Middle East crisis led President Nixon to instruct his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, to embark on his shuttle diplomacy aimed at peacemaking between the two sides.

The other event of historic importance that received less attention was the overthrow of Afghanistan's King Zahir Shah by his cousin, General Daud Khan, who also abolished the monarchy and declared the country a republic. That palace coup took place in July 1973, but did not attract the attention

that the Middle East crisis received for several reasons. Daud Khan, a prince in the Afghan royal family, carried out a bloodless coup while the King was away in Italy for medical treatment. However, life under President Daud continued as before for most Afghans. Daud had more liberal, pro-western leanings, which were also a factor in the relative lack of reaction in the West. And, of course, tensions in the oil-rich Middle East drew greater international attention than the events in one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. In the long run, it turned out that events in 1973 in Afghanistan were no less significant than those taking place further west in the region.

Fifty years on, I came to believe that the Afghan coup of 1973 upset the delicate balance King Zahir Shah had maintained between the different social and religious forces during his reign of four decades, and triggered a long-drawn-out conflict drawing local, regional, and international players. President Daud's imposition of western-oriented policies caused alienation among conservative and religious groups in Afghan society, on the one hand, and young military officers mostly trained in the Soviet Union on the other. A deep and dangerous split occurred between rural and urban Afghanistan, provoking a civil war that tempted the Soviet Union to invade in 1979, and the Americans in 2001. After a decade of occupation in the 1980s, the Soviets were forced to retreat, and the USSR disintegrated thereafter. Then, after the September 11 attacks in 2001, the Americans invaded Afghanistan, but left after 20 years of war, having failed to transform the country. The history of Afghanistan is part of a pattern showing that when great powers get bogged down in long wars, they eventually become tired and lose support at home before finally admitting defeat and retreating.

The twenty-first century started badly for me. In the year 2000, my career came to an abrupt end due to ill health and inability to work 10- or 12-h shifts in a BBC newsroom. Such a life-changing event makes one think about the future. Fortunately for me, it turned out to be an opportunity to discover new interests in academia, concentrating on history of war and humiliation, and its consequences. And so to my book *Breeding Ground*, though it was the second volume in my trilogy because it took several years to research, write, and publish. *Breeding Ground* was published a decade after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. The war was on, but hopes were alive that the people of Afghanistan might have a happy ending after all. That the Taliban would ultimately force the United States out was not envisaged, even though the US-led international forces were beginning to face stiff resistance. As the conflict went on year after year, it was time to reflect and reexamine the unfolding chain of events.

Time to reflect helped to see Afghanistan's long conflict in a wider perspective. As well as the Arab-Israeli War, and the overthrow and abolition of the Afghan monarchy back in 1973, America's protracted military involvement in Indochina was coming to an end. I remember the final phase of the Vietnam War ending in the collapse of the US-backed regimes in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in 1975. I was in Washington during the period. Two years before that historic upheaval in 1973, American combat troops had been withdrawn from Indochina, after which the inevitable was only a matter of time. The United States was in a state of shock, anger, and humiliation at what happened, conscious of its status as the greatest power, but largely unaware of the rise of nationalist forces and the flow of history. The Vietnam debacle was viewed as America's own reluctance to deal with the enemy with full military force, caused by dwindling public support for the war. The term "Vietnam Syndrome" entered the political rhetoric and analysis to describe the paralysis in America's foreign policy, and capacity to exert power abroad.

Despite the rhetoric about the Vietnam Syndrome, the reality was that the United States under President Jimmy Carter began to send covert aid to the Afghan Mujahideen, who were fighting the communist regime that had seized power in Kabul in a coup by young military officers in April 1978. Carter's modest aid package, channeled through the CIA, started in mid-1979. His National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, an ardent anti-Soviet American of Polish descent, claimed years later that it was he who had advised Carter to help the Mujahideen to lure the Soviets into Afghanistan, and give them "their Vietnam." That is exactly what happened in December 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. After Carter's defeat by Ronald Reagan in November 1980, Afghanistan became a major US-Soviet battleground, with the Reagan administration pouring money and weapons into Afghanistan.

It is true that the North Vietnamese and their South Vietnamese allies Viet Cong looked to China and, to an extent, the Soviet Union for support. But they were essentially nationalist revolutionaries who had fought French colonial rule before France relinquished the territory under the 1954 Geneva Agreements, which mandated unification on the basis of elections under international supervision to be held in July 1956. In the interim, Vietnam was divided into North Vietnam and South Vietnam as a temporary measure until elections would be held 2 years later. The United States and South Vietnam rejected the accords and never signed them. The South Vietnamese leadership asserted that free elections were impossible in the communist North. Nonetheless, France did withdraw, and there followed a growing American involvement in Vietnam and subsequent war in Vietnam, Cambodia, and

Laos—a war that ultimately forced the United States to withdraw its combat troops in 1973. In 1975, pro-US South Vietnam was captured by the North Vietnamese forces, Cambodia led by General Lon Nol fell to Khmer Rouge, and the royalist government of Laos to Pathet Lao.

At this point, perhaps the meaning of defeat in war should be discussed. The term “defeat” can mean different things to different people. Some may argue that the United States was not defeated in Vietnam since American combat troops were withdrawn from the region in 1973, well before the fall of South Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian regimes. Others may contend that Vietnam was not a defeat, because American troops did not surrender to the enemy. Or the United States had the power to obliterate the enemy with nuclear weapons had Washington chosen to do so. In their view, what happened was a political failure rather than military defeat. Still others may assert that the American withdrawal from Vietnam was voluntary under the 1973 Paris Peace Accords between the United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (PRG).

What really matters, however, is that after a 20-year conflict, the Nixon administration was compelled to sign the Paris Accords to end the war and withdraw its combat forces without achieving victory. Thereafter, the governments it backed surrendered to enemy forces. Therefore, it was a defeat. This analytic approach helps us take an overview of which side prevails and ultimately achieves its aims. In other words, what decides victory or defeat.

A decade after the publication of *Breeding Ground* in 2011, I began to think of America at war in Afghanistan, and the manner of the Taliban’s 2021 victory, and how America’s war in Indochina had ended with opposition forces in South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos emerging victorious in 1975. The United States could not live with the humiliation in Indochina. And only 4 years later, President Carter went along with his National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski’s advice to entice the Soviets to invade Afghanistan and give them Vietnam treatment, even though China, not the USSR, was the main backer of North Vietnam, as discussed in Chap. 2.

In 1998, Brzezinski expressed his undisguised triumph over the Soviet Union’s comprehensive defeat including the retreat from Afghanistan, the collapse of President Najibullah’s government the Soviets had left behind in Kabul, and the dissolution of the Soviet state.¹ But by then, Afghanistan had

¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski’s interview in French in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (Paris), January 15–21, 1998, translated by William Blum and David N. Gibbs in “Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Retrospect,” *International Politics* 37, no 2, 2000, 241–242.

fallen to the anti-US Islamic fundamentalist Taliban, who defeated Mujahideen groups Washington had supported in the war against the Soviets, and Afghanistan had become a sanctuary for al Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden. Barely 3 years later on September 11, 2001, America was attacked, prompting President George W. Bush's decision to invade Afghanistan and remove the Taliban from power. And there began a new phase of war—this time between US-led multinational forces and the Taliban.

The length of America's 20-year war, and the manner in which its troops were withdrawn, made me think about the end of the Vietnam War, and similarities between them. Each war lasted about 20 years. America employed some of the most advanced weaponry against an enemy that was poorly equipped and poorly supplied. In Indochina, America's secret bombing caused very heavy military and civilian casualties in North Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. In the final 20-year phase of the Afghan War, American drones were used against suspected enemies across the Afghan-Pakistan frontier. But, in the end, the underdog prevailed in Afghanistan, as had happened in Indochina.

This long gaze at history opened the route for me to write *Afghanistan and the Vietnam Syndrome*. How a seemingly undefeatable power submitted to circumstances in which it was forced to accept that it could not continue the war, because the cost was simply too high? That is the question this book attempts to answer. In my effort, Paul Kennedy's book *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987) was particularly helpful in advancing my argument that the idea of war without end eventually confronts reality, beyond which war cannot continue.

What created such conditions for the United States in Vietnam and Afghanistan? The nature of local and foreign forces that collided in both cases is a fascinating subject to explore. Their interests and motives that drove them to act as they did caused enormous destruction and human suffering, ending in unforeseen outcomes. In both cases, what prevailed was courage, endurance, capacity to take losses, and overcome what seemed impossible. Continuing the march of history, nationalism that has a close relationship with cultural and ethnic identity, and the people's will, was vital to the outcome. The nature of forces that ultimately prevailed in both wars was fundamentally anti-imperialist. *Afghanistan and the Vietnam Syndrome* is a study that explores these forces.

Before continuing to Chap. 1, a few words need to be said about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which became a new theater of East-West confrontation within months of America's withdrawal from Afghanistan. The origins of Russia-Ukraine conflict went back to 2014, when pro-Kremlin President of Ukraine, Victor Yanukovich, was ousted in a popular revolution

and fled to Russia.² Yanukovych was resisting growing demands for Ukraine to sign an agreement with the European Union. Parliament of the autonomous region of Crimea supported Yanukovych, but the rest of Ukraine opposed him. The split pushed the country toward a civil war. On February 27, 2014, Russian troops without insignias launched a coup, capturing government buildings in Crimea, and Russia eventually annexed the region. After that, a state of war existed between Ukraine and Russia.

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, from Moscow's ally Belarus in the north, from Russia in the east, and from occupied Crimea in the south.³ Against all expectations in Moscow that President Volodymyr Zelensky's government would soon collapse, the Ukrainian nation united against the invading forces. Able-bodied Ukrainian men and women took up arms, and Russian forces began to encounter strong resistance. The United States, Britain, and allies began to send vast amounts of military, economic, and humanitarian assistance. Thus, Ukraine became a major battleground between Russia and the Western Alliance. At the time of writing, advances by Russian forces were slow, but they had captured large areas in eastern Ukraine. On September 30, 2022, President Putin signed "accession treaties" formalizing Russia's annexation of four Ukrainian regions occupied by his forces after holding referendums, which were widely condemned as illegal.⁴ It was the beginning of what looked like a long, brutal conflict, with economic warfare between Russia and the West, and Russia weaponizing supplies from its vast gas and petroleum resources to the West.

A proper assessment of the Russia-Ukraine War will have to wait until such time in the future when its conclusion is known. But this study is about the Greater Middle East, and it is in that direction that this book will proceed.

Afghanistan and the Vietnam Syndrome: Comparing US and Soviet wars aims to study the long war between George W. Bush's decision to invade Afghanistan in 2001 following the 9/11 attacks on America, and its complete withdrawal in 2021, leaving the Taliban to return to rule the country. The Soviets had in the past met the same fate, being forced to retreat from Afghanistan after a decade-long occupation in the 1980s. This book examines attempts by US-led occupation forces to defeat the Taliban and al Qaeda, and undertake a state-building program including an American-style democratic system in

² "Putin's Gamble: Russia's 2014 Invasion of Crimea—A Short History," History.co.uk.

³ "Hundred days of war in Ukraine—A timeline," CBS News, June 3, 2022.

⁴ The four regions of Ukraine occupied by Russia, and annexed, were Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk, and Donetsk. See Pjotr Sauer, "Putin annexes four regions of Ukraine in major escalation of Russia's war," Guardian, September 30, 2022.

place of the centuries-old tribal system in Afghanistan. This study further looks at how the Bush administration extended its mission to conduct a global war on terror, invade Iraq to overthrow the Saddam Hussein regime, and rebuild the Iraqi state.

The US venture did not stop there. It stretched further west in the Middle East to Libya and Syria to overthrow regimes that had long challenged American hegemony. The book examines how the mission also assumed a drive for democracy promotion in the region, but was forced to halt when friendly authoritarian regimes were challenged by mass revolts demanding democracy. And so arrived the point when the United States had overreached itself beyond which an endless war could not continue.

At the time of the 2021 US withdrawal from Afghanistan and Iraq, and scaling down of American ambitions in the wider Middle East, it looked like the Vietnam War, and retreat after failing to defeat anti-US forces in Indochina. That withdrawal was forced on the United States after it had overreached in its war in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Taking an overview of America's military venture in the wider Middle East, and the limits of the world's only superpower on display, the book explores parallels between Vietnam, on the one hand, and US and Soviet wars in Afghanistan on the other. The study is based substantially on qualitative research into original archives listed in the bibliography.

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I am grateful to many individuals and institutions for their help when I was writing this book. Richard Falk, my mentor and friend, had contributed the foreword to my 2011 volume *Breeding Ground: Afghanistan and the Origins of Islamist Terrorism*. He encouraged me to write this sequel. Richard went through an earlier version of the manuscript and gave valuable suggestions, which improved the book. A lot had changed in Afghanistan, the region, and global affairs in over a decade, and the time had come for this volume. I am also grateful to Martin Shaw, who guided me to my PhD and made recommendations for improvement. He and Richard Falk gave generous testimonials after reading the manuscript. I thank Kees van der Pijl for his foreword, and Amin Saikal and Lisa Hajjar for their endorsements. Barnett Rubin and William Maley gave of their time to suggest useful reading lists and also gave endorsements. They are all renowned academics, whose support is much appreciated. Among the many institutions whose archives provided me with source material, the National Security Archive and the Woodrow Wilson Center were especially useful. I am thankful to them. My wife was unstintingly supportive during a difficult period. She knows how much that means to me. Finally, I must express my gratitude to Niko Chtouris, my editor at Springer, who was always willing and ready to help. Without his commitment, this project would not have been possible. While I am indebted to all whose contributions made this book possible, the responsibility for its contents is entirely mine.

About This Book

Great powers have often found that military adventurism to force their will in distant lands comes with the risk of spending excessive military, economic, and moral capital to the extent that war is no longer sustainable. In modern times, the Americans met that fate in Vietnam, and so did the Soviets and Americans in Afghanistan. America's 1975 retreat from Vietnam was a consequential event, prompting US commentators to explain it as reluctance to get involved in foreign wars, a mindset described as the Vietnam Syndrome.

Deepak Tripathi points out that the Vietnam experience made the Americans determined to give the Soviets their Vietnam. The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and retreat after a decade of occupation represented the revenge America sought. However, President George W. Bush's decision to invade Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks was the beginning of a long military venture that ended in retreat in 2021. In this book, Tripathi explores parallels between Afghanistan and Vietnam.

Testimonials & endorsements

“Anyone with an interest in world affairs should read Deepak Tripathi’s superb book *Afghanistan and the Vietnam Syndrome*. Although drawing on his deep knowledge of Afghanistan exhibited in his masterful 2011 study *Breeding Ground: The Origins of Islamist Terrorism*, Tripathi’s focus in this book is far broader, analyzing US foreign interventions since Vietnam, convincingly dissecting policy failures, above all in Iraq and Afghanistan. Tripathi’s essential argument is that the US has continued to suffer from ‘imperial overreach’ ever since its disastrous experience in the Vietnam War.”

—Richard Falk, *Milbank Professor of International Law Emeritus, Princeton University; Chair of Global Law, Queen Mary University of London*

“Deepak Tripathi has written widely on United States foreign and military policy, and his new book offers a concise, reliable, and readable narrative of the long wave of US intervention in the Middle East. Extending the case that overreach is the cause of US failures, Tripathi traces recent events to the seminal disaster in Vietnam, reworking the idea of the ‘Vietnam Syndrome’ as a general definition of this type of imperial hubris. Although the book focuses on the developments which led to the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, its argument is widely applicable.”

—Martin Shaw, *Emeritus Professor of International Relations, University of Sussex*

“Deepak Tripathi’s *Afghanistan and the Vietnam Syndrome* offers a compelling and comparative argument about the wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan: The United States lost both along with much blood and treasure, and hawkish officials’ hubristic delusions about US invincibility and the imminence of victory against militarily inferior enemies prolonged both. Losing long wars and an incapacity to understand why has become ‘the American syndrome.’”

—Lisa Hajjar, *Professor of Sociology, University of California – Santa Barbara, and Author of The War in Court: Inside the Long Fight against Torture*

“Combining the sharp judgments of an experienced foreign correspondent with the insights of the trained historian, Deepak Tripathi has produced an informed, insightful and wide-ranging study that helps us make sense of the challenges that both the Soviet Union and the United States encountered in Afghanistan’s mountains and on Afghanistan’s plains. No one will fail to benefit from reading it.”

—William Maley AM FASSA, *Emeritus Professor of Diplomacy, Australian National University*

“Deepak Tripathi has written an excellent and highly readable overview of imperial overstretch by both the USSR and the United States in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. He draws persuasive parallels between the war in Vietnam, the wars (Soviet and American) in Afghanistan, and the interventions that followed the Arab Spring. The book reads as a warning to anyone planning once again to use armed force to spread either a system of government or stability to a society that they are equipped neither to understand nor to engage with.”

—Barnett R. Rubin, *Distinguished Fellow, Stimson Center; Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Center on International Cooperation, New York University; and Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft*

“*Afghanistan and the Vietnam Syndrome* uniquely informs us of the parallels that have existed between America’s Afghanistan and Vietnam fiascos. It stands out for its analytical depth and discussion of the issues that have so far received inadequate coverage. As another admirable sequential work, Deepak Tripathi shows how major powers do not learn from their past misguided policy behaviour. It is a book of our time that deserves to be read very widely.”

—Amin Saikal AM FASSA, *formerly Distinguished Professor and Director, Center for Arab and Islamic Studies, Australian National University; Adjunct Professor of Social Sciences, University of Western Australia*