



Dexter Filkins,

Class of 1979

Update 2009: "The Forever War" named book of the year by NY Times; He was part of NY Times reporting group that won a Pulitzer Prize for reporting in Afghanistan; more articles by Dexter: http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/f/dexter_filkins/index.html Interview with General McKrystal: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/18/magazine/18Afghanistan-t.html?_r=1

Dexter Filkins, Class of 1979 is an American journalist who reports for The New York Times Magazine. He received a B.A. in political science from the University of Florida in 1983. He has been reporting from Iraq since 2003. His reporting from Afghanistan won him a Pulitzer Prize nomination in 2002. Prior to joining the New York Times in October, 2000, Dexter was New Delhi Bureau Chief for the Los Angeles Times for three years. Filkins received the 2004 George Polk Award for War Reporting given annually by Long Island University to honor contributions to journalistic integrity and investigative reporting. In 2006-2007, Dexter was at Harvard University on a Nieman Fellowship.

Dexter's book, *The Forever War*, is about his experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was published September 16, 2008.

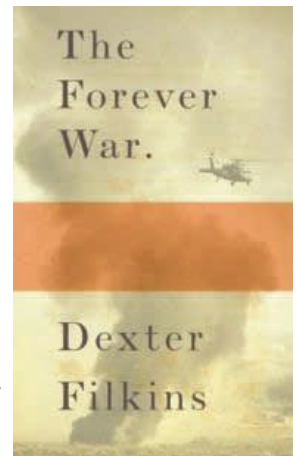


Recent and archived news articles by Dexter Filkins of the New York Times:

http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/f/dexter_filkins/index.html

Review of "The Forever War":

<http://www.statesman.com/search/content/life/stories/books/09/14/0914war.html>



This is a reprint of an article by Jeffrey Goldberg, *The Atlantic*:

02 Sep 2008 11:59 am

Dexter Filkins is the greatest war correspondent of my generation, and I would say this even if we weren't friends. We've reported together on occasion; Dexter knows better than anyone how to work your way into bad places, and work your way out again. He's also the author of a great new book, coming out imminently from Knopf, called "[The Forever War](#)." I e-mailed him some questions about his *Times* [story](#) today, and here are his answers:

Jeffrey Goldberg: In a [review](#) in the *Times* today, Michiko Kakutani quotes Farnaz Fassihi writing in 2004: "The genie of terrorism, chaos, and mayhem has been unleashed onto this country as a result of American mistakes, and it can't be put back into a bottle." The question is, is the genie back in the bottle?

Dexter Filkins: Yes, it is, for now. The progress here is remarkable. I came back to Iraq after being away for nearly two years, and honestly, parts of it are difficult for me to recognize. The park out in front of the house where I live--on the Tigris River--was a dead, dying, spooky place. It's now filled with people--families with children, women walking alone, even at night. That was inconceivable in 2006. The Iraqis who are out there walking in the parks were making their own judgments -that it is safe enough for them to go out for a walk. They're voting with their feet. It's a wonderful thing to see. Having said that, it's pretty clear that the calm is very fragile. The calm is built on a series of arrangements that are not self-sustaining; indeed, some of which, like the Sunni Awakening, are showing signs of coming apart. So the genie is back in the bottle, but I'm not sure for how long.

JG: The most astonishing detail in your article today is your description of a parade through Ramadi, which included "American marines and soldiers wearing neither helmets nor body armor, nor carrying guns." You wrote, "The festive scene became an occasion for celebration by Iraqis and Americans, who at several moments wondered aloud in the sweltering heat how things had gone from so grim to so much better, so fast." How much of this can be credited to the surge in troops and the shift in tactics last year, and how much to the notion that Iraqis simply got tired of the killing?

DF: Astonishing indeed. I haven't seen American soldiers walking around Iraq without helmets since the summer of 2003, when the Americans, who were popular in southern Iraq for having taken down Saddam, used to do that.

What's happened in Anbar really doesn't have anything to do with the surge and, in fact, it is one of the main reasons why the surge has worked.

In Anbar, two things happened: Al Qaeda overreached and the Americans wised up. If you will recall, the Americans came into Iraq in 2003 in a very heavy-handed way, often sweeping up large groups of young males who had nothing to do with the insurgency. In a tribal society, -where everyone is related to everyone else, -the Americans dug themselves a very large hole.

Al Qaeda of Mesopotamia, through sheer ruthlessness, became the dominant player in the insurgency. And while the guys from Al Qaeda were very good at killing Americans, a goal with which many Sunnis sympathized, they also wanted to kill Iraqi -Shiites, who they consider apostates, and anyone associated with the Iraqi government. Ordinary Iraqis, it's now clear, didn't want to go along.

And the sheikhs in Anbar didn't go along. So when Al Qaeda started murdering the sheikhs, the sheikhs went to the Americans. The Americans, chastened by their earlier mistakes, grabbed the opportunity. They made a deal. They crushed Al Qaeda in Anbar. The result is the calm you see today.

The Sunni Awakening, which began in Anbar, spread rapidly to other Sunni areas of Iraq, and that took enormous pressure off the Americans and the Iraqi government as the surge kicked in.

JG: One tribal leader you quote, Hamid al-Hais, puts most of the blame for the chaos of the previous years on Paul Bremer's decision to disband the army. Do you agree?

DF: I don't know. I don't think there are any one-line explanations for any of this. But it's pretty clear that decision had a lot of bad consequences.

JG: Is the average Iraqi better off today than he was under Saddam? Or, put another way, is the average Iraqi who was not directly tied to the regime better off today than he was six years ago?



DF: Today is a moment in time. The calm is just a few months old. The Iraqis have been through an extraordinarily violent and traumatic five years. Many, many people suffered horrendously under Saddam. Ask me the question again in five years.

JG: Is Iraq a democracy?

DF: I don't think so. A democracy has many things: elections, compromise between groups, an atmosphere safe enough to discuss the issues of the day, and institutions that exist outside of government that are strong enough to allow all of the above to flourish-- newspapers, political groups and the like. In Iraq, most of those things are in their infancy.

JG: How do you, as an American, feel walking through Baghdad today vs. two years ago?

DF: I'll answer with two snapshots from dusk. I went running in the park in front of the New York Times house the other day as the sun was going down and I felt no threat at all. People waved, people smiled. It felt very normal.

A couple of days later I went to Sadr City, also at dusk. Sadr City is a vast slum that takes in about three million people. It's the stronghold of the Mahdi Army, the Shiite militia, and it's been the scene of heavy fighting, as recently as a few months ago. I was with some Iraqi friends. It felt perfectly normal. Then one of my Iraqi friends said to me, "What do you think would happen if you were alone?" And I said, "What?" And he and the other Iraqis laughed and said: "You'd be dead in ten seconds."

Let me just say: I left.