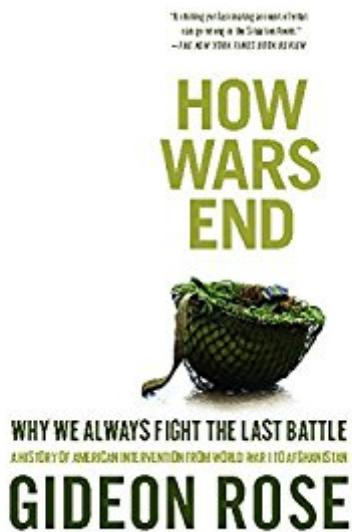


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# How Wars End: Why We Always Fight The Last Battle



## Synopsis

In 1991, the United States Army trounced the Iraqi army in battle, only to stumble blindly into postwar turmoil. Then, in 2003, the United States did it again. How could this happen? How could the strongest power in modern history fight two wars against the same opponent in just over a decade, win lightning victories both times, and yet still be woefully unprepared for the aftermath? Because Americans always forget the political aspects of war. Time and again, argues Gideon Rose in this penetrating look at American wars over the last century, our leaders have focused more on beating up the enemy than on creating a stable postwar environment. What happened in Iraq was only the most prominent example of this phenomenon, not an exception to the rule. Woodrow Wilson fought a war to make the world safe for democracy but never asked himself what democracy actually meant and then dithered as Germany slipped into chaos. Franklin Roosevelt resolved not to repeat Wilson's mistakes but never considered what would happen to his own elaborate postwar arrangements should America's wartime marriage of convenience with Stalin break up after the shooting stopped. The Truman administration casually established voluntary prisoner repatriation as a key American war aim in Korea without exploring whether it would block an armistice - which it did for almost a year and a half. The Kennedy and Johnson administrations dug themselves deeper and deeper into Vietnam without any plans for how to get out. Drawing on vast research, including extensive interviews with participants in recent wars, Rose re-creates the choices that presidents and their advisers have confronted during the final stages of each major conflict from World War I through Iraq. He puts listeners in the room with U.S. officials as they make decisions that affect millions of lives and shape the modern world - seeing what they saw, hearing what they heard, feeling what they felt.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a very special book that will change the way you think about war and U.S. foreign policy. The author argues that in all of the major wars America has fought in the 20th century--World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and Iraq--U.S. officials have screwed up the endings. Too often do they think more about defeating the enemy (the "day of") than planning for the result (the "day after"). Rose goes behind the scenes, using lots of primary sources to find out what decision-makers knew and when they knew it. In doing so, he creates a compelling case that in each "endgame," policymakers were haunted by the lessons they derived from the last war. Thus, for example, the lessons of Vietnam--don't get heavily involved in faraway drawn-out conflicts--cause the George H. W. Bush administration to bungle the end of the Gulf War and opt for an overly cautious and quick approach that failed to achieve the administration's own goals. George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq was, in some ways, a way to finish the job that his father had left undone. The research the author has done for each case is remarkable, and has the added benefit of providing many amusing anecdotes. (His stuff on Kissinger is particularly interesting.) The most important contribution of "How Wars End" is its sketching of a grand strategy of pacification that has run through 20th-century U.S. foreign policy. In war after war, the United States has tried to put out fires in strategically important parts of the world. World Wars I and II were attempts to pacify Europe (by solving the Germany problem), Vietnam and Korea were attempts to calm East Asia, and the wars in Iraq were efforts to stabilize the Middle East.

as a professional Army officer, most of my personal and professional study has been focused on the tactical level of war. I have learned much from reading accounts of Soldiers facing adversity, of commanders determining the best tactics to defeat their enemy, of organizations working together to achieve their mission. This book is significantly different. Gideon Rose connects the wars of the past century to their political purpose through an examination of how each war ended. He does this in a heavily footnoted academic work that is very accessible to non-academics, like me. He very briefly recounts some of the military action that led to the conclusion of combat and relies on the reader to know (or look up) the history of why the war began and how it progressed because that is not the

purpose of this book. His purpose is to explain how political purpose is achieved as a war reaches its end. What I found particularly enlightening was his discussion of how various administrations had to revise or update their political goals of a conflict given realities of the time and the political goals of their opponents. Even when war ends with "unconditional surrender" there are political realities to consider of our adversaries. As a professional Army officer, it is important for me to remember that I'm not asked to participate in war for only military purpose. I'm part of the government of this great country and am asked to succeed at my assigned mission so our political leaders can achieve their goals. While my job isn't to determine those political objectives, it is my job to give my best to my organization within the Army, ensure my organization's objectives are linked to those of my higher command which ultimately are linked to the political objectives.

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