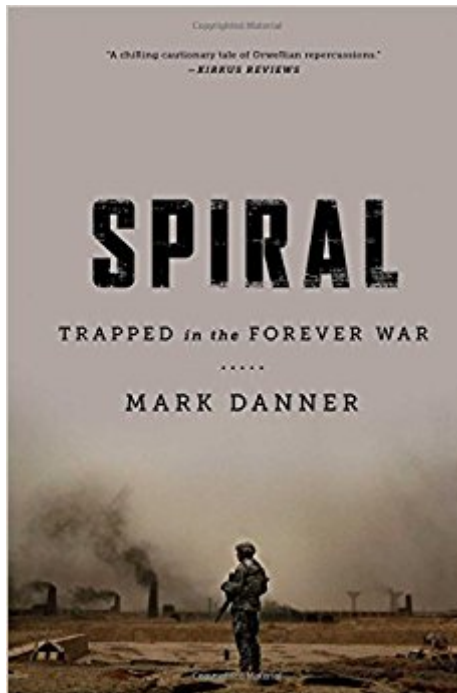




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# Spiral: Trapped In The Forever War



## Synopsis

“[A] chilling cautionary tale of Orwellian repercussions.” —Kirkus Reviews  
“Masterly...eloquent” —The New York Review of Books  
Trapped in a forever war by 9/11, in *Spiral* Mark Danner describes a nation that has been altered in fundamental ways. President Bush declared a war of choice and without an exit plan, and President Obama has proven unable to take the country off what he has called its “permanent war footing.” The War on Terror has led to fourteen years of armed conflict, the longest war in America’s history. Al Qaeda, the organization that attacked us on 9/11, has been “decimated” (the word is Obama’s) but replaced by multiple jihadist and terror organizations, including the most notorious — ISIS. *Spiral* is what we can call a perpetual and continuously widening war that has put the country in a “state of exception.” Bush’s promise that we have “taken the gloves off” and Obama’s inability to define an end game have had a profound effect on us even though the actual combat is fought by a tiny percentage of our citizens. In the name of security, some of our accustomed rights and freedoms are circumscribed. Guantanamo, indefinite detention, drone warfare, enhanced interrogation, torture, and warrantless wiretapping are all words that have become familiar and tolerated. And yet the war goes badly as the Middle East drowns in civil wars and the Caliphate expands and brutalized populations flee and seek asylum in Europe. In defining the War on Terror as boundless, apocalyptic, and unceasing, we have, Danner concludes, “let it define us as ideological crusaders caught in an endless war.”

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Danner has been the most intellectually distinguished critic of America’s war on terror. *Spiral* is a masterly writer’s case for the prosecution, a patriot’s indictment of his own country’s folly. . . . He shows, with eloquent conviction and considerable evidence, that torture, rendition, domestic surveillance, foreign wars, and democracy promotion at gunpoint have made America more enemies than friends, and in the process have diminished America’s moral standing and security.” (The New York Review of Books) “[Danner] has produced incisive journalism and books over the past three decades exploring the moral dimension of war and foreign policy. His essays . . . were among the first to reveal the bleak reality and moral vacuum of the George W. Bush administration’s torture policy. In *Spiral* Danner continues to render valuable service.” (The Washington Post) “[A] poignant, thoughtful plea for accountability and a change of course . . . [a] chilling cautionary tale of Orwellian repercussions.” (Kirkus Reviews) “Lucid . . . a solid account of how the U.S. seems to be mired in a losing and intractable battle against global terrorism. . . . a clear-eyed and shrewd examination.” (Publishers Weekly) “An excellent resource for those who want to understand Middle East unrest and the ISIS terrorism threat without being Middle East scholars.” (Library Journal) “A timely, valuable book . . . Danner provides a vital service in this election season, reminding us that the job of president of the United States grows more complex with each passing year.” (San Francisco Chronicle) “Eloquent . . . [Danner] writes powerfully from the perspective of an American who feels both angry and betrayed . . . a bold, unsparing assessment of who Americans are when they can be so complacent in the face of so many ongoing iniquities.” (The National) “Mark Danner’s > lays bare the way a jihadist strategy of provocation, playing on America’s infinite capacity for oversimplification and overreaction, sucked the United States into endless wars. This is a book that must be read, debated, and deeply understood if we are ever to extricate ourselves from the world of quagmires created by the global War on Terror.” (Christopher Dickey, Foreign Editor of The Daily Beast) “In Mark Danner’s eloquent and unsparing analysis, America’s War on Terror has degenerated into a downward spiral that has tarnished its laws, its reputation and its soul. There is no better account of what the forever war has done to this country and what we need to do to get the battle against terrorism onto the right track.” (Michael Ignatieff Edward

R. Murrow Professor, Harvard Kennedy School)“In the growing mountain of books coming out about the War on Terror, Mark Danner’s *Spiral* is the one you have to read. In a small book, Danner offers clarity to the complicated with a combination of tough-minded reporting and an elegant sense of classical tragedy. *Spiral* will make you angry, make you sad, and make you understand.” (Mark Kurlansky, author of *Paper: Paging Through History*)“In this important book, Mark Danner shows how the War on Terror has become not just perpetual but self-perpetuating—a series of misconceived policies that, designed to prevent attacks, have only bred more. > is an excellent metaphor, and with force and passion, he suggests a way out.” (Michael Massing, author of *Now They Tell Us: The American Press and Iraq*)“Mark Danner has long been both an eyewitness to the wars of our time and an erudite analyst of the illusions behind them. But above all, in this wise and eloquent new book, he is a humanist and patriot appalled at how far his own country has gone off the rails.” (Adam Hochschild, author of *Spain in Our Hearts*)

Mark Danner has written about foreign affairs and American politics for three decades, covering Latin America, Haiti, the Balkans, and the Middle East. He was for many years a staff writer at *The New Yorker*, and contributes frequently to *The New York Review of Books*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and many other publications. He teaches at the University of California, Berkeley, and at Bard College and speaks widely about America’s role in the world. Among his books are *Spiral*, *Stripping Bare the Body*, *Torture and Truth*, and *The Massacre at El Mozote*.

It tends to focus on one aspect of the War on Terror rather than expanded to look at other points. However, in looking at enhanced interrogation techniques specifically, this book does a good job discussing it.

Great book, I’m big fan of Mr Danner, read all his articles in New York Review of Books, and totally share his beliefs

Need to know info, well presented.

Excellent book, a great look at the exception state that we’ve become in the War on Terror.

Heard Mark Danner on NPR talking about "Spiral" and said, this will be a book to read, like the awesome "Drift" by Rachel Maddow. BUT, Mark is no Rachel and his thesis (at least in the first 115 pages) can be summed up as "torture is bad and illegal and the US shouldn't have done it but we couldn't help ourselves" and saved a few trees. If you enjoy repetition, multi-syllabism, and 90 pages of notes and index, you will enjoy this, otherwise, just find his interview on NPR or go buy Rachel's book!

The War on Terror has brought us 14 years of military conflict, constant risk of terrorist attack, and the loss of trillions of dollars and thousands of American lives. We ended up simply creating more and more enemies with every strike, initiative, and 'victory' because each of these actions invariably kills civilians, thereby adding revenge-seeking relatives to the original insurgents. Or original response to the attack by a small insurgent group calling for Muslims to throw Americans out of Muslim lands was to dispatch 150,000 more - driving down Arab capital streets in their tanks, rousting Muslims from their beds, and torturing them in prisons. Twelve years later the Islamic State has taken up the challenge, and we try to limit/focus our response via drones. (Better, but not perfect.) Meanwhile, since 9/11 only a handful of Americans have died at the hands of terrorists - 24 in 2014, less than those killed by lightning, and our military and intelligence spending (already greater than that of the next ten nations combined), has nearly doubled again. Al Qaeda was born of Bush I's Iraq War, subsequently ISIS was born of Bush II's Iraq War. Our ongoing drone wars in Yemen have also brought dramatic expansion of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and contributed to the collapse of the Yemeni state. Nearly 33,000 worldwide died from terrorism in 2014 - a 4,000% increase since 2002. We have created a perpetual motion war machine.

The opening quote in this book is "We must define the nature and scope of this struggle, or else it will define us." Obama 2013 Danner has defined the nature and scope of this struggle as a war on terror. He says that our presence in Iraq and Afghanistan is a Republican attempt to replace "being tough on communism as a defining cause in their political identity" with a war on terrorism. To make the case for a "war on terror" as our reason for being there, Danner needs to state why we are NOT there for the 1980 Carter doctrine, which states "the overwhelming dependence of the Western democracies on oil supplies from the Middle East [any] attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including

military force."Or the the Reagan Corollary to the Carter Doctrine, in which the U.S. guarantees both the territorial integrity and internal stability of Saudi Arabia.Since then we've invaded, occupied, or bombed Iran (1980, 1987-1988); Libya (1981, 1986, 1989, 2011); Lebanon (1983); Kuwait (1991); Iraq (1991-2011, 2014-present); Somalia (1992-1993, 2007-present); Saudi Arabia (1991, 1996); Afghanistan (1998, 2001-present); Sudan (1998); Yemen (2000; 2002-present); Pakistan (2004-present); and now Syria.The reason Carter said this is because many Americans, Europeans, and Chinese would die if the oil stopped flowing, but especially Americans since no other nation on earth is as dependent on oil as we are (why we have to be the world's unpaid policeman is another topic). Just consider a few of the things that what would happen if trucks stopped running: by day 6 grocery stores would be out of food, restaurants, pharmacies, and factories closed, ATMS out of cash, sewage treatment sludge and slime storage tanks full, gas stations closed, 685,000 tons of trash piling up every day, livestock suffering from lack of feed deliveries. Within 2 weeks clean water would be gone since purification chemicals couldn't be delivered. Within 1 to 2 months coal power plants would shut down due to lack of coal, and much natural gas is pumped through pipelines electrically, so natural gas power plants would shut down too. And there goes the financial system - our energy, electricity, and other 16 vital infrastructures are inter-dependent, which makes us incredibly vulnerable, since many of them can pull each other down (see "When Trucks Stop Running: Energy and the Future of Transportation (SpringerBriefs in Energy)" for details)Michal Breen, of the Truman National Security Project, explained at the 2012 U.S. House of Representatives hearing "The American energy initiative part 23: A focus on Alternative Fuels and vehicles" why we're doomed to continue to fight wars in the Middle East. He said: "Our dependence on oil as a single source of transportation fuel poses a clear national security threat to the nation. As things now stand, our modern military cannot operate without access to vast quantities of oil. A lack of alternatives means that oil has ceased to be a mere commodity. Oil is a vital strategic commodity, a substance without which our national security and prosperity cannot be sustained. The United States has no choice but to do whatever it takes in order to obtain a sufficient supply of oil. We share that sad and dangerous predicament with virtually every other nation on earth"The word "oil" appears just once in the book as an adjective for Iraq (secular, middle-class, urbanized, rich with oil), and the words petroleum, gasoline, and diesel don't appear at all. But the words torture, terror, terrorist, and terrorism each appear about 90 times.If we want to get out of the middle east, and stop risking that our ghastly

activities on citizens of the Middle East aren't turned on our own citizens in the U.S. someday, then the President needs to educate the public about the need for energy conservation. Right now, Americans rush out to buy gas guzzling cars every time the price of gasoline goes down. In fact, the New York Times reported today (June 24, 2016) that people are turning in their electric vehicles for gas guzzlers (see "American Drivers Regain Appetite for Gas Guzzlers"). CAFE standards were supposed to go up to 54 mpg, but they've dropped to 24 mpg since gasoline prices began dropping in 2014. Former President Carter was invited to a 2009 Senate Hearing "Energy Security: Historical perspectives and modern challenges" to advise the Senate. He said the president has a responsibility to educate the American public about energy, like he did over his four years in office. Memorably, one of his speeches in 1977 began: "Tonight I want to have an unpleasant talk with you about a problem unprecedented in our history. With the exception of preventing war, this is the greatest challenge our country will face during our lifetimes. The energy crisis has not yet overwhelmed us, but it will if we do not act quickly. It is a problem we will not solve in the next few years, and it is likely to get progressively worse through the rest of this century. We must not be selfish or timid if we hope to have a decent world for our children and grandchildren. We simply must balance our demand for energy with our rapidly shrinking resources. By acting now, we can control our future instead of letting the future control us." This was unpleasant dinner conversation. President Carter was not invited back to serve a second term. Energy and transportation policy, diesel engines, and the trucking companies need to focus on energy efficiency, not endless growth. Conventional oil peaked in 2005 and has been on a plateau since then. That's why our economy isn't growing either — try to think of a business that doesn't use energy. We need to reduce our consumption. Alternatives to Just-in-time delivery where trucks arrive half empty with just what's needed and return empty has to stop. We've traded away energy to gain time. We've traded away energy security to get stuff ASAP. Do we really have to have everything RIGHT NOW? To address some of the comments below: This book is not worth reading if the premise is incorrect. The one good thing about peak oil, peak coal, and peak natural gas is that starting possibly this year, fossil fuel production of oil, and perhaps coal and natural gas as well are about to decline (since peak oil means peak everything since it's master resource that makes all others possible). The premise that climate change is the greatest worry is incorrect. We are on the cusp of an energy crisis, and few see it coming because everyone assumes that solar, wind, biofuels and so on can save us. They are unaware that fossil fuels can

not be replaced with renewable energy which has been shown in the scientific field known as systems ecology, using energy returned on invested and other scientific research. Also, science magazine, nature magazine (the two top science journals), and too many other journals to list, plus the National Academy of Sciences, comprised of the very best scientists in their fields, and the Department of energy, among many other universities and government agencies have also published peer-reviewed research that shows why biofuels, marine kinetic energy (wave, tidal, etc power), wind, solar, nuclear, fusion, and other alternative energy resources can not replace oil (again, see energyskeptic book lists and posts). That means possibly starting this year, or within the next decade, carbon dioxide will begin to decline, although 20% of it is likely to remain in the atmosphere for millennia. Still, at at worst this means only the lowest 4 or so of the IPCC projections will be reached. At energyskeptic I back this up with peer-reviewed science at: 3) Fast Crash, Extinction, But not from climate change: peak fossil fuels. I am not a climate change denier, and I worry that we've already set in place some non-linear, irreversible changes. Low oil prices have led to fracked oil and gas production declining 25%. Fracked oil comprised about half of the rise of oil production since the plateau began in 2005, and low oil prices have led to less oil found in 2015 than since over 60 years ago, and in 2016 we're finding even less oil. Only 3 billion new barrels were found in 2015 but globally we burned 30 billion. It won't help for the price to rise again either, that will drive us back into an even worse depression than the 2008 crash, and oil prices even lower. All we have left is nasty, remote, hard to get expensive oil that takes far more energy (and money) to get than the cheap oil that has fueled us up to 7 billion people from 1.5 billion the past 100 years. Clearly the biggest danger is that resource wars will lead to nuclear war and a consequent nuclear winter that will kill billions of people. Preventing nuclear war, and using the remaining fossil energy to bury nuclear and other industrial waste should clearly be our main priority. And allowing carrying capacity globally to go 5.5 billion people beyond what a biomass (wood)-based civilization can support in the future means that our fellow citizens will be the new terrorists in the future as the middle east reverts back to a nearly uninhabited desert as it was before the brief age of oil.

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