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**Since 9/11, We've Had 4 Wars in the Middle East.
They've All Been Disasters.**

By Kevin Drum

Feb. 17, 2015



So here's my scorecard for American military interventions since 2000:

- **Afghanistan:** A disaster. It's arguable that Afghanistan is no worse off than it was in 2001, but after losing thousands of American lives and spending a trillion American dollars, it's no better off either.
- **Iraq:** An even bigger disaster. Saddam Hussein was a uniquely vicious dictator, but even at that there's not much question that Iraq is worse off than it was in 2003. We got rid of Saddam, but got a dysfunctional sectarian government and ISIS in return.
- **Libya:** Another disaster. We got rid of Muammar Qaddafi, but got a Somalia-level failed state in return.
- **Yemen:** Yet another disaster. After years of drone warfare, Houthi rebels have taken over the government. This appears to be simultaneously a win for Iran, which backs the rebels, and al-Qaeda, which may benefit from the resulting chaos. That's quite a twofer.

Blame all this on whoever you want. George Bush for starting two wars with no real plan to prosecute either one properly. Or Barack Obama for withdrawing from Iraq too soon and failing to have any kind of postwar plan for Libya. Whatever. The question for hawks at this point is: what makes you think American military force has even the slightest chance of improving things in the Middle East? It's been nothing but disasters since 9/11, and there's no reason at all to think we've learned how to do things better in the intervening years. Bush started big wars, and Obama has started small ones, but the result has been the same.

I know, I know. If you're a liberal, I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. If you're a conservative, I'm being dangerously simplistic. But tell me: From the viewpoint of military action in the Middle East, what have we gotten better at over the past 14 years? What reason is there to believe that ever more military action will work out any better than it has before? In the past 50 years, has there been *any* case of the U.S. successfully training local troops to prosecute a war against insurgents?