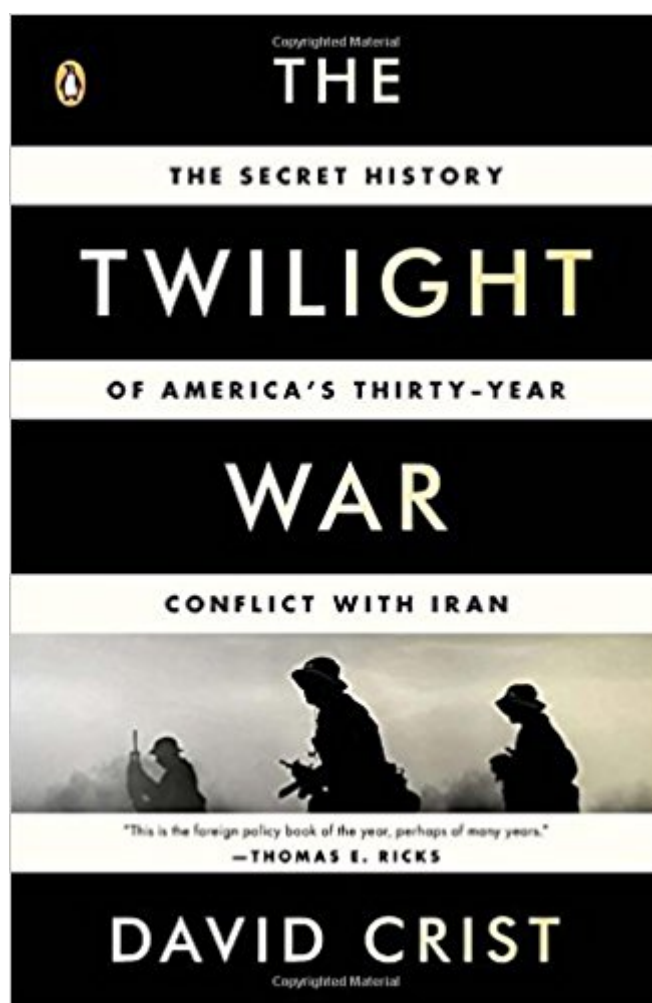


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# The Twilight War: The Secret History Of America's Thirty-Year Conflict With Iran



## Synopsis

The dramatic secret history of the undeclared, ongoing war between the U.S. and Iran For the past three decades, the United States and Iran have been engaged in an unacknowledged secret war. This conflict has frustrated five American presidents, divided administrations, and repeatedly threatened to bring the two nations to the brink of open warfare. Drawing upon unparalleled access to senior officials and key documents of several U.S. administrations, David Crist, a senior historian in the federal government, breaks new ground on virtually every page of *The Twilight War*. From the Iranian Revolution to secret negotiations between Iran and the United States after 9/11 to Iran's nuclear program and sanctions against it, Crist brings vital new depth to our understanding of "the Iran problem" and what the future of this tense relationship may bring.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A fascinating, detailed history of American-Iranian foreign relations... Crist is a natural-born writer, and the best parts of *The Twilight War* are not just engaging, but thrilling. His account of the 1988 naval mine strike on the USS Samuel B. Roberts in the Persian Gulf reads almost like the script for an action movie, in large part because he's careful to pay attention to the actual people behind the sailors' uniforms. It's that concern for humanity that also renders his narratives of the bombings of the Beirut barracks (in 1983) and the Khobar Towers (in 1996) so chilling, immediate and heartbreaking." — Michael Shaub, NPR "David Crist's painstakingly researched

and elegantly written account of the United States-Iran cold war is an earnest chronicle of this shadowy history. ...Deserves a spot on the short list of must-read books on United States-Iran relations." – Karim Sadjadpour, The New York Times "Lucid and thoughtful... Crist has written an important and timely book that should be required reading for anyone interested in understanding how the United States and Iran went from close allies to enduring adversaries." – The Washington Post --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

David Crist is currently a historian for the federal government. As a colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, he served in the first gulf war and made two tours with elite special operations forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. He lives in Maryland.

This book makes clear that no matter how good we as Americans think we are at foreign policy, we are pretty damn terrible. Focusing exclusively on the battle between the United States and Iran, it walks through history from the fall of the Shah and the taking of the embassy, across both sides struggling for relevance in Lebanon, through the Tanker War of the eighties while Iraq and Iran are locked in mortal combat, through the encircling of the Islamic Republic by the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. The Iran Contra scandal figures prominently, and details of that dark period in American foreign policy highlight how far the depravity went when visitors from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps are admitted into the White House for visits during negotiations over arms sales. The birth of Central Command is discussed in depth, along with the ineptitude of the CIA, and the failure of American intelligence to gain a full understanding of what is going on in one of our most important adversaries. The downing of Iran Air 655, the bombing of the USS Roberts, the bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut and the Marine barracks, the attack on Khobar tower, cooperation and eventual falling out over combat in Afghanistan, the author covers it all. There are few more thorough works of history focused on a specific topic to allow the reader to walk away well informed. Similar to Knoll's "Private Empire," this book is a must read for those that want to talk intelligently about the topic.

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If you were among those who sighed with relief when Barack Obama was reelected because you'd



been concerned that a Republican administration would invade Iran, David Crist has news for you. In fact, *The Twilight War* is full of surprises, even for one who stays relatively well informed about world affairs. The underlying message -- the meta-message, if you'll permit that conceit -- is that what we normally consume on a daily basis as "news" is an awkward mixture of critical opinion, wishful thinking, rumor, partisan posturing, self-serving news leaks, and a smattering of hard information. When it comes to Iran, the purveyors of news have done an especially poor job of keeping us informed. As David Crist makes clear in this illuminating report on the three decades of conflict, tension, miscalculation, and profound misunderstanding that have characterized our two countries' relationship, we have indeed engaged in what can only be described as war for several extended periods. And when I say war, I mean soldiers, sailors, and air force pilots shooting at one another, laying mines, launching missiles at ships and ground facilities, and generally forcing one or both of the two governments to decide between escalation and retreat. There was even one heart-stopping incident during the Reagan Administration when a rogue, high-ranking U.S. Admiral conspired with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to invade Iran with massive force -- and, apparently, was ordered to pull back from the brink largely because the Administration was consumed with covering up the President's active role in the Iran-Contra affair. The 2004 Presidential election campaign brought into the spotlight the U.S. support for Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s because Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had been photographed shaking hands with Saddam. Then we learned, some of us for the first time, that the U.S. had supplied weapons and munitions to Iraq. However, what went largely unreported was the extent to which the U.S. military built up its forces in the Persian Gulf to prevent Iran from flanking Iraq or widening the war to the Gulf Arab states, provided combat intelligence that helped Iraq turn back Iranian advances, and even intervened with force on Iraq's side from time to time. It was this history -- combined with an understanding of the neoconservative design on the region -- that led the Iranian leadership to conclude in 2003 that the U.S. invasion of Iraq presaged an imminent attack on Iran itself. The Ayatollah Khamenei and his minions were so frightened of this prospect that they used every backchannel available to them to attempt to get the U.S. to the negotiating table, where they were prepared to arrive at a grand solution to the differences between the two countries. Are you surprised to learn that the Bush Administration flatly rejected the overtures? In other words, this has been a nail-biting relationship. Even worse, the outlook today doesn't look any brighter than it ever has. Author David Crist is a military historian for the U.S. Government, a reserve Marine Corps colonel, and the son of one of the early four-star commanders of CENTCOM, which was created in the 1980s to coordinate U.S. military affairs involving Iran and the Middle East. Given

this pedigree, it's not unfair to wonder whether Crist himself is guilty of some of the same sins I attributed earlier to the news media. Clearly, he's extremely well informed and had access to military and government archives that might well be closed to other writers. However, a little poking around on the Web reveals that Crist got at least a few of his facts wrong, and in some places his interpretation of events has clearly been colored by his official associations. The *Twilight War* is an especially dense work. The hardcover edition runs to 656 pages, but it reads as though it's a thousand, largely because Crist (military historian to the core) seems to include a capsule biography of every other officer and combatant engaged in every firefight he reports. Like the epic dramas of Cecil B. DeMille, *The Twilight War* has a cast of thousands. All in all though, this is a revealing and important book, well worth reading, even if that means slogging through the mud.

Actual access to conversations at the highest levels, heretofore, at least to me, inaccessible, gave this book its authority. The interagency competitions between Secretaries and other high government officials was clearly revealed and was surprising at times, based on what the press said at the time the events were unfolding. Crist's description of people, both their physical characteristics and manner, was very helpful. Much of what went on in the vicinity of the Strait of Hormuz in those years was not reported, nor commonly known outside of a few senior military and highly placed civilians. The international relationships were and are very complicated, with multiple tracks occurring simultaneously, piquing one's curiosity about who is in charge among the leadership of certain nations and making the overall effort to achieve peace there very challenging. Crist has mined the information stream now available and has revealed a scene in the Gulf that few realized was as dangerous as it was. Thorough and taut.

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