

Books

A Secret War No More

reviewed by LtGen Robert B. Neller

I believe Marines read books for three reasons: first, to learn about a subject they want to know more about; second, to improve themselves professionally in the performance of their duties; and third, to enjoy a well-written, interesting story. In *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran*, a history of the United States' ongoing confrontational relationship with the nation of Iran, Col David Crist provides the reader with a book that meets all three of the aforementioned requirements. In the process, Col Crist establishes himself as one of our Nation's leading authorities on the historical and current relationships between the United States and Iran.

I first heard about Col Crist's book when he spoke at a Central Command Component Commander's Conference. As he spoke about ongoing events and the

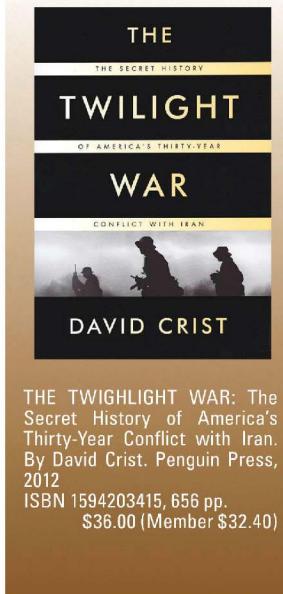
>LtGen Neller is the Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Central Command.

Yes, I remembered to varying degrees of detail and accuracy the departure of the Shah of Iran in the late '70s, Ayatollah Khomeini's subsequent return from exile, the U.S. hostages taken in the aftermath of the attack on the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, the failed rescue attempt and Desert One disaster, the Iraq-Iran War, the Iran-Contra arms sales, U.S. support of Iraq against Iran in their 8-year war, the Tanker Wars, actions by Iran and the U.S. post-11 September 2001, and on and on. Quite frankly I cannot think of any nation with which the U.S. has had a more contentious and fractious relationship over the past 30-plus years than Iran. We continue to see that contentiousness play out in Iran's nuclear program, and its support of the Syrian regime,

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current relationship between the U.S. and Iran, I realized how little I knew about that important country, and how it had evolved politically since the departure of the Shah of Iran. More importantly, I was unaware of how Iran's relationship with the U.S. had gone through an almost uniformly negative series of events.

Lebanese Hezbollah, and Hamas. One cannot understand today's events without the context of the past, so in order to better understand current political and security challenges, I would commend this book to you to educate you as it did me on the history of the relationship between our two countries.



THE TWILIGHT WAR: The Secret History of America's Thirty-Year Conflict with Iran.
By David Crist. Penguin Press, 2012

ISBN 1594203415, 656 pp.
\$36.00 (Member \$32.40)

We read to improve ourselves professionally and to be better able to perform our duties in tomorrow's contingencies. While we have left Iraq, continue to draw down in Afghanistan, and have vowed to pivot to the Pacific (which for Marines is a return to our normal Pacific posture), I would submit that we will continue to remain engaged in the Middle East for the foreseeable future. The simple reason for this is Iran. Iran is, by population, geography, history, religion, and resources, a regional power, and it clearly sees itself in this light, just as it sees the United States as the primary obstacle to this goal. Col Crist, in a well-documented chronology, including a good deal of new material from interviews and primary research, lays out all the reasons for this view, while at the same time explaining the political and military decisions each country made that have taken us to our

current very critical and potentially dangerous relationship.

It would be impossible in this short space to recount all the opportunities for accommodation and trust-building that have occurred over the past 3 decades, but if there is a single theme of this book, it is that seemingly at every point where a rapprochement was possible, one side or the other, and sometimes both, did something to make thawing relations impossible. Americans often have a hard time understanding the view adversaries have of us. This book does an excellent job of explaining the reasons for Iran's mistrust of the U.S., which is critical to understanding why tensions are so high today. As we have learned all too well during the last decade of war, it is crucial to always strive to see problems through others' eyes, especially those of your adversary.

The final point I would make about this book is that it is very well written. Yes, it is a work of historical research,

well documented and researched, but Col Crist is above all else a good writer and storyteller. Of course it helps that the story is interesting, complicated, and full of intrigue and motives, but it is also true. Though a long read, it is a good read due both to the subject

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The Twilight War is highly recommended reading for any Marine leader. The background it provides is critical to understanding the complex U.S.-Iranian relationship which will continue to dominate both the geopolitics and the military operations of our nations for years to come. We, as well as other global powers, will continue to operate in the Middle East, and dealing with Iran will remain an ever-increasing part of this environment. For Marines to remain effective in the region, we must understand the history and current context of events. Col Crist's *The Twilight War* will greatly assist us in this task.

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matter and Col Crist's clear, objective, and plain-language style. I would strongly recommend this book for consideration on the Commandant's Reading List for lieutenant colonels and above.

MajGen Harold W. Chase Prize Essay Contest

Boldness earns rewards...

The annual Chase Prize Essay Contest invites articles that challenge conventional wisdom by proposing change to a current Marine Corps directive, policy, custom, or practice. To qualify, entries must propose and argue for a new and better way of "doing business" in the Marine Corps. Authors must have strength in their convictions and be prepared for criticism from those who would defend the status quo. That is why the prizes are called Boldness and Daring Awards.

Prizes include \$3,000 and an engraved plaque for first place, \$1,500 and an engraved plaque for second place, and \$500 for honorable mention. All entries are eligible for publication.

*** Instructions ***

The contest is open to all Marines on active duty and to members of the Marine Corps Reserve. Electronically submitted entries are preferred. Attach the entry as a file and send to gazette@mca-marines.org. A cover page should be included identifying the manuscript as a Chase Prize Essay Contest entry and include the title of the essay and the author's name. Repeat title on the first page, but author's name should not appear anywhere but on the cover page. Manuscripts are accepted, but please include a disk in Microsoft Word format with the manuscript. The *Gazette* editorial board will judge the contest in June and notify all entrants as to the outcome shortly thereafter. Multiple entries are allowed; however, only one entry will receive an award.

Be bold and daring!

Deadline: 30 April

Send to: gazette@mca-marines.org
Mail entries to: *Marine Corps Gazette*, Box 1775, Quantico, VA 22134

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