

Review Essay

Iraq in Books

by Michael Rubin

The Iraq war has pumped adrenaline into the publishing industry. Whereas five years ago, few bookstores included any selections on Iraq, today dozens of Iraq books line the shelves. There have been three waves of Iraq-related publishing: First came the embed accounts that described the military campaign; second were examinations of prewar planning and, third, studies of the occupation. Quantity does not equal quality, though, nor does popularity correlate to accuracy. Many of the most popular books have been deeply flawed. Many authors use their Iraq narrative to promote other agendas, be they related to U.S. domestic politics, U.N. empowerment, or independence for Kurdistan. Other authors have substituted theory for fact or tried to propel their experience into the center of the Iraq policy debate. While time has already relegated much Iraq-related writing to the secondhand shelf or dustbin, several authors have produced works that will make lasting contributions, be they to future generations of war and post-conflict reconstruction planners, or scholars looking more deeply into the fabric of Iraq.

THE WAR IN BOOKS

Ambush Alley: The Most Extraordinary Battle of the Iraq War. By Tim Pritchard. New York: Ballantine Books, 2005. 320 pp. \$25.95. **Marines in the Garden of Eden.** By Richard S. Lowry. New York: Berkley Caliber, 2006. 448 pp. \$24.95. **Thunder Run: The Armored Strike to Capture Baghdad.** By David Zucchino. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2004. 320 pp. \$24. **The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the United States Marines.** By Bing West and Gen. Ray L. Smith.

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New York: Bantam, 2004. 336 pp. \$14. **In the Company of Soldiers.** By Rick Atkinson. New York: Henry Holt, 2005. 326 pp. \$25. **No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah.** By Bing West. New York: Bantam, 2005. 400 pp. \$25. **Among Warriors in Iraq.** By Mike Tucker. New York: The Lyons Press, 2005. 264 pp. \$16.95. **The Blog of War: Frontline Dispatches from Military Bloggers in Iraq and Afghanistan.** By Matthew Burden. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006. 304 pp. \$15.

More than 500 journalists were embedded with U.S. military units as they rolled into Iraq on March 19, 2003. While quality is uneven, their accounts while embedded inject color into the military campaign. War is a composite of tens of thousands of soldiers' experiences; any particular story is important but its reflection of the overall operation is limited. In such accounts, quality is proportional to the author's recognition of the genre's constraints.

For ambitious authors, to embed is to play

the lottery. Prior to combat operations, journalists do not know whether their units will be in the center of action. When war erupted, top journalists embedded with the 4th Infantry Division found themselves sitting idle in the Eastern Mediterranean, unable to redeploy after the Turkish government's decision to deny the coalition access to Turkish territory.

Among the authors who got lucky were British filmmaker Tim Pritchard, *Los Angeles Times* correspondent David Zucchino, former assistant secretary of defense Bing West, and Major General Ray L. Smith. In *Ambush Alley*, Pritchard, whose documentaries have aired on BBC, PBS, and the Discovery Channel, describes the battle for Nasiriyah, perhaps the hardest fought of the war. While he humanizes the U.S. soldiers, he prioritizes drama above accuracy. How he arrives at what soldiers think is curious as his omniscience does not appear to result from extensive interviewing. And, while he captures the

The heroism involved in less than 1,000 men seizing Baghdad, a city of five million, is significant.

confusion of battle, *Ambush Alley* does not place it in perspective; his post-publication attempt to paint the fight for Nasiriyah as the clarifying moment when it became clear that the Iraq war would be folly is not convincing.¹ Far better is military historian Richard S. Lowry's detailed

and less pretentious, even if somewhat disjointed, reconstruction of the same battle in *Marines in the Garden of Eden*, and its succinct coverage in *Cobra II*.²

Zucchino, a *Los Angeles Times* national correspondent, chronicles the charge into Baghdad of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division (mechanized) in *Thunder Run: The Armored Strike to Capture Baghdad*. Their bold

move took both Iraqi forces and outside observers by surprise. Because Zucchino amplifies a single operation into a book, he pads his narrative with the personalities of its participants. Unlike Pritchard, however, he does not substitute them with imagined clichés. Still, the heroism involved in just three battalions—less than 1,000 men—seizing the heart of a city of five million is significant, and the tale worth telling. Former Reagan-era assistant secretary of defense and Marine infantryman Bing West and retired Marine Major-General Ray L. Smith, who accompanied the 1st Marine Division on its drive to Baghdad, give broader perspective of the thunder runs and other aspects of the attack on Baghdad in *The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division*.

The quality of embedded accounts rests not only in narrative flow but also in insight. Here, Rick Atkinson's *In the Company of Soldiers* is the best chronicle. A former staff writer and editor at *The Washington Post* and the author of several books about military history, Atkinson chronicles the 101st Airborne from its preparations in Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to its deployment to Kuwait and its subsequent march through the major cities of southern Iraq to Baghdad. Maj.-Gen. David Petraeus, perhaps the most media accessible officer in the U.S. army since Gen. Douglas MacArthur, let Atkinson shadow him from the preparatory phases through combat operations. This allows Atkinson to balance his own observations with Petraeus's explanations.

The result is excellent. Atkinson observes, in turn, commander, soldiers, and fellow embedded journalists. He describes the scramble caused by last minute amendments to Cobra II, the military's battle plan for the Iraq invasion. While many authors inject cynicism borne from the omniscience of hindsight into their accounts, Atkinson recalls the concern that permeated journalists and soldiers about the likelihood they would face chemical weapons. Petraeus ranked the probability of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein possessing chemical weapons at 80-90 percent and the chance that he would order their use against U.S. troops at 50 percent.

1 Tim Pritchard, "When Iraq Went Wrong," *The New York Times*, Dec. 5, 2006.

2 Michael R. Gordon and Gen. Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), pp. 234-59.

Perhaps because he had access to a commander's concern, Atkinson's account is one of the few to address logistics. As equipment arrived in Kuwait, for example, he describes the scramble to find the missing command tent. While descriptions of battles win space on the front page of newspapers, Atkinson's descriptions remind readers of how difficult a task deployment can be.

As the 101st began to engage the enemy, Atkinson captures the character and chaos of the command. While other authors talk about the smell of gunpowder and the adrenaline of combat, Atkinson provides insight into how commanders and their staffs react in real-time to battlefield news. He chronicles to the minute frantic reactions to sometimes erroneous reports of both enemy engagements and friendly fire incidents.

Most journalists ended their embedded arrangements with the fall of Baghdad. While their narratives of initial combat operations saturate bookshelves, less numerous are accounts describing subsequent operations. The best here is Bing West's *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle of Fallujah*, which will gain greater prominence in 2008 through a screen version with Harrison Ford as Gen. James Mattis.³ West guides his audience through the various phases of the most important battle in post-Saddam Iraq. He describes the ambush, murder, and mutilation of four U.S. contractors, Washington's response, and the subsequent



A U.S. tank from the 2nd Battalion, 70th Armor division parks in the center of the Shi'ite shrine city of Karbala southwest of Baghdad, April 6, 2003. More than 500 journalists were embedded with U.S. military units as they rolled into Iraq, and their accounts inject color into the military campaign. But most journalists ended their embedded arrangements with the fall of Baghdad, so fewer accounts of subsequent operations are available.

blockade and siege. He, then, describes the creation of the Fallujah Brigade in which U.S. forces empowered insurgents and Baathists to secure the city, and, upon the experiment's failure, the decision to rout insurgents. West's book is important not only in providing an accurate chronicle but also in addressing the broader issues of convoluted chains of commands, messy civilian-military relations, and the bureaucratic interests that combined both to constrain the U.S. military and to undercut policy effectiveness. His concluding chapter—a broad assessment of the errors and successes—is both useful and succinct.

Former marine infantryman Mike Tucker provides another description of post-major combat fighting in *Among Warriors in Iraq*. Though this book pales in comparison to West's work, it remains useful for its illumination of time and place. Tucker was embedded with coalition forces serving not only in Fallujah but also in Mosul. He is less able than West, though, to differentiate between pertinent fact

3 *The Daily Variety*, Dec. 16, 2004.



Iraqis await the toppling of a statue of Saddam Hussein in central Baghdad, April 9, 2003. On Point provides behind-the-scenes detail of this much-photographed destruction of the statue.

and tangential detail. While he identifies weapons encountered better than many journalists, published accounts should be more than inventories of kit. Still, juxtaposition of embedded accounts authored by former military men like Tucker and West and those written by ordinary journalists show how basic journalists' understanding of military matters can be. The absence of a draft and the ban by elite colleges on both the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and on-campus military recruitment promises only to widen the knowledge gap apparent between journalists and the military.

Also useful to illustrate both combat and the lives of soldiers is Matthew Burden's *The Blog of War*. Burden, a former paratrooper and special operations officer, edits excerpts from more than fifty military blogs into chapters on such themes as "The Healers," "The Warriors," "The Fallen," and "Homecoming." He presents

soldiers' own accounts of ambushes, battles, and manning checkpoints.

SEPARATING BAD EMBEDS FROM GOOD

Sleeping with Custer and the 7th Cavalry. By Walter C. Rodgers. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005. 224 pp. \$29.50. **Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq.** By Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson. New York: The Lyons Press, 2003. 450 pp. \$23.95. **Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception.** By Danny Schechter. New York: Prometheus Books, 2003. 286 pp. \$28.

While accounts by embedded writers humanize battle, at least from the U.S. side, they often fall short when they try to analyze it. It is impossible for journalists embedded in units, no matter how astute they believe themselves, to grasp the big picture. In twenty-first century warfare, most information and intelligence flows not to the unit commanders with which journalists interact but rather to superior officers sitting in war rooms hundreds if not thousands of miles away. U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) generals directed the invasion of Iraq not from front-line positions but rather from the Al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar. Nor do officers, let alone the enlisted men, have much access to broader policy or intelligence issues. Units may seize documents and enemy equipment, but these are exploited far away at specialized U.S. bases and facilities.

Not every embedded author recognizes the limits of the genre. It is with considerable conceit that journalists such as CNN correspondent Walter C. Rodgers infuse their embedded accounts with political commentary and Iraq policy analysis. In *Sleeping with Custer and the 7th Cavalry*, Rodgers promotes the conspiracy theory that Bush concocted the idea that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction in order to please the Israel lobby and force the United States into war. That the Clinton administration also believed Saddam to have such

weapons is ignored, as is the fact that Saddam threatened to use them in the weeks before the war.⁴ Rodgers' venality permeates his narrative, which he cheapens with gossip about his competitors. Given its faults and content, President Jimmy Carter's back cover endorsement of *Sleeping with Custer* may raise eyebrows.

While the quality of embedded accounts may vary, the Iraq war has brought the very institution of embedding under the microscope. Can embedded journalists maintain neutrality? To what extent do operational security needs compromise reporting? Do the personal relationships that writers strike with soldiers lead to self-censorship? And, does increased access lead to greater understanding of the military and accuracy of description? Here, liberal blogger Bill Katovsky and freelance writer Timothy Carlson's *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq* is useful. Katovsky and Carlson interview sixty embedded reporters and officials to explore some of these issues. The subjects of their interviews are diverse but cover the spectrum of broadcast and print journalists, political and mainstream outlets, and policymakers and practitioners. They allow Bryan Whitman, deputy assistant secretary of defense, for example, to discuss the formulation of the embed policy and the internal policy debates surrounding it, British and U.S. public affairs officers to describe its execution from a military point of view, and then, both print and television reporters to describe their experiences. Other reporters in the book discuss everything from life and sexual relationships on naval ships to the balance between access and constraint incumbent in the practice. Also valuable is the reproduction of the regulations governing journalists in their relationship with the military.

Less serious are other treatments such as former ABC and CNN producer Danny Schechter's *Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception* which makes little effort to treat the subject with dispassion, and instead, as the title suggests, substitutes polemic for analysis.

PRE-WAR PLANNING: THE MILITARY DIMENSION

On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom. By Col. Gregory Fontenot (Ret.), Lt. Col. E.J. Degen, and Lt. Col. David Tohn. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005. 539 pp. \$34.95. **Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq.** By Michael R. Gordon and Gen. Bernard E. Trainor. New York: Pantheon, 2006. 603 pp. \$27.95.

While Atkinson, Lowry, and West are cognizant of military workings and strategy, what is absent in many accounts—let alone in breezy journalistic descriptions of prewar planning—is a sense of the nuts-and-bolts military planning that provides the unseen backdrop for much of what transpired. Here, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* by Col. Gregory Fontenot (Ret.), Lt. Col. E.J. Degen, and Lt. Col. David Tohn adds fresh material to the literature. While authors more enmeshed in Beltway politics seek to construct the intellectual influences shaping policy, Fontenot and his colleagues take a more dispassionate and technical approach. They demonstrate how planners for Operation Iraqi Freedom incorporated lessons derived from the U.S. experiences in Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. While many commentators say that the Iraqi insurgency caught U.S. planners by surprise, *On Point* suggests urban combat preoccupied war planners. Supplemented by photos, maps, and charts, *On Point* describes various seminars, discussions, and exercises to prepare the U.S. army to fight in Baghdad. Fontenot and his colleagues offer considerable detail not only of planning—training exercises in Germany, for example—but they also describe how the U.S. military managed with very little public note to ready ports, airfields, and other infrastructure in the Middle East needed for its campaign.

Rumsfeld pulled proposed troop numbers from thin air.

⁴ *The Daily Telegraph* (London), Feb. 28, 2003.

Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn provide thumbnail diagrams and explanations of various battles on the drive north from Kuwait. While not designed as such, *On Point* can serve as a one-stop reference to couple with embedded accounts. A chapter on the fall of Baghdad, for

The CIA sought to quash the Pentagon's troop training program.

example, provides behind-the-scenes detail on the "thunder runs," the much-photographed toppling of Saddam's statue in central Baghdad, and mop-up operations within the city.

On Point, though, will not provide the last word. Air force and naval planning was outside the purview of the authors. Certain items that Fontenot and his colleagues glanced over also deserve further treatment. For example, while the authors say the small number of Free Iraqi Forces—Iraqi expatriates trained in Tazsar, Hungary—were significant strategically, operationally, and tactically, they do not explain why. Any elaboration, though, might need to await further declassification of material.

Another excellent account of prewar military planning is Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor's *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*. Gordon, chief military correspondent at *The New York Times*, and Trainor, a retired Marine Corps lieutenant-general, combine their talents to weave a complete narrative of the Iraq campaign, discussing both its inception and execution. They ask "how a military campaign that was so successful in toppling Saddam Hussein's regime set the conditions for the insurgency that followed." They win the trust of a far greater range of people than others who have sought to tackle this issue, and so their narrative becomes more multi-dimensional than competing efforts.

TROOP NUMBERS DEBATE

Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq. By Thomas E. Ricks. New York: The Penguin Press, 2006. 416 pp. \$27.95.

While *On Point* describes the Iraq war's planning, in *Cobra II*, Gordon and Trainor delve more into its inputs, such as the debate over troop numbers. They describe the evolution of proposals outlining how to take on Iraq after Operation Desert Storm. General Wayne Downing, between 1993 and 1996, head of U.S. Special Operations Command, proposed establishing a Shi'ite safe-haven in southern Iraq to mirror the U.S.- and U.K.-protected Kurdish zone in northern Iraq. With limited investment beyond airpower, he argued a southern safe-haven could become a base to squeeze Saddam in the center.

Others said the only way to change the regime in Iraq would be to flood the country with troops. Gen. Tommy Franks, at the time CENTCOM commander, dusted off contingency plans approved by his predecessor, Gen. Anthony Zinni, who believed securing Iraq would require nearly 400,000 troops. When Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld entered the Pentagon, though, he sought to transform the military. With new technology and new thinking, he argued, less could be more. He suggested that Franks might do the job with 125,000 troops, a number which Gordon and Trainor suggest Rumsfeld pulled from thin air.

As the Iraq invasion plan developed, tension between Rumsfeld and Franks escalated. Even after CENTCOM bent to Rumsfeld's wishes, the troop debate continued. Gordon and Trainor elaborate upon the oft-cited February 25, 2003 testimony of Army chief-of-staff Eric Shineski before the Senate Armed Services Committee. In response to a question from Senator Carl Levin (Democrat-Michigan), Shineski said that he believed it would take "several hundred thousand troops" to secure Iraq. *Cobra II* relates how a furious Rumsfeld tasked Wolfowitz to chide Shineski for commenting when he was not involved in operation planning. Why Levin would seek to reveal troop strength publicly on the eve of the operation is not discussed but worthy of examination given military planners' real concern that Saddam Hussein might strike first while U.S. deployment was incomplete and vulnerable. In *Fiasco*, *Washington Post* senior Pentagon correspondent Thomas Ricks argues that

such a debate cannot be separated from the jousting between Rumsfeld and the U.S. Army over posture and appropriations programs.

Within planning circles, controversy raged not only over troop strength but also regarding the importance of maintaining an Iraqi face. While Franks famously called Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith “the f---ing stupidest guy on the face of the earth,” a consensus is developing in recent writing to suggest Franks himself might warrant that designation. Franks worked hard to block attempts to train the Free Iraqi Force to which *On Point* eluded. CENTCOM foot-dragging and interagency rivalry hampered a program that might have put an Iraqi face on liberation or obviated the need to start training a new military from scratch. CENTCOM was not the only bureaucracy to undermine planning to preserve bureaucratic interests. Because the CIA had trained its own covert Iraqi force, it sought to quash the Pentagon’s larger, overt program. *Cobra II* suggests a CIA case officer even filed a false report to sidetrack administration efforts to place an Iraqi face on the fight.

Like Atkinson, Gordon and Trainor also describe CENTCOM anxiety about the potential use of chemical weapons. On April 2, 2003, after U.S. troops crossed the Tigris and advanced on Baghdad, U.S. signals intelligence intercepted what the CIA believed to be Iraqi orders to launch such an attack.

While the U.S. intelligence upon which the Pentagon based planning was often wrong, the CIA’s venality permeates the narrative. Its station chief speaks openly against de-Baathification, exaggerating the numbers of those affected. But while Gordon and Trainor imply that de-Baathification and the decision to disband the Iraqi army contributed to violence, their analysis fails to convince. Consider Petraeus’s area of operation: His willingness to



Iraqi looters push stolen generators in the suburbs of Baghdad as they wave to a passing convoy of U.S. Marines, April 7, 2003. Coalition forces eventually stopped the looting, but violence and disorder persisted.

empower senior Baathists in Mosul bought short-term calm but provided the insurgency with a safe-haven. Had Gordon and Trainor sought quantitative data, they might find that insurgent violence was proportional to re-Baathification.

BEGINNING THE BLAME GAME

Blind into Baghdad: America’s War in Iraq. By James Fallows. New York: Vintage, 2006. 229 pp. \$13.95.

Ever since a mob in Fallujah ambushed, murdered, and mutilated four U.S. security contractors on March 31, 2004, insurgency and violence have dominated discussion of U.S. Iraq policy. Both *Cobra II* and *Fiasco* identify de-Baathification and Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) administrator L. Paul Bremer’s order to dissolve the Iraqi military as important contributors to the outbreak of the insurgency and as a major reason why an initial military campaign that ended so well degenerated into such a chaotic and violent occupation. Iraqis certainly did greet U.S. troops with flowers and kisses,⁵

but the honeymoon did not last long. Regime loyalists dissipated but did not disappear. Coalition forces stopped the looting, but violence and disorder persisted. The absence of weapons of mass destruction, the supposed presence

of which was a major motivator for war,⁶ embarrassed the White House and provided fodder for both conspiracy theorists and more rational war opponents who argued that such original sin de-legitimized the U.S. mission, or that continued U.S. military involvement would equate to mission creep.

Iraqis resented Tom Warrick's assertions that his Rolodex would be the future Iraqi government.

As violence persisted, journalists and politicians began to ask what went wrong. Two distinct narratives developed. The first blamed civilian planners while the second narrative focused more on U.S. Central Command.

Among the first group of authors, most focused their attention on Pentagon civilians and other neoconservative "architects." In a series of articles since republished in *Blind into Baghdad*, *Atlantic Monthly* national correspondent James Fallows raised concerns about the complexities of post-conflict reconstruction and civilian planners' unwillingness to face worst-case scenarios. While many accounts lambaste Douglas Feith for poor management—a charge not without merit—almost all authors used the same, narrow pool of sources to confirm often inaccurate accounts and to propel an often flawed narrative into conventional wisdom.

THE OFFICE OF SPECIAL PLANS

Take for example, David Rieff, a freelance journalist for many left-of-center publications

and a frequent contributor of comments on partisan blogs: On November 2, 2003, he published an influential 8,000-word cover story in *The New York Times Magazine* entitled "Blueprint for a Mess."⁷ A thinly-veiled polemic, Rieff blames the "blinker vision and over-optimistic assumptions on the part of the war's greatest partisans within the Bush administration." His narrative is rife with errors and half-truths. Rieff's assertion that the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans existed "to evaluate the threat of Saddam Hussein's nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare capabilities" was a falsehood he lifted from Knight-Ridder foreign affairs correspondent Warren Strobel. In a taped interview with a British journalist, Karen Kwiatkowski, a career military officer who had served as a desk officer for Morocco, acknowledged being Strobel's source. But Kwiatkowski had never stepped foot in the Office of Special Plans. When questioned by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, she could not provide supporting evidence, nor could anyone corroborate her stories.⁸ W. Patrick Lang, a former Defense Intelligence Agency official, often seconded the myth of the Office of Special Plans to intelligence-beat reporters. When he did so, though, he seldom revealed that he was serving as a registered Lebanese agent under the U.S. Department of Justice's Foreign Agents Registration Act.⁹

Reality was more mundane: As the Iraq war approached, office space constraints necessitated Iraq desk officers to relocate within the Pentagon. This, in turn, necessitated a new name if for no other reason than to ensure inter-Pentagon correspondence arrived at the right door. Its mission was Iraq policy, the Pentagon's

7 David Rieff, "Blueprint for a Mess," *The New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 2, 2003.

8 "Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq," U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, July 9, 2004, pp. 282-3.

9 See "Lang, W. Patrick," in *Report of the Attorney General to the Congress of the United States on the Administration of the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938, as amended, for the six months ending June 30, 2003*, U.S. Department of Justice, Appendix B-18; W. Patrick Lang, "Drinking the Kool-Aid," *Middle East Policy*, Summer 2004.

5 See, for example, *The Boston Globe*, Apr. 10, 2003.

6 Colin Powell, "Remarks to the United Nations Security Council," U.S. Department of State, Feb. 5, 2003.

equivalent of the State Department's Iraq desk.

While Rieff bases his account largely on unnamed and anonymous sources, he allows those who do speak on record to discuss matters about which they had no direct knowledge. Timothy Carney, for example, speaks about the attitudes of Pentagon officials with whom he had no contact. Carney had other agendas, though. Jay Garner released Carney from his service in Iraq after only eight weeks after questions surfaced about leaks to journalists. Carney then made his agenda public. Against the backdrop of a multibillion dollar interagency fight for control of reconstruction spending, Carney called subordination of diplomats to retired generals "a grievous flaw" and argued that "military officers simply did not understand" reconstruction.¹⁰ Professional reporters should gauge and, at least, identify agendas. Rieff preferred to cherry-pick comments to fit.

THE FUTURE OF IRAQ PROJECT

Losing Iraq. By David Phillips. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2005. 292 pp. \$25.

Another apparent source upon whom Rieff relies was Tom Warrick, a State Department lawyer. In June 2002, the State Department assigned Warrick to coordinate the Future of Iraq project, a series of seminars bringing together Iraqi expatriates and U.S. government officials, not only from the State Department but also from the White House, Pentagon, National Security Council (NSC), and Central Intelligence Agency.¹¹ Rieff argues that the Pentagon paid little heed to the project's reports. This was false. Rieff appears unaware of almost daily National Security Council meetings in which Stephen Hadley, the deputy national security advisor, and Zalmay

Khalilzad, then the senior NSC director for Iraq, met with officials from across the U.S. bureaucracy to discuss issues highlighted by Future of Iraq project working groups. Pentagon policy was formulated in conjunction with the recommendations of the Democratic Principles Working group, whose report was readily accessible to Rieff;¹² the State Department vetoed it. Again, Rieff failed to fact-check, preferring instead to amplify a false conventional wisdom put forth by his ideological fellow-travelers.

For their part, Gordon and Trainor also deflate the importance of the Future of Iraq project. It did not provide a viable plan for postwar Iraq; its importance was limited to ideas and background. Still, this

does not let the Pentagon off the hook: Kurdish leader (and current Iraqi president) Jalal Talabani warned Rumsfeld about the potential for looting in an August 2002 meeting. Despite Rieff's characterization, according to Warrick's supervisor, deputy assistant of state Ryan Crocker, "It was never intended as a postwar plan."¹³

Rieff promoted a number of other assertions not based in fact. For example, he pushed the canard, since adopted by *Washington Post* reporters and others, that the Pentagon blacklisted Warrick for his political views. The truth was more mundane: The State Department sanctioned Warrick for professional misconduct upon determining the credibility of complaints leveled by Iraqis who resented both assertions that his Rolodex would be the future Iraqi government and threatened to blackball them unless they altered their positions. Crocker, himself, placed in charge of assembling the governance team for Baghdad, passed Warrick over in the initial deployment.

U.N. officials predicted three million Iraqis would face starvation.

¹⁰ *BBC News*, June 26, 2003.

¹¹ "Iraqi-American Conference Focuses on a Future Democratic Iraq," *The Washington File*, U.S. State Department, June 10, 2002.

¹² "Transition to Democracy Report," Dec. 10, 2002, accessible through the Iraq Foundation.

¹³ L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 25.

Still, the Future of Iraq myth has legs. In *Losing Iraq*, an account of his experience as a consultant to the project, former Council on Foreign Relations fellow David L. Phillips underlines and amplifies Rieff's declarations. Phillips's insight though was limited. He did not recognize that Iraqis with whom he met held separate meetings in the Pentagon, National Security Council, and Central Intelligence Agency. He was

Fiasco suggests General Franks was a pivotal failure.

not a participant in National Security Council meetings where issues were discussed that arose within the Future of Iraq program. Nor was Phillips aware that ideas for which he claims credit had been discussed and, in some

cases, implemented weeks if not months before. Phillips's narrative is, in many ways, the archetype for a larger trend of Washington hallucination: bit players believing themselves central to decision-making. Soon after *The Wall Street Journal* caught Phillips plagiarizing accounts of Iraq from newspaper descriptions to suggest greater experience in the country,¹⁴ he left the Council on Foreign Relations.

INITIAL DEPLOYMENT

Iraq and Back. By Kim Olson. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006. 211 pp. \$26.95. **The Assassins' Gate.** By George Packer. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005. 467 pp. \$26.

Hindsight is always 20-20. Although the dominant narrative suggests only inadequate preparation, there was also misdirection. While Fallows points out that too many civilian authorities assumed best-case scenarios, there is scant memory of exaggerated worst-case scenarios. Fallows cites William Nash, a retired two-star army general and a senior fellow at the Coun-

cil on Foreign Relations, who said, "You are going to start right out with a humanitarian crisis." U.N. officials predicted the initial military campaign could injure 500,000 Iraqi civilians, create almost a million refugees and two million additional displaced persons, and cause more than three million Iraqis to face starvation.¹⁵ Opponents of U.S. and British policy used such predictions to argue against ousting the Iraqi regime. "An all-out war that caused devastating suffering to the people of Iraq would be wrong," Clare Short, the British secretary for International Development, said.¹⁶ Col. Kim Olson, USAF (ret.), describes the focus on humanitarian concerns in *Iraq and Back*, one of the few accounts of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance interlude. Few journalists or writers have explored how the politicalization of non-governmental organization analysis undercut the general credibility of warnings and muddled more legitimate concerns.

The Rieff and Phillips narrative, however flawed, permeates George Packer's *The Assassins' Gate*. Declaring, "The story of the Iraq war is a story of ideas about the role of the United States in the world, and of the individuals who conceived and acted on them," Packer, a staff writer at *The New Yorker* weaves together an account of the planning and personalities involved in the Iraq war.

He is at his best providing character sketches of individuals involved in postwar Iraq. In a chapter entitled "The Palace," for example, he offers snippets of conversations with Meghan O'Sullivan, Drew Erdmann, and Col. Paul Hughes, Garner's planning chief, interspersed with description to give a sense of atmosphere so often lacking in newspaper accounts. "The Captain" follows the experiences of Captain John Prior, a mid-ranking officer who fought his way north from Kuwait, then spent several weeks in central Iraq before heading to Baghdad and the province of Al-Anbar. Here, though, his account does not hold up to the

14 Robert Pollock, "The Armchair Analyst," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 10, 2005.

15 *The Guardian* (London), Jan. 29, 2003.

16 *The Independent* (London), Dec. 29, 2002.

much more complete sketches offered by Atkinson or West.

What undercuts *The Assassins' Gate* is Packer's tendency to treat Iraq as a template upon which to act out agendas that have more to do with Washington than Iraq. Like Rieff, Packer seeks to amplify a narrow range of sources into a more comprehensive narrative. He channels the thoughts and even the dreams of State Department officials such as Barbara Bodine, O'Sullivan, and Erdmann but does not place sources in context. He cites Noah Feldman, for example, a New York University (now Harvard) law professor and fluent Arabic speaker but is unaware that the Coalition Provisional Authority dismissed Feldman after less than a month because, like Warrick, he promoted himself at the expense of the Iraqis and misrepresented his position.

Hostile to the Pentagon, Packer gets offices and staffs confused. Those with whom Packer disagrees, such as then-deputy defense secretary Paul Wolfowitz, he treats as two-dimensional foils. There are other errors: I attended no meeting in which he placed me. His discussion of prewar planning is facile. He repeats the Rieff narrative, amplifies Warrick, and ignores both the National Security Council and CENTCOM.

Underlining Packer's failure to assess information and his enthusiasm to substitute polemic for research is an endnote in which he acknowledges "benefit[ing] from" the blogs of Juan Cole, a University of Michigan history professor, and Laura Rozen, a correspondent for *The American Prospect*. Both argue that dual loyalties motivated Jewish officials in the Pentagon to pursue the war.¹⁷ Neither had been to Iraq nor



General Tommy Franks (L) leaves one of Saddam's presidential palaces after a meeting with military leaders, April 17, 2003. Many analysts believe Franks failed to fulfill his responsibility to oversee Phase IV work: military planning for post-conflict stability and reconstruction.

had direct knowledge of the people or events about which Packer consulted their writing. While *Assassin's Gate* became a best-seller, Packer's willingness to substitute polemic for research takes its toll; his narrative pails besides the far more thorough *Cobra II*.

FRANK ON FRANKS

Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq. By Ahmad S. Hashim. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006. 482 pp. \$29.95.

Ricks's *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* does not absolve Bush adminis-

(not wars that really needed to be fought, but wars that the Likud coalition thought it would be nice to see fought ... especially if someone else's boys did the dying)." In a September 9, 2004 comment to her own blog (www.warandpiece.com), Rozen, a political commentator for *The American Prospect*, wrote, "Do you think Feith has not demonstrated throughout his career as a government official ... and in his writings ... an extraordinary commitment to the hard-line policies of the Likud party? The political party of another nation? What is there to dispute?"

¹⁷ On August 29, 2003, Cole, a University of Michigan professor, wrote, "These pro-Likud intellectuals concluded that 9-11 would give them carte blanche to use the Pentagon as Israel's Gurkha regiment, fighting elective wars on behalf of Tel Aviv

tration civilian appointees from blame but emphasizes more military decision-making. Ricks's narrative begins after Iraq's 1991 defeat in Operation Desert Storm. When Iraqi Shi'ites and Kurds heeded President George H.W. Bush's call to rise up against Saddam, Paul Wolfowitz, at the time an undersecretary of defense for policy, was perhaps the only senior officials within the George H.W. Bush administration to

Questions about Chandrasekaran's reporting forced *The Washington Post* to issue corrections.

advocate for intervention in their support. U.S. inaction enabled Saddam's return to power. For the Shi'ites, betrayal was complete. But the Kurds got a second chance: After Kurds began to stream to the Turkish border, fleeing Saddam's vengeful forces, Turkish president

Turgut Özal—Ricks mistakenly credits the United Nations—called for establishment of a safe haven so that refugees could remain inside Iraqi territory. Wolfowitz flew to Iraq to observe Operation Provide Comfort, and at Sarsang, met Zinni, at the time the Operation's chief-of-staff. Zinni recounts that he saw the work as strictly humanitarian while Wolfowitz, like Gen. Downing would later, saw something more.

Over the next decade, Wolfowitz and Zinni would anchor opposite poles in the Iraq policy debate. While Wolfowitz would urge regime change, Zinni would advocate containment. Zinni ridiculed as "the Bay of Goats" plans by Wolfowitz, Downing, and other advocates to duplicate the lessons of the Kurdish safe-haven and support Iraqi oppositionists' quest to liberate Iraq. Ricks cites the wisdom of prominent realists who lambasted Wolfowitz's ideas¹⁸ but, dishonestly, does not identify the authors as Clinton administration officials with partisan as well as ideological agendas.

Wolfowitz's advocacy gained little traction until 9-11 when Rumsfeld demanded action. Here Ricks departs from earlier narratives and criticizes CENTCOM. Franks, he suggests, abdicated responsibility for planning. While unsympathetic to Wolfowitz and Feith, Ricks faults the uniformed military as much as civilian leadership for Pentagon dysfunction. He places Shineski's testimony in the context of unrelated procurement battles rather than altruistic Iraq advice. He also deconstructs the military's myths: While Zinni said Pentagon civilians had discarded his plans to control Iraq, Ricks implies Zinni lied. Citing CENTCOM's deputy chief of planning as his source, Ricks notes, "The quality of planning done under Zinni may have improved in Zinni's memory with the passage of time."

Fiasco suggests Franks was a pivotal failure. He did not convey with urgency the concerns of the Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), which was to lead the charge to Baghdad, nor did he issue orders stating what he wanted done. CENTCOM morale plummeted as Franks berated his staff. By prioritizing speed in the drive to Baghdad over consolidation, Ricks argues that "Franks flunk[ed] strategy ... Speed didn't kill the enemy—it bypassed him."

Franks failed to fulfill his responsibility to oversee Phase IV work: military planning for post-conflict stability and reconstruction. True, Garner's Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs may have botched its job, but its task was Herculean given Franks's abdication of planning. Garner's executive officer, Col. Kim Olson, USAF (ret.), depicts the confusion in her short account of the ORHA interlude.¹⁹ Here, *National Review* editor Rich Lowry points to a pivotal issue Ricks bypasses. While there were Phase III plans and a thumbnail sketch for Phase IV, the Pentagon failed to coordinate and implement its own plans.²⁰ Neither CFLCC com-

18 Daniel Byman, Kenneth Pollack, and Gideon Rose, "The Rollback Fantasy," *Foreign Affairs*, Jan./Feb. 1999.

19 Olson, *Iraq and Back*, pp. 1-110.

20 Rich Lowry, "What Went Wrong?" *National Review*, Oct. 25, 2004.

THE GREEN ZONE

mander David McKiernan, CENTCOM commander Franks, nor Rumsfeld made the call as to when Phase III ended and Phase IV began. The result was a vacuum filled by chaos and looting.

Fiasco continues to examine decision-making, both civilian and military, during the initial reconstruction phase and the insurgency. Ricks criticizes military tactics and the disconnection between Rumsfeld's refusal to prioritize nation-building and the reality that U.S. troops in Iraq found it a major component of their postwar responsibility. Here, though, Bing West's *No True Glory* is a more substantive read. Ahmed S. Hashim, a professor at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, provides a useful chronicle of insurgent groups in *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq* but undercuts his narrative with both politics and lazy analysis.

Although Ricks provides a necessary correction to earlier accounts, *Fiasco* is not definitive. While more careful than some colleagues with respect to Zinni, Ricks becomes dependent and, perhaps, too deferential to others, leading him to embrace inaccuracies and conspiracies. Shortly after *Fiasco*'s publication, *Washington Post* executive editor Len Downie chided Ricks for promoting on national television²¹ the idea that the Israeli military declined to shoot down Hezbollah's rockets because home front casualties would generate sympathy. He attributed such charges to unnamed military sources.²² That Ricks would accept and parrot such a theory calls into question his judgment and undercuts the credibility of his work. For *Fiasco*, for example, he uses Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage as a source, someone who both friends and foes acknowledge uses the press in service of his agenda. Ricks also cheapens his work, like Rodgers, by using his narrative to engage in petty vendettas toward colleagues.

21 CNN, Aug. 6, 2006.

22 *The Washington Post*, Aug. 17, 2006.

Imperial Life in the Emerald City. By Rajiv Chandrasekaran. New York: Knopf, 2006. 336 pp. \$25.95.

Those journalists who emphasize U.S. policymaker and Beltway intrigue exhibit subtle disdain for Iraqis and a condescending attitude to their contributions. Ricks allows almost no Iraqi voice to permeate his narrative while Packer ignores the role of the 100-member Iraq Reconstruction and Development Council (IRDC). These Iraqi-American and Iraqi-European technicians worked alongside U.S. diplomats. They remained independent politically as they implanted reconstructed ministries, guided U.S. diplomats and other officials around Iraq, and facilitated outreach to local officials. They did their work without guards. Some IRDC members paid with their lives; Majeed Hanoun, for example, lost his while investigating smuggling in Basra.

While Packer can plead ignorance because he parachuted into Iraq only for brief trips, *Washington Post* Baghdad bureau chief Rajiv Chandrasekaran has no excuse. His book, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, seeks to describe life in the Green Zone, the high-security enclave in which were based both the CPA and the interim Iraqi government. Chandrasekaran appears ignorant of the IRDC's existence.

He depicts the Green Zone as Oz, often detached from reality. This is true, but his thesis that CPA partisanship doomed reconstruction falls flat. To support the allegation that the CPA selected staff on the basis of politics rather than their competence, he offers a few unsubstantiated anecdotes and cites as examples a handful of allegedly unqualified staffers. But, his methodology and fact-check-

Iraqi-American and Iraqi-European technicians worked alongside U.S. diplomats and did their work without guards.

ing are poor. He provides no numbers to prove his thesis: Was the CPA 90 percent, 19 percent, or 9 percent political? Chandrasekaran's narrative suggests the former; reality is closer to the latter.

Rather than seek hard data, Chandrasekaran appears to have culled blogs. He repeats—but does not credit to their source—allegations first aired on partisan websites.²³ For example, he writes that the CPA hired Simone Ledeen, the 28-year-old daughter of “neoconservative” Michael Ledeen, to manage Iraq's \$13 billion budget, even though, he says, she had no background in accounting. But Simone Ledeen did have a background in accounting and a master's

in business administration. She did not, however, manage the budget but rather executed it, handling issues such as payroll. Ironically, Ledeen was one of the few CPA employees to leave the Green Zone regularly; many diplomats and other

government employees preferred to remain inside the safe-zone. On several occasions, she braved hostile fire. Questions about Chandrasekaran's reporting forced *The Washington Post* to issue corrections²⁴ after it had published excerpts.²⁵

He twists other evidence to fit his thesis as well. In a *Washington Post* op-ed, former CPA spokesman Dan Senor lists several examples of places where Chandrasekaran cherry-picked data and omitted that which undercut his thesis.²⁶ Chandrasekaran mentioned Crocker, a career diplomat and talented Arabist, only in passing, even though Chandrasekaran had once described him as Bremer's “top political aide.”²⁷ It was Crocker,

rather than Bush administration political appointees, who handpicked the CPA's political team. Nor, as Senor points out, does Chandrasekaran acknowledge that most CPA senior officials were career diplomats or military officers with long service under both Republican and Democratic administrations.

Chandrasekaran is not only careless with facts but also imprecise with terms. He labels as neoconservatives not only Feith and Wolfowitz but also Cheney and Rumsfeld. But neoconservatism prioritizes the importance of democracy within foreign policy. While analysts argue over Cheney's willingness to prioritize democracy—Ricks recalls how Cheney opposed Wolfowitz after the 1991 Iraq uprising—for Rumsfeld it was never a priority.

The inaccuracies permeating *Imperial Life in the Emerald City* may result more from Chandrasekaran's ambition than ignorance. With public disillusionment with the Iraq war high and the media searching for scapegoats, Chandrasekaran sought to capitalize on the public mood and deliver some. Politicized books sell. Integrity can take a back seat. In his essay in *Embedded*, *New York Times* Baghdad correspondent John Burns alludes to an incident in which a correspondent from a competing paper sought favor with Saddam's Information Ministry by suggesting his own reporting more favorable to the Iraqi regime;²⁸ several journalists finger Chandrasekaran.²⁹

Iraqis often promised agreement, then, maintained their own course.

THE IRAQI VOICE

In the Red Zone: A Journey into the Soul of Iraq. By Steven Vincent. Dallas: Spence Publishing, 2004. 247 pp. \$27.95. **Night Draws Near.** By Anthony Shadid. New York: Henry Holt, 2005. 448 pp. \$26. **In the Belly of the Green Bird: The**

23 “The Washington Monthly's Who's Who,” *The Washington Monthly*, Dec. 2003.

24 *The Washington Post*, Sept. 20, 2006.

25 *The Washington Post*, Sept. 17, 2006.

26 *The Washington Post*, Oct. 10, 2006.

27 *The Washington Post*, July 13, 2003.

28 John Burns, “The Moral Compass of Iraq,” in Katovsky and Carlson, *Embedded*, pp. 155-63.

29 See also the allusion to the incident in *City Journal*, Autumn 2003.

Triumph of the Martyrs in Iraq. By Nir Rosen. New York: Free Press, 2006. 288 pp. \$26. **The Foreigner's Gift.** By Fouad Ajami. New York: Free Press, 2006. 400 pp. \$26.

Missing in many of the accounts is an accurate representation of the Iraqi voice. Packer addresses this a bit, at least outside the palace walls. His chapter "Occupied Iraqis" introduces readers to the experiences of a young, female computer programmer at the University of Baghdad; a forensic specialist at the Baghdad morgue; an aide to young Shi'ite firebrand Muqtada al-Sadr; and a pseudonymous Kurdish translator. While well-written, Packer's sketches read as little more than random encounters. He did not invest the time in Iraq to explore the layers of complexity in the society. Freelance writer Steven Vincent, though, did. His book, *In the Red Zone: A Journey into the Soul of Iraq*, is a richer account, better identifying themes that continue to permeate Iraqi society. Vincent was murdered in Basra on August 2, 2005,³⁰ after breaking the story of Shi'ite death squads.³¹ State Department refusal to grant his translator a visa has impeded publication of his unfinished manuscript about life in Basra.

Another rich reflection of the Iraqi voice is *Washington Post* correspondent Anthony Shadid's *Night Draws Near*. Time spent in Iraq before the war and fluency in Arabic allow Shadid to give context to his treatment of Iraqis. More modest than Packer about his ability to transmit Iraq's complexity, Shadid's cynicism about U.S. motivations distracts the reader. He describes the "folly" of trying to create a democracy in America's "brash, confident image," and, by failing to challenge his own biases, conflates hypothesis with fact. This prevents him from asking tough questions and challenging his sources. For example, while his prewar Iraqi interlocutors disparaged U.S. motivations with one former Baathist saying, "I won't hide

my feelings—the American invasion has nothing to do with democracy and human rights"—he never returns to examine whether the Iraqis celebrating Saddam's downfall included those cheerleading the regime just weeks before. *In the Red Zone* does a better job of exploring Iraqi survival strategies and how Iraqi opinions shift with time and circumstance. Still, Shadid does a far better job than Nir Rosen does in *In the Belly of the Green Bird: The Triumph of the Martyrs in Iraq*. An Arabic-speaking freelance journalist, Rosen's access to Iraqi jihadists seems to result most from his willingness to amplify uncritically their message.

Where Shadid does question, his analysis can be incisive. Shadid is almost alone in recognizing the importance of the U.S. decision to label itself an occupying power. "When the U.S. government shifted the legal jurisdiction of its presence in Iraq, it inadvertently answered a question that had long dominated Iraqi conversations before and during the war: Would it be an occupation or liberation? Even by American admission, it was now an occupation. And in an *ihtilal*, ambitions of a common destiny, promises of collaboration, pledges of shared aims and goals are rendered impossible."³²

While Shadid provides framing commentary elsewhere, here he does not question the U.S. debate surrounding acquiescence to U.N. demands to accept occupying power status, something the U.S. government had not done with regard to its missions in Somalia, Bosnia, or Kosovo. Despite such flaws, though, the sheer quantity of Shadid's anecdotes and interviews—meeting farmers, judges, and even firebrand cleric Muqtada al-Sadr—make *Night Draws Near* worthwhile.

Iraqi Kurds and Shi'ites distrusted prominent U.N. officials who had remained silent during Saddam's attacks on the Iraqi civilian population.

30 *The New York Times*, Aug. 4, 2005.

31 Steven Vincent, "Switched off in Basra," *The New York Times*, July 31, 2005.

32 Shadid, *Night Draws Near*, p. 198.

With *The Foreigner's Gift*, Fouad Ajami, the marquis Middle East historian at Johns Hopkins' School for Advanced International Studies, also contributes an incisive, and less cynical, account. Ajami, like Shadid, a Lebanese-American fluent in Arabic, traveled repeatedly to Iraq in the wake of its liberation. He brings the insight and depth of an academic and the smooth, eloquent prose of an accomplished writer.

Ajami summarizes the intellectual path for war in a straightforward, less tendentious manner than Packer. Ajami is more self-confident and less interested in winning the praise of peers than he is in providing an open, honest account. He contextualizes the Iraq campaign within the broader Middle East struggle among autocrats, theocrats, and democrats and defends Iraqi National Congress leader Ahmad Chalabi against the often-spurious charges accepted blindly by other writers. When analyzing the Shi'ites, Ajami provides historical depth lacking in other accounts. He describes the resurgent Sunni-Shi'ite divide in observations subsequently popularized by Vali Nasr, a historian at the Naval Postgraduate School.³³

The trust Ajami garnered among Iraqis is impressive. His access is unparalleled. He accompanies Iraqi politicians, observing interactions with constituents. He interviews the overseer of the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, the holiest shrine in Shi'ite Islam and even receives an audience with Grand Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani, the most influential religious leader in Iraq.

"IT'S ALL ABOUT ME"

The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War without End. By Peter W. Galbraith. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006. 272 pp. \$26. **Squandered Victory.** By Larry Diamond. New York: Times Books, 2005. 384 pp. \$25.

Many coalition officials returned from Iraq

to write books about their experiences. These vary in quality but are often disappointing. Many authors assume authority not matched by experience, and others self-promote or promote narrow agendas. In *The End of Iraq*, Peter Galbraith, a former U.S. ambassador long active in Kurdish causes, falls into all of these traps: He uses his narrative to argue for Kurdish independence but does not reveal his affiliation with the Kurdish Regional Government.³⁴ He self-promotes: mentioning himself on eighty-nine different pages while ignoring the role of colleagues. He also takes often dishonest partisan shots. He suggests, for example, that Bush did not understand the difference between Sunnis and Shi'ites. Not only is this assertion undermined by the many briefings the president receives but is also not credible because Galbraith never has access to the president to substantiate such a charge. Other assertions appear untrue. While Galbraith writes that Wolfowitz refused him a meeting, Galbraith had many such meetings. The Pentagon has no record of Galbraith's unanswered requests, not could Galbraith, when asked by office staff members, substantiate his charge.

Despite their flaws, coalition-experience books, like those of embedded journalists, can both clarify and add color to events. The reality of Iraq and the challenges of reconstruction permeate throughout. The value of such books is often proportional to their author's rank and time spent in Iraq. Bremer's *My Year in Iraq* is more important than Larry Diamond's *Squandered Victory*, for example. Bremer spent thirteen months in Iraq while Diamond, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and founding co-editor of the *Journal of Democracy*, stayed only three months.

Diamond capitalized on public unease about the Iraq mission to pen *Squandered Victory*. It is, at best, a deeply-flawed account and, at worst, dishonest. Diamond's description of prewar planning is derivative and error prone.

33 Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).

34 See "Ambassador Peter Galbraith, Advisor to the Kurdistan Regional Government," Kurdistan Development Corporation, accessed Jan. 11, 2007.

Like Packer, he gets names, offices, and positions confused. That he spent only three months with the coalition, during which he attended conferences outside Iraq for a part of the time, is apparent in his lack of insight into Iraqi politics and society.

Ego permeates. He came to Iraq as an academician with a theory and spent his time there lecturing Iraqis about it. "Since I had the greatest expertise in this area [of democratization], my recommendations were generally accepted," he explains. But they were not. Iraqis accustomed to a parade of U.S. officials often promised agreement, then, maintained their own course. On Iraq's constitutional debate, he appears unaware how Iraqi lawyers Salem Chalabi and Faisal Istrabadi ran circles around him.³⁵

Few Iraqis would agree with Diamond's desire for greater U.N. involvement. Not only had U.N. officials defrauded Iraq during the Oil-for-Food scandal, but many Iraqis also resented U.N. secretary-general Kofi Annan's statement, aired repeatedly on state television, "Can I trust Saddam Hussein? I think I can do business with him."³⁶ Iraqi Kurds and Shi'ites also distrusted prominent U.N. officials such as Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi who, in his previous position as deputy Arab League secretary-general had remained silent during Saddam's attacks on the Iraqi civilian population.

Diamond's belief that Iraqis heeded his wisdom reflects a larger problem that afflicted both U.S. civilian and military officials arriving in Iraq for limited tours. Iraqi society is complex. Coalition officials would often inflate the importance or trustworthiness of contacts, perhaps believing them both to have greater insight and fewer ulterior motives than other Iraqis. While most of Diamond's interactions occurred within the Green Zone, he describes a meeting with Sayyid Farqad al-Qazwini, a cleric at the University of Hilla whom Diamond describes as an influential,

pro-U.S. cleric. Diamond was unaware that Qazwini's collaboration with Saddam's regime kept him from membership on the Iraqi Governing Council. While Diamond praised Qazwini's democracy centers, these amounted to little. Qazwini contested Iraq's first election, draining the centers' budgets but managing only a few thousand votes, far less than needed to win a seat. Following the assassination of Fern Holland, a U.S. Agency for International Development contractor working with women in Iraq, the Coalition Provisional Authority transferred the women's centers she established to Qazwini, who proceeded to sell them and pocket the money, according to Iraqis living in Hilla.

The danger of drawing broad conclusions from short periods of time

is also apparent in Diamond's description of the CPA operation in Hilla. "Because of [Regional CPA director Michael] Gfoeller's extraordinary energy, vision, and organizational skills," he writes, "South Central ... was the region under CPA administration that was furthest along in promotion of democracy." Subsequent audits found corruption among U.S. personnel in CPA-South Central to be rampant. According to Stuart W. Bowen, Jr., the special inspector general for Iraq, "The reconstruction efforts during the CPA, in the South Central Region, around Hilla, failed."³⁷

Still, there is value in *Squandered Victory*. Diamond highlights CPA dysfunction between provisional teams and Bremer's Baghdad operation. He raises alarm about the militias—and complains that Bremer ignored his warnings—but appears unaware that, for all his praise of CPA's Hilla operation, it was Gfoeller who, in defiance of CPA efforts to marginalize militias, first empowered them.

The British military had little interest in supporting the CPA or reconstruction.

35 *The Wall Street Journal*, Apr. 4, 2004.

36 Kofi Annan, "Remarks on the Agreement between the Secretary-General and the Iraqi Government on Weapons Inspections," Feb. 24, 1998.

37 *NBC News*, Feb. 2, 2006.

THE VIEW FROM THE PROVINCES

Revolt on the Tigris. By Mark Etherington. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. 241 pp. \$25. **The Prince of the Marshes.** By Rory Stewart. New York: Harcourt, 2005. 416 pp. \$25.

Upon his return from Iraq, where he headed the CPA office in Al-Kut, British political officer Mark Etherington penned *Revolt on the Tigris*.

Like *Squandered Victory*, it is deeply flawed, more an exercise in navel-gazing than illumination. Rather than shed much light on Al-Kut, its political figures, or the complexity of the local society, Etherington describes meetings with Bremer, senior British representative Sir Jeremy

Greenstock, and other diplomats. Local color is limited to a few short paragraphs as Etherington hops from base to base. Overshadowing a one-paragraph overview of Al-Kut's demographics are thirty pages describing his compound, equipment, staff, e-mails he received, and his thoughts on the local Ukrainian detachment and military contractors. There is little insight into local politics.

Still, *Revolt on the Tigris* reflects the issues dominating CPA attention in late 2003 and early 2004. Etherington describes, albeit briefly, elections for municipal councilmen highlighting the local governments so often ignored in broader, Baghdad-centered accounts. He also touches on gas rationing and the rioting it sparked. His narrative culminates in the April 2004 revolt by Shi'ite populist Muqtada al-Sadr. Here, though, Etherington disappoints. He offers no analysis of Sadr's flirtation with the political process nor the motivations and planning that underpinned Sadr's strategy. Like Phillips and Diamond, Etherington sacrifices accuracy for legacy. An official after-battle report from Al-Kut singles Etherington out for blame and incompetence.³⁸

Etherington's compatriot Rory Stewart penned *The Prince of the Marshes*, a parallel, though far better, account of his time as "deputy governor" in both Al-Amara and Nasiriyah. Like Shadid, Stewart acknowledges the limits of personal experiences. But also like Shadid, Stewart's bias and sarcasm can, at times, detract from his narrative. He rails against "chino-wearing U.S. Republican appointees, fresh from the West Wing," but this stereotype appears lifted more from the editorial pages of British broadsheets than from reality.

He is more self-aware, however, than other writers. He discusses the struggle against the temptation to abuse power or drag adversaries through the mud. He considers Abu Hatim, a tribal leader who led local resistance against Saddam and whose English nickname Stewart borrows for his book title, for example, to be a warlord but bends over backwards not to let their mutual antagonism interfere in policy decisions.

The Prince of the Marshes reflects coalition confusion and lack of preparation for the duties of governance. The British military had little interest in supporting the CPA or reconstruction. The desire of British troops to leave is a recurrent theme. Stewart acknowledges that, while in theory, he had near-absolute authority over more than 850,000 people, in reality, he was powerless should they ignore him.

The problems he faced were serious. During his first formal audience, residents complained of political parties appropriating school property, farmers lacking seeds for the planting season, and a shortage of baby formula.

Stewart, perhaps because of linguistic ability or regional experience, is more attuned to nuance than Diamond or Etherington. He describes the tension between anti-Iranian tribal leaders such as Abu Hatim and pro-Iranian political leaders from the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq and Al-Da'wa. While journalists such as Rieff, Packer, and Ricks say that de-Baathification went too far, Stewart il-

³⁸ "Al-Kut, Iraq: After-Battle Report," *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2004, pp. 67-9.

What went wrong is likely to dominate discussion of Iraq for years to come.

lustrates the complexity of the issue: Many people in southern Iraq complained that it had not gone far enough.

Stewart's discussion of local governance is deeper than either Diamond's or Etherington's. He describes the difficulties of balancing local notables like Abu Hatim with pro-Iranian militias and followers of Muqtada al-Sadr. Stewart describes Abu Hatim's anger at learning his desire to incorporate Islamists and Sadrists into local governance. The episode raises an important question: Did British officials in southern Iraq, as Petraeus did in northern Iraq, empower recalcitrant and anti-democratic forces? Did they have a choice? To what extent were U.S. and British officials in Baghdad to blame? "I wrote to Baghdad promoting my new plan for the council," Stewart recounts. "I did not say that the councils were dominated by unpopular mafia gangsters ... Instead I wrote a draft in bureaucratic prose talking about a 'more inclusive approach.'" He received no immediate response but later complains of interference by democracy experts whose experience was in Bosnia. While Stewart was unhappy with their interference, his comment does counter the conventional wisdom spun by Rieff, Packer, and Chandrasekaran about the CPA's prioritization of political connections over expertise.

Stewart's subsequent narrative describes the province's descent into chaos. Sadrists murder the police chief, and tension grows over the selection of his replacement. Violence forces fence sitters to declare loyalties. Aid projects flounder. Demonstrations grow shrill, and corrupt clerics incite mobs to attack. Tensions erupt between Stewart, who seeks economic development, and Iraqi officials more interested in security. Less than six months after his arrival in Al-Amara, Stewart transfers to Nasiriyah. Here, his tenure did not last long. On June 28, 2004, the CPA transferred authority to an interim government. Stewart would not return for almost a year, at which time he would find little record or memory of the development projects he initiated, a depressing end to his narrative, and one which forces questions about the worth not only of Stewart's efforts but also of those of other Coalition personnel and Iraqis.

BREMER'S TAKE

My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope. L. Paul Bremer. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006. 417 pp. \$27.

Bremer's *My Year in Iraq* is perhaps the biggest disappointment in the autobiographical genre. While Bremer does not self-promote to the extent of Diamond or Galbraith, his chronicle provides little insight into his decision-making or vision during his 13-month tenure as the CPA's chief administrator. Bremer is gracious. He does not use his text to revenge animosities and, instead, ignores those with whom he sparred. He fails to acknowledge his rocky relationship with his military counterpart, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, nor does Bremer discuss his interactions with other prominent generals.

Discussion of civilian advisors is no more incisive. Savvy subordinates realized that the key to success was to remain quiet in the face of problems. Governance team member Meghan O'Sullivan, who has since risen to become Bush's deputy national security advisor for Iraq and Afghanistan, would remove items that contradicted what Bremer wanted to hear from memos before forwarding them to his office. Bremer describes her and others who seconded his opinions as "personable," "cheerful," and "brilliant." Those, such as Jeremy Greenstock, who challenged his positions, barely appear in the narrative. His ego is apparent. He details media appearances, unaware of the antagonism they caused outside the Green Zone's cement blast walls.

Bremer does address those analysts who charge that his decisions to dissolve the Iraqi army and pursue de-Baathification backfired. He is correct to note that the Iraqi army had disbanded itself weeks before his arrival. The trouble lay in their pension payments. Nor was

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de-Baathification as wide-ranging as some journalist assumed: It affected only 20,000 top officials and not most ministry technocrats.

Readers seeking reflection will be disappointed. Like Etherington, Bremer discusses Sadr's uprising but does not reflect upon how Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi militia infiltrated so deep and wide beyond the notice of both provincial

CPA teams and the Central Intelligence Agency. He derides the Governing Council as ineffective on eighteen different pages, yet their squabbling mirrored real political debate and was little different from that which occurred within the CPA. He describes events as they unfold but fails to posit either why they occurred or how policymakers might avoid their replica-

tion. Juxtaposing *The Prince of the Marshes* with *My Year* illustrates perhaps more than any other combination of books the dysfunction of the CPA period as well as the gap between coalition policy and Iraqi reality.

Photos debunk the myth that the Pentagon discounted warnings about the Baghdad museum's location and carelessly fired on it.

ARCHAEOLOGY, HERITAGE, AND IDENTITY

Thieves of Baghdad. By Matthew Bogdanos (with William Patrick). New York: Bloomsbury, 2005. 320 pp. \$25.95. **Reclaiming a Plundered Past.** By Magnus Bernhardsson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005. 327 pp. \$45. **Memoirs of State.** By Eric Davis. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. 385 pp. \$24.95.

Nothing dampened optimism about post-Saddam Iraq faster than looting. Satellites beamed images of Iraqis looting and burning buildings. Rumsfeld dismissed the initial reports of looting and, on April 11, 2003, chided journalists. "The images you are seeing on television you are seeing over, and over, and over, and it's the same picture of the some person walking out

of some building with a vase, and you see it twenty times, and you think 'My goodness, were there that many vases?,'" he asked. "Is it possible that there were that many vases in the whole country?"³⁹

News that looters had sacked the Iraq Museum in Baghdad helped coalesce U.S. domestic opposition to the project in Iraq. On April 16, 2003, the American Schools of Oriental Research, a professional organization for U.S. archaeologists working in the Middle East, issued a statement declaring the museum looting to be "the most severe blow to cultural heritage in modern history, comparable to the sack of Constantinople, the burning of the library at Alexandria, the Vandal and Mogul [*sic*] invasions, and the ravages of the conquistadors."⁴⁰ While reports of the museum looting were exaggerated and much of the theft an inside job,⁴¹ the Iraq Museum incident does loom large in two post-war books.

The investigation into the museum looting is the subject of Matthew Bogdanos's *Thieves of Baghdad*. Bogdanos, an assistant district attorney in Manhattan and a Marine reservist charged with leading the team investigating the incident, begins his narrative with the museum director, her AK-47-toting guards, and a host of other investigators as they move through the museum to catalogue missing artifacts. Ten days into their work, they entered the museum vault. While its steel doors had remained closed, looters had entered through a secret entrance, long since walled up. The thieves had left unmolested empty boxes and instead had made a beeline for those crates that had contained valuables. They had located a set of keys hidden behind a stack of otherwise untouched files. Their maneuvers were all in the dark; electricity was out at the time of the thefts. While journalists had described

39 "News Briefing: Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers," U.S. Department of Defense, Apr. 11, 2003.

40 "Statement on Baghdad Museum," American Schools of Oriental Research, Apr. 16, 2003.

41 Alexander H. Joffe, "Museum Madness in Baghdad," *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2004, pp. 31-43.

the museum thefts as the result of looting and lawlessness, investigators determined it to be an inside job. And, while the *New York Times* parroted the estimate of Adonia “Donny” George Youkhanna, the museum’s director of research and spokesman, that looters had stolen 170,000 artifacts,⁴² the real figure was closer to 17,000.

As the investigation continued, Bogdanos reflects on the nature of society and what impact that has on the investigation. Iraqis seldom differentiate between hearsay and direct knowledge; rarely does anyone volunteer information. Imams at neighborhood mosques become allies. The museum staff itself is compartmentalized in ways far more complex than any official wire diagram could depict, and titles did not necessarily correlate to power. A handful of employees privy to contingency plans kept the status of certain artifacts secret from others who theoretically outranked them. While George Youkhanna was interlocutor for journalists and Western scholars, he was out-of-the-loop. Hana Abdul Khaliq projected terror throughout the complex not because of her management position but rather because of her relationship to Muhammad Zimam Abd al-Razzaq al-Sadun, a senior Baath Party activist who was the four of spades (number 41) on the deck of cards of wanted regime officials.

While Bogdanos’s work helped lead to the retrieval of many of the artifacts believed lost, navigating among Iraqis was not his only obstacle. He describes—tactfully omitting names—interference by Coalition Provisional Authority civilians and State Department ambassadors who wanted personalized tours in ways that would



The Iraqi National Museum, containing objects from the Sumerian, Assyrian, Akkadian, and pre-Islamic eras, was pillaged following the coalition overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Investigators determined that much of the looting was an inside job, but while initial accounts reported some 170,000 artifacts stolen, the real figure was closer to 17,000.

have disrupted the crime scene. He also had to counter U.N. officials who, despite having accurate information available, made false statements about the artifacts looted.

Complementing Bogdanos’s gripping prose are several pages of photographs, maps, and diagrams. Some of the photos also debunk the myth—popularized in academic circles—that the Pentagon discounted warnings about the museum’s location and carelessly fired on it, in one case sending a tank round through a replica arch at the Children’s Museum. While the ordinance damage is real, so too are the firing positions dug by the Iraqi army. Most U.S. academics have yet to correct the record.

Magnus Bernhardsson, a professor of history at William College, begins *Reclaiming a Plundered Past*, his study of archaeology and nation building in Iraq, with reference to the looting of the museum. But this provides only the backdrop to a much deeper investigation of the development of archaeology in Iraq and its role in Iraqi nationalism. While there are records of European travelers in Mesopotamia dating back almost one thousand years, Western archaeolo-

42 *The New York Times*, Apr. 13, 2003.

gists only began systematic work in what is now Iraq in the early nineteenth century. While the formation of Iraq ended the free export of artifacts, the famous British diplomatic and Orientalist Gertrude Bell served as director of antiquities under the British mandate. Upon Iraqi independence in 1932, newspapers launched a campaign for Baghdad to reassert authority over Iraq's archaeological heritage. It did. Quickly, though, archaeology and politics became intertwined. Bernhardsson points out that between 1932 and 1941, and again between 1963 and 1968, Iraqi officials used archaeology to emphasize Iraq's pan-Arab and Islamic heritage. Between 1958 and 1963, and then under Saddam Hussein's rule, the government emphasized Iraq's pre-Islamic heritage, the most famous example of which was Saddam's 1982 decision to rebuild Babylon. While the postwar literature is full of instant experts, Bernhardsson is an authentic scholar. He bases his study not only on published Western sources but, as a scholar comfortable with Arabic, also on an extensive array of Iraqi newspapers, pamphlets, and reports dating back to Iraq's independence. While Bernhardsson's prose is scholarly and dry, he does not bury his story in unnecessary jargon.

Nationalism and identity are not frozen in time. Readers wishing to understand the complexity and development of Iraqi nationalism should read Bernhardsson together with the study by Rutgers University professor Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*. Davis also taps a rich array of archival sources to track the rise and fall of the Iraqi sense of state. He not only elaborates on what books and authors the state promoted but also on those who had their works banned. Unlike many instant experts who have written on Iraq, he does not conflate U.S. political commentary with Iraqi history. Instead, he studies Iraq's political and popular culture in its own right to trace the rise of popular Iraqi nationalism. Davis argues that the Iraqi sense of state peaked in the 1970s but declined as Saddam Hussein supplanted Baath Party control with family control.

While Arab-Kurdish strife is well covered elsewhere, Davis's examination of sectarian di-

visions within the country is particularly useful given the problems now plaguing Iraq. Davis identifies the warning signs of sectarian struggle: Shi'ite demonstrations in Najaf and Karbala in 1977, tit-for-tat attacks in 1980, and the rise of the Islamist Da'wa party while also showing why Iraqi Shi'ites remained unimpressed with the Iranian model of theocracy. What has changed between 1980 and now would be a worthy topic for a sequel.

Davis's chapter on Iraqi political and intellectual culture in the wake of the Kuwait war is also important. He discusses both new institutions of control as well as Saddam's efforts to alter Iraqi culture. While the Baath Party once declared its intention to eradicate tribalism, Saddam re-emphasized tribalism in the 1990s in order to reassert control over the Shi'ite south. Saddam began to ask officers their tribal surnames during visits to military bases. He also surveys Saddam's own articles and writings during this period. While hindsight is always 20-20, Davis discusses the roots of the trends about which other authors—Columbia University professor Rashid Khalidi, for example⁴³—appear ignorant.

THEMES FOR THE FUTURE

Iraq, Inc.: A Profitable Occupation. By Pratap Chatterjee. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004. 246 pp. \$11.95.

What went wrong is likely to dominate discussion of Iraq for years to come. The first draft of history is seldom correct. Already, the narrative shows fluidity as officials and experts delve deeper into actions of the many actors and decision-makers. Still, the process is far from complete. There has been little study of decision-making in the National Security Council. Many writers focus on the State versus Defense Department rivalry, but few explore decisions made

⁴³ Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

by Rice, her deputy (and current national security advisor Stephen Hadley), senior directors Khalilzad and Elliott Abrams, and later deputy national security advisor Robert Blackwill. There is little reason why their minutes, discussions, and notes should remain classified.

Also lacking in the narrative has been exploration of the Central Intelligence Agency's role. This is crucial because of the CIA's ability to leverage funding into policy. The State Department and Pentagon could struggle for months to reach consensus, but so long as the CIA could ply Iraqis with money, their agreement would be moot. Nowhere was this more apparent than with the prewar and immediate post-liberation maneuverings of Gen. Nizar al-Khazraji and Ayad Allawi, both of whom received logistic and financial support to consolidate their positions in defiance of interagency consensus.

There has been little exploration of other watershed events. Very little is known about the assassination of Iraqi cleric Abdul Majid al-Khoei on April 9, 2003, an act of violence that propelled Muqtada al-Sadr into the limelight. While West touches on the issue, there has been

little examination of the repeated decisions not to arrest Sadr. There has been little treatment of U.S. reconstruction policy although there is little question that corruption and mismanagement were rampant. In *Iraq, Inc.*, Pratap Chatterjee, program director of CorpWatch, takes a stab at exploration of corruption and contracting, but his polemics and questionable source treatment undercuts his study. There is much room for dispassionate analysis should enterprising financial reporters and forensic accountants choose to do so.

Captured Iraqi documents should also serve as needed correctives. Despite Davis's excellent account, Iraqi history remains a virtual black hole. Little is known of internal deliberations, nor—beyond Iraqi Kurdistan—of local politics and center-periphery relations. Apart from literature questioning the efficacy or morality of sanctions, the release of such documents will enable discussion of Iraq's economy.

Much has been written about Iraq, but the best may be yet to come.



AP Gets It Wrong on Baghdad Mosques

The Iraqi Ministry of Interior says disputed Associated Press source Jamil Hussein does exist. But at least one story he told the AP just doesn't check out: The Sunni mosques that Hussein claimed and AP reported as "destroyed," "torched," and "burned and [blown] up" are all *still standing*. So the credibility of every AP story relying on Jamil Hussein remains dubious.

When the AP ran its head-line-grabbing and horrifying account of alleged atrocities in Baghdad last Thanksgiving, its main source was an Iraqi police captain, one Jamil Hussein. ...

One of the mosques identified by the AP, the Nidaa Alah mosque, had been abandoned and vacant at the time it was hit with small-arms fire, say Iraqi and U.S. Army officials. ... Three other mosques in the area ... sustained small-arms fire damage to their exteriors; the Mustafa mosque also had two rooms burned out by a firebomb.

Contrary to Hussein and the AP's account, military reports note that Iraqi army battalion members were on the scene—pursuing attackers, securing the area, calling the fire department, providing support and an outer cordon.

Neither *The New York Times* nor *The Washington Post* was able to confirm AP's story. ...

Deception and manipulation are also tools of the insurgent trade. Satellites, cellphones and Internet cafes aid insurgent and militia propaganda wars 24/7. It behooves the Western media to acknowledge these realities and maintain as much transparency about their sources and local stringers as possible.

Michelle Malkin, *The New York Post*, Jan. 21, 2007