America’s Dirty Wars
Irregular Warfare from 1776 to the War on Terror

This book examines the long, complex experience of American involvement in irregular warfare. It begins with the American Revolution in 1776 and chronicles big and small irregular wars for the next two and a half centuries. What is readily apparent in dirty wars is that failure is painfully tangible while success is often amorphous. Successfully fighting these wars often entails striking a critical balance between military victory and politics. America’s status as a democracy only serves to make fighting—and, to a greater degree, winning—these irregular wars even harder. Rather than futilely insisting that Americans should not or cannot fight this kind of irregular war, Russell Crandall argues that we would be better served by considering how we can do so as cleanly and successfully as possible.

Russell Crandall is a professor of international politics and American foreign policy at Davidson College. His previous books include The United States and Latin America after the Cold War (Cambridge, 2008); Gunboat Democracy: U.S. Interventions in the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Panama (2006); and Driven by Drugs: U.S. Policy Toward Colombia (2008). Interwoven with his academic career, Crandall has held several high-level foreign policy appointments within the U.S. government, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Office of the Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon and the National Security Council at the White House.
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Cover image: Lt. Matthew Stuhler visits with Haji Najibullah at his home in western Marjah, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, Sunday, August 1, 2010. Many compounds were empty in the area that was hotly contested between marines and Taliban fighters and Lt. Stuhler visited to offer his support. “I don’t want anything. I just want to stay at home, feed my family, and work on my farm,” Najibullah said. Photo by Victor J. Blue, used with permission.
To my brother and hero, Bill Jr.
Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.

Winston Churchill
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