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Charles Pena: Winning the Un-War: A New Strategy for the War on Terrorism. Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2007. 240 pages. ISBN 978-1-59797-006-8. \$ 19.95. Reviewed by E. G. Vallianatos.

The Islamic strike against the United States on September 11, 2001 was an affront that demanded an appropriate response. Destroying the Taliban regime of Afghanistan harboring the Moslem fanatics was part of that response. But George W. Bush did not stop there. He and vice president Dick Cheney, doing the bidding of the oil industry, took advantage of the 9/11 attack and launched America right into the heart of the Middle East, invading and conquering Mesopotamia. They said to Americans that Iraq had to be punished because, under the tyrant Saddam Hussein, Iraq, like Afghanistan, had become a base for al Qaeda, a conspiratorial organization of Moslem fanatics dedicated to the killing of Americans. Besides, they argued, Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

None of the war claims of Bush were true. However, the American elite is so cowed by Bush's "war on terror," a deceptive term covering up America's global aggression, especially in Afghanistan and Iraq, that it has tried to use fig leaves for hiding the country's slide into a tyranny-like state. When Congress was under Republican hands, Bush was like a king. He violated the Constitution, spying on Americans and ignoring the law. American troops and the "intelligence" services defied international law, torturing prisoners, kidnapping "enemy combatants" and outsourcing their degradation and torture. And in addition to some 150,000 "volunteer" troops, the Bush administration hired an additional 180,000 mercenaries to be its Praetorian Guard in Iraq.

When the Democrats became a majority in Congress in 2006, they raised their voices against Bush and the Iraq War, but failed to impeach him or, at least, demote him from acting tyrant to president. In fact, the Speaker of the House, the Democrat Nancy Pelosi, took the impeachment of Bush off the table.

This precarious situation becomes palpable whenever Congressmen and Senators hold hearings, desperately trying to restore their "oversight" over what is a very sophisticated national security state funded largely by secret budgets, having the trappings of democracy, and no accountability, least of

all to Congress. The discussion in these hearings sheds light on nothing that matters – the lawlessness of the Bush administration at home and abroad and the chaos in Iraq and Afghanistan, the vast spending for a private petroleum war, and the decline of well being and civility at home, including doing nothing about global warming, a calamity threatening life on earth.

Even C-Span TV, by far the best television network in the United States, is now flooded by meaningless discourse on Iraq, broadcasting meetings of experts funded mostly by the Pentagon and speaking out of Washington's think tanks, nearly all parroting the patriotic rhetoric of the White House. What is also outrageous is the near universal assumption that American troops in Iraq are on a noble mission, bringing democracy to the Middle East.

Meanwhile, the Republicans in Congress keep insisting on victory against the “terrorists” and the Democrats proposing the “redeployment” of the troops, decrying being in the midst of a civil war. Yet they leave unsaid that America is the cause of that civil war.

These political issues find little if any place in the “Winning of the Un-War: A New Strategy for the War on Terrorism” by Charles Pena, an expert on “national security problems.” Pena, like Bush, asserts that al Qaeda deserves the ranking of a real national enemy of the United States, equating al Qaeda to Bush's “war on terror.” He disagrees with Bush “lumping all terrorist groups” together. He would rather have Bush's “war on terror,” which he describes as the “un-war,” zero in on al Qaeda. He also questions fighting a war on terrorism when terrorism is millennia old and nebulous as a strategy. Yet, despite his skepticism, Pena offers more of the same, becoming obsessed by al Qaeda, which he would like to see being “painstakingly dismantled piece by piece.” His “strategy for the war on terrorism” would also include a new US foreign policy less likely to produce “new al Qaeda terrorists” and, finally, strengthening America's homeland defenses, making it more difficult for fanatic Muslims to repeat the 9/11 attack.

Despite missing the boat on the current, petroleum-fuelled, crusading struggles between Islam and American Christianity, Pena's book is useful because it deconstructs the Bush administration's justification for dragging the country into a non-winnable adventure.

The pre-2001 cabal of American Republican warmongers made no secret of their ambition to overthrow the tyrant of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, that way wrecking any ambitions Hussein might have had against Israel and, at the same time, putting the United States in the oil lake of the Middle East. Pena uses the writings of well-placed government insiders like former Secretary of the Treasury Paul O'Neill, former White house counterterrorism official Richard Clark, and former deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz in support of his view the Bush administration was planning regime change in Iraq before 9/11.

Pena denounces the Bush administration for calling Iran, Iraq, and North Korea "axis of evil," a useless diversion taking the United States away from its mission of fighting al Qaeda, "the enemy at the gates." However, Pena pays special attention to Iraq, quoting and discrediting Bush's exaggerated claims about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. That way, Pena provides an easy chronological summary of deception by the Bush administration: that Saddam Hussein and Iraq has something to do with 9/11 or al Qaeda; that America invaded Iraq to bring freedom and democracy to Iraq and the Middle East; that Iraq was at the center of global terrorism against America; and that the United States is more secure as a result of the occupation of Iraq, fighting terrorists in Mesopotamia rather than in America's shores.

Pena shows that the American invasion and occupation of Iraq created the Iraqi resistance, not terrorists; and the longer the occupation lasts the higher the chances that Iraqis resisting the American occupation would also join al Qaeda. In addition, the violence of the occupation and the tendency of military commanders for "a show of force" have the unintended consequences of turning Iraqis friendly to America into critics and enemies of America.

Pena uses the first 3 chapters in exposing the shallowness of the thinking behind the Bush "war on terror," a convenient campaign covering up the petroleum lust and faith-based vision of Bush, which Pena ignores to some degree because of his own obsession with al Qaeda. He employs the last 4 chapters in building a case against that Islamic organization, urging the United States to create a new force for that purpose. It is irrational, however, that a country with the might of America would fight any war against a bunch of fanatics. Al Qaeda demands expert police action, not the military or other extraordinary force.

The problem, which eludes Pena and the Bush administration, is not al Qaeda, though al Qaeda criminals must be brought to justice. The real issue in the hatred of the Moslems against America is the 1,300-years hatred between Christianity and Islam. America is now the target for that hatred only because America is an empire whose policies injure the Islamic world, especially its unwavering funding and support for Israel, the enemy of the Arabs and the oppressor of the Moslem Palestinians. Second, al Qaeda is not different than Christian monastic orders and Islamic organizations that fought each other for centuries. The al Qaeda fighters – tracing their theology and politics to Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood – have quite a political vision, no less than the reestablishment of the medieval Caliphate, an Islamic empire for the world’s Moslems. With that kind of agenda, al Qaeda is at the center of the storm.

No wonder the current al Qaeda crisis, equivalent to Bush’s “war on terror” and Pena’s “un-war,” is an exaggeration of ancient hatreds. But Pena is right: US foreign policy fuels al Qaeda and the one billion Moslems who see al Qaeda doing their work.

We are, in fact, in the midst of another crusade.

Read Pena’s book: It is an honest assessment of American policy. He says Muslims “see the hypocrisy in American policy, which is volatile fuel for radical Islamists and foments anti-American attitudes that are the basis for terrorist motivation” (p. 142). But, above all, Pena prescribes a strictly America-centered policy of defense, abandonment of cold war practices, including special treatment for tyrannies or Israel. And at the home front, he is for the defense of the Constitution; rejecting police-state measures the Bush administration and its Republican Congressional Guard grafted into law.

E. G. Vallianatos is the author of “This Land is Their Land” and “The Passion of the Greeks.”