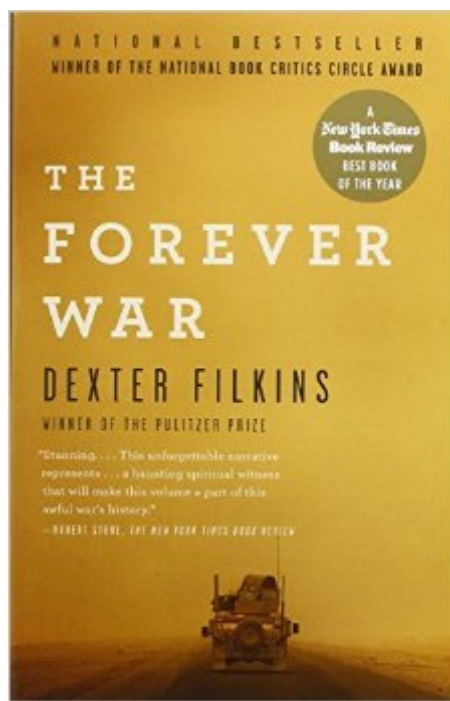


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# The Forever War



## Synopsis

National Bestseller One of the Best Books of the Year: New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, USA Today, Boston Globe, and Time An instant classic of war reporting, *The Forever War* is the definitive account of America's conflict with Islamic fundamentalism and a searing exploration of its human costs. Through the eyes of Filkins, a foreign correspondent for the New York Times, we witness the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s, the aftermath of the attack on New York on September 11th, and the American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Filkins is the only American journalist to have reported on all these events, and his experiences are conveyed in a riveting narrative filled with unforgettable characters and astonishing scenes. Brilliant and fearless, *The Forever War* is not just about America's wars after 9/11, but about the nature of war itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Of the dozens of books written about the war in Iraq, along comes Dexter Filkins with a commentary on Iraq that blows the others away. Non-political and highly personal, Filkins goes after the day-to-day story that, through accumulation, delivers a report about the Iraqi citizenry over the years after the invasion. He captures it with style, wisdom and grace. Americans have largely known the Iraqi war through political slants with a small degree of knowledge of the street. The author adds so much to the discourse. Who knew the depth that kidnapping played or how even going to the bathroom played with both American troops and the Iraqi people, disrupted as it was. This is a book of color and passion. I was particularly moved by a paragraph in which he relates how one would

know if an Iraqi was killed by a Sunni or a Shia. The exceptional side of "The Forever War" is not only the presentation of the story but the narrative in which it is told. Filkins has his own boots on the ground, grinding through Baghdad, Falluja and other hot spots. His book is one of remarkable courage under fire and serves to remind us of what our government simply didn't know about Iraq, or about which it didn't care. I highly recommend it.

This will, I think, become the classic book of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. It is non-political and consists of multiple snapshots ranging over many years, not always in chronological sequence. These are Filkins's carefully selected memories of his life as a N.Y. Times reporter on the front lines, as well as his experiences on 9/11 at ground zero. He makes no effort to "explain" the turmoil of the Middle East, but one puts the book down with a new understanding of some of the powerful and destructive forces at play. He is respectful of the U.S. military and his sketches of the bravery of the Americans fighting against bad odds, most of them only teenagers, is very moving. Politics don't even intrude in the brief chapter on Ahmad Chalabi, it is rather a sketch on the personality of this complex and slippery player in the power struggles of the time. I recommend this book as a companion to the excellent "Imperial Life in the Emerald City" which documents the appalling stupidity of U.S. policy in Iraq flowing down from the top. The "Forever War" balances that with the street smarts courage of our military. Still, Filkins would, I am sure, agree that imposing "democracy" by military force guarantees a forever war. This is a powerful book, well and clearly written, by an experienced and compassionate observer.

I happened to be in New York when Mr. Filkins was giving a reading from this book at the Strand so I stopped by to listen to him read as well as answer questions about his years in Iraq and Afghanistan. This book is probably one of the few written about the wars which does not get involved in making judgments about whether these wars are anything but "forever." Starting with his witnessing of Taliban "justice" in Kabul in 1998, nearly 20 years after Jimmy Carter decided to start the war in Afghanistan as a trap to lure the Soviets into invading the country and create a Soviet "Vietnam", Filkins shares with us the brutality of that war and the ravages it brought to Afghanistan over a couple of decades. He is able to capture the reasons that the Taliban were reluctantly viewed by the general population as a means to end the bloodshed and blackmail which had seen millions displaced, disfigured and dead over the years. Ironically, Filkins witnessed the amputations and executions in the former soccer stadium the same year that Zbigniew Brzezinski was giving his interview with a French magazine claiming that his advice to Carter to fund the mujahedeen and

thus creating "a few stirred up Muslims" was worth the price if it meant the Soviets would end their occupation of his native Poland. Filkins witnessed firsthand just how "stirred up" they became, and how decades later, they are still "stirred up." Filkins does not get into the "who started what and when" trap in this book, but does show that decisions have consequences and "The Forever War" started long before W even thought about running for president. If you are looking for a book that points fingers and lays blame, this is not the book for you. If you are looking for a book that shows the day-to-day reality of war, the deaths, the damage, the decisions, that people have to make in winning or surviving them, this is as good as it gets. Filkins does devote a few pages of placing Iraq today into context with his observations in visiting the cemetery where Gertrude Bell is interred and her role in the creation of the country of Iraq after WWI, as well as his visit to the graveyard and memorial built to the memory of the 30,000 British soldiers who were members of the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force who paid the ultimate price in liberating the country that would become Iraq from the Ottomans during WWI. As I told him after his reading, I am sure that Ernie Pyle is smiling down on him and his courageous return to unvarnished journalism without a political agenda.

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