

America and Iraq

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regional politics**

Edited by
David Ryan and Patrick Kiely

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This book will be of great interest to all students of US foreign policy, Middle Eastern politics, Strategic Studies and IR in general.

David Ryan is a member of the Department of History, and Associate Dean, Graduate Studies in the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, University College Cork. **Patrick Kiely** is a Research Fellow in the Department of History, University College Cork.

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For Heidi, Daniel, Hannah and Luca
and
For the Kiely family and Claire
for their support over the years

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Preface

Lara Marlowe

In late 2002 and early 2003, it was obvious that George W. Bush was determined to invade Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein, with or without a UN mandate. It was equally obvious that the invasion would plunge the region into ever greater chaos and violence. There are times when a journalist would rather not be vindicated.

Although we wrote about Saddam Hussein's murderous dictatorship, journalists who criticized the invasion were accused of supporting Saddam. The Pentagon and British Ministry of Defence went to great lengths to prevent us covering the March and April 2003 bombardment from Baghdad.

The results of the war were writ large in its initial conduct. As the US Air Force pounded away at Iraq's infrastructure, we were constantly reassured that telephone exchanges, government ministries and other infrastructure would be rebuilt; they never were.

On 8 April 2003, a tank from the 4th Infantry Division fired a shell at the Palestine Hotel – where the whole world knew the press were staying – killing two of my colleagues. Washington never accepted responsibility for the deaths of Taras Protsyuk and Jose Couso, no more than it acknowledged the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians.

If a US soldier felt threatened, Gen. Ricardo Sanchez said, he had orders to shoot. On the Dora highway south of Baghdad, I saw the blackened, bloated bodies of dozens of civilians who were picked off by US gunners as they entered the capital.

I asked US Ambassador Ryan Crocker in May 2008 whether, as the representative of the United States, he felt responsible for the destruction of the country. 'I got here in March 2007 and history starts for me then,' he replied. It was up to the historians of the future to determine what had happened. 'The scholars of the future will be spending generations on what happened in 2003 and after,' he predicted.

Present-day scholars writing in this book give keys for understanding what has happened in Iraq. Kenneth Osgood's chapter on 'Eisenhower and regime change in Iraq: the United States and the Iraqi Revolution of 1958' notes the perennial US oscillation 'between conflict and cooperation,

between working with the regime in Baghdad and conspiring against it.' The Eisenhower administration considered going to war in Iraq in 1958 but feared it would have a disastrous effect on world public opinion. It's a pity the Bush administration did not have the same foresight in 2003.

Jon Roper's chapter on 'The imperial presidency redux: presidential power and the war in Iraq' chronicles the assumption of US conservatives over the past half century that authority and power should be concentrated in the executive branch. George W. Bush, he concludes, 'is the latest American "Caesar" to become a casualty of a failed war that lost him the public confidence necessary to the exercise of effective Presidential power.'

John Morrissey's chapter on 'US central command and the war in Iraq' lends credence to suspicions that whatever presidential candidates may promise, the US will never leave Iraq, because Iraq's oil and location are vital to US interests.

A West Point graduate serving in Iraq recently spoke to me of John Nagl's book *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, whose title was inspired by a quote from T.E. Lawrence. Marilyn B. Young shrewdly picked up on the US military's romantic, comical and alarming fascination with Lawrence. Americans may see themselves as Lawrence-like would-be liberators, but Iraqis see them as invaders and occupiers.

Cheerleaders for the Bush invasion persisted through the failed mandates of Gen. Jay Garner and Paul Bremer, through the corruption and discredit of two Iraqi governments and the disgrace of the torture at Abu Ghraib prison. As Iraq descended into the world capital of suicide bombings and beheadings, the Americans blamed savage Iraqis. A US mercenary in Baghdad told me in May 2008: 'The Iraqis are like the Watts rioters: hell-bent on destroying their country.'

The neo-con cheerleaders fell silent around 2006; Iraqis called it 'the year of disaster.' Hostilities between Sunni and Shia started as soon as Saddam fell, but burgeoned into civil war proportions when al-Qaeda in Iraq blew up the Shia golden mosque in Samarra in February 2006.

It took Bush's 'surge,' the defection of 90 000 Sunnis from the insurgency to the US-backed Sahwa or Sons of Iraq militia and relative restraint by Moqtada al-Sadr's Jaish al-Mehdi militia to bring the bloodshed of 2006 and 2007 down to manageable proportions. In May 2008, the US announced that violence had reached its lowest level in four years.

Yet the words 'fragile and reversible' accompany every US announcement of improvement. The retired four-star General Barry McCaffrey summed up the situation before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April 2008:

It's a hell of a mess. I mean, you know, there's just no way about it. It's a USD 600 billion war, 34,000 (US servicemen) killed and wounded. We've alienated most of the global population. The American people don't support the war. And the Iraqi government's dysfunctional.

There is no guarantee that the security gains of late 2007 and 2008 will survive substantial US troop withdrawals. At least seven conflicts are still brewing in Iraq: Arabs vs. Kurds over possession of oil-rich Kirkuk; the upper-class Shia of the Supreme Islamic Council in Iraq vs. the poor Shia who follow Moqtada al-Sadr; al-Qaeda in Iraq vs. the Shia; al-Qaeda vs. Sunni 'traitors'; US forces vs. al-Qaeda and US forces vs. al-Sadr's Jaish al-Mehdi. Last and certainly not least is the rivalry between Iran and the US for influence in Iraq, a veritable new Cold War.

If Iraq is to overcome these wars within wars, it must reach consensus on how to share oil revenues and how to govern itself. Pressures by some US lawmakers and the Kurds for 'soft partition' could set a dangerous precedent for the dismemberment of an Arab state. Yet the Sunni and Shia who 'ethnically cleansed' most of Baghdad over the past two years seemed to arrange themselves by design, to achieve contiguity between the Sunni neighbourhoods of west Baghdad and the Sunni heartland of Abu Ghraib, Ramadi and Falluja.

More than five years after the invasion, there are only questions, no answers. Will the US stay? In what form, and for how long? Will the US attack Iran? And will the war between Sunni and Shia reignite? History has taught us to fear the worst.

Lara Marlowe, May 2008

(Lara Marlowe covered the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its aftermath for
The Irish Times.)

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Introduction

David Ryan

The US intervention in Iraq has had a profound impact on that country, the region and for the future of US foreign policy and power. The impact is made all the more significant because, after all, this was a 'war of choice.' The intervention has not only largely defined the foreign policy of the Bush administration but also partly characterized the identity of the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is an irony of significant proportions that in 1990 and early 1991, the administration of George Bush Sr. made the case for repelling the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on the basis of protecting notions of sovereignty in the then 'new world order.' Despite the many shortcomings of the normative element of international relations during the Cold War, as both superpowers fuelled local conflicts, there was a pervasive sense of balance that characterized the period and compromised various readings of sovereignty. Obviously the issue of sovereignty was extensively debated and compromised across the 1990s too, but the war started in 2003 in Iraq, again based on choice, violated the strict interpretations of sovereignty. The consequences are obviously significant and profound. Following the fraught transatlantic diplomacy and reflecting on the repercussions of the Iraq war, Jürgen Habermas concluded that 'the normative authority of the United States of America lies in ruins.'¹ More recently examining the fallout, Richard Falk too has highlighted the 'normative costs' and the war's implications for world order and the 'evaluation of the neoconservative blueprint for U.S. foreign policy from the perspectives of world order.' Though the Baker-Hamilton Report (2006) provided an opportunity for disengagement, negotiation and 'Iraqification', Bush chose otherwise, to initiate the 'surge' and 'stay [...] the course.' The implications are profound in terms of the erosion of the 'legitimacy of American global leadership.'² The costs and implications for Iraq are unfathomable as one considers the extent and depth of suffering, since 2003, but also for decades under the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein. The implications for Iraq's viability are still to be played out with regional and global repercussions. The costs are far more widespread than the limited focus here. There is already a revival in the literature on US Decline³ and on the 'post-American' world and the prospects of an era of 'nonpolarity.'⁴ In 1977 when Jimmy Carter assumed the presidency he explicitly sought to

restore the moral authority of the nation. As he indicated in his inaugural, 'I have no new dream to set forth today, but rather urge a fresh faith in the old dream.' The United States could be better and stronger than before, 'let our recent mistakes bring a resurgent commitment to the basic principles of our Nation...' were themes that he tried to develop alongside concepts of 'shared leadership,' which is a theme he has revisited in recent months.⁵

This volume aims to provide a broad set of reflections on the US intervention in Iraq placing it within a broad temporal approach provided by perspectives informed by a range of leading US historians as well as contributions from some younger scholars using innovative methods to interrogate US foreign policy, ideology and culture. The current period is prefaced with a set of essays that examine the US–Iraqi relationship since 1958 and earlier US justifications and strategies used to legitimate their involvement. Kenneth Osgood examines the bilateral and regional relationship surrounding the 1958 Iraqi Revolution and its aftermath. The impact of the 1967 War and the Nixon Doctrine on the regional balance of power and its implications for Iraq are developed by Patrick Kiely. I then trace the US attempts at rapprochement during the 1980s and its ultimate failure prior to the 1990–1991 Gulf War and crucially the decision to end that engagement short of Baghdad. Marilyn B. Young moves between the US romance of Lawrence of Arabia and the contemporary counterinsurgency debates and provides a study on how the romantic framework informed current tactics.

The chapters on the contemporary crisis investigate the causes and consequences of regime change and its failure. Iraq expert Toby Dodge sets US plans against the 'reality' they faced in the country. John Morrissey provides an analysis of CENTCOM within the context of US grand strategy and geopolitics. Three chapters then focus on domestic influences on the Bush administration. Trevor B. McCrisken examines the prevailing influence of US exceptionalism and the manner in which the administration was informed by these ideologies and framed their policies within that context. Melani McAlister provides an analysis of the influence of Evangelical Christians on US policy and the administration. Scott Lucas and Maria Ryan scrutinize the quest for unipolarity and the use of Iraq as a demonstration case for US foreign policy. Jon Roper then revisits the questions of presidential power and the 'imperial presidency,' while Cary Fraser reflects on the question of US empire and the potential decline of regional hegemony. Finally, James Deneslow, with extensive regional expertise, looks at the attempts to bring security to Iraq through rapidly changing norms and conventions on border control, with a particular focus on the Iraqi–Syrian border. Hence the collection aims to provide historical and contemporary analysis combined with reflections on US policy-making, culture and an analysis on the local, regional and global impact of war in Iraq.

The debate on the future direction and identity of US foreign policy begins to take sharp relief, as President Bush and Senator John McCain chastised Senator Barack Obama for offering to talk to US regional opponents,

through the divisive invocation of the Munich analogy and tactics of appeasement.⁶ In part the Iraq War of 2003 was brought on by the belief, held by some, that it offered an opportunity to transform US strategic interests and identity after Vietnam and after the inhibited closure of the 1991 Gulf War. These beliefs cut against other lessons of an earlier devastating war. In 1975 an NSC study on the 'lessons of Vietnam' informed Kissinger:

Having been badly burned in Viet-Nam, the American people now appear to have quite different, and more limited, vision of our proper role in the world and our ability to influence events. In a sense, a control mechanism has evolved within our society which is likely to prevent for the foreseeable future any repetition of a Viet-Nam style involvement. The danger may therefore be not that we will ignore the lessons of Viet-Nam, but that we will be tempted to apply them too broadly, in East Asia and around the world.... It is tempting to say, as many do, that we should either use our power totally or not use it at all.⁷

Apart from all the local, regional and international repercussions and dynamics resulting from the Iraq War, how the United States reads, remembers and narrates its experience will be pivotal in years to come.

Notes

- 1 Jürgen Habermas, *The Divided West* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).
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- 3 See a good review by Michael Cox, 'Is the United States in decline – again?' *International Affairs*, vol. 83, no. 4 (2007), 643–653.
- 4 Fareed Zakaria, 'The Future of American Power: How America Can Survive the Rise of the Rest,' 18–43; and Richard Haass, 'The Age of Nonpolarity: What Will Follow U.S. Dominance,' 44–56, both in *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2008).
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1 Eisenhower and regime change in Iraq

The United States and the Iraqi Revolution of 1958

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Shortly after the 1991 Gulf War, the Mexican-American comedian Paul Rodriguez joked that war was God's way of teaching geography. 'Before the war in the Middle East,' he confessed, 'I didn't know what the hell Kuwait was. I thought it was a fruit from New Zealand.'¹ Rodriguez's humorous observation captured the ethos of an American public that is often poorly informed about the wider world, but which, in moments of crisis, scrambles to make sense of its role in the global community. Rodriguez could also have pointed out that America's wars abroad have acted as catalysts for tutorials in US diplomatic history. This is especially true with respect to the Middle East, where the pace of historical inquiry has largely followed the emergence of crises in such places as Palestine, Egypt, and Iran. This volume is itself testimony to the power of contemporary problems – in this case, the ongoing war in Iraq – to provoke scholars and the wider public to reflect more deeply on the historical background of crises in the Middle East.

Prior to 1991, you could search in vain for books or articles that focused on the history of US foreign policy toward Iraq. To the extent that Iraq figured at all in historical writing on US foreign relations, it did so only indirectly – as but a small component of broader studies of such issues as the Arab–Israeli dispute, the British Empire, Arab nationalism, and the Cold War. The situation has improved slightly during the last 15 years, but Iraq effectively remains a black hole in US diplomatic history. We know more about the 1991 Gulf War than we do about US–Iraqi relations during the five decades of Cold War that led up to it. Indeed, we know more about the conduct of the *present* war in Iraq than we do about the historical events that preceded it. Thus, putting the current conflict in its proper historical perspective is as difficult as it is important. So too is it necessary to examine US–Iraqi relations on their own terms. As Nathan Citino has written, 'more research is sorely needed to prevent America's wars with Saddam Hussein from distorting historical interpretations of previous US–Iraqi relations.'²

A broadened historical perspective reveals that America's troubled relationship with Saddam Hussein was anything but an aberration in US–Iraqi

relations. For over a half-century, US policy toward Iraq oscillated between conflict and cooperation, between working with the regime in Baghdad to conspiring against it. At recurring intervals, American policymakers carefully considered various types of interventions in Iraq – from direct military intervention, to covert operations, to more subtle efforts to shape, manipulate, or influence Iraqi politics. Iraq was hardly unique in this regard, of course: the history of US foreign policy is to a great extent the history of American intervention abroad. As Stephen Kinzer has expertly chronicled, the most drastic form of intervention, ‘regime change,’ has been a recurring feature of US foreign policy since the nineteenth century. At least 14 times since 1893 the United States played a decisive role in overthrowing foreign governments. On many other occasions Americans played a supporting role in campaigns directed against leaders and regimes at odds with the United States. American leaders often considered regime change to be a legitimate objective of US foreign policy, even if they usually hid that sentiment from the public.³

Well-intentioned critics of George W. Bush’s foreign policy were mistaken, then, in concluding that his policy of ‘preemptive war’ to spark ‘regime change’ in Iraq somehow represented a dramatic break from the normal course of American foreign relations. What was unique about George W. Bush was not that he used American power to topple a foreign government, but the *way* that he went about it: openly and brazenly declaring his determination to do so. President Bush also was not the first to seek regime change in Iraq. His immediate predecessors, George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, had made overthrowing Saddam Hussein a top priority, though they opted to use clandestine measures, rather than direct military force to do so.⁴

American leaders seriously considered regime change at earlier moments as well. The first instance was a half-century ago, near the end of the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower. The precipitating incident was the Iraqi Revolution of July 14, 1958. Early that morning, a group of army officers surrounded the royal palace in Baghdad and executed the king and his family. The Hashemite dynasty, which had ruled Iraq as a virtual proxy of the British Empire since the 1920s, was dead. When the coup plotters announced on the radio that the army had liberated Iraq from British imperialism, Iraqis poured into the streets to celebrate the downfall of the old regime. Shortly thereafter, army officers found and shot the former prime minister of Iraq, Nuri al-Sa’id. Nuri had been one of Britain’s closest allies in the Middle East, and he was widely regarded by ordinary Iraqis as a tool of the British Empire. Cheering crowds celebrated Nuri’s death by parading his mutilated remains through the streets of the capital.⁵

The events of that day triggered a wave of panic among other pro-Western regimes in the Middle East. Leaders in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Lebanon feared that they might be the next victims of nationalist revolution. Washington and London went into crisis mode. Concerned about their interests and their allies, the American and British governments promptly

dispatched troops to shore-up the pro-Western governments of Lebanon and Jordan respectively.⁶ These interventions have overshadowed the more complex and confused set of politics that the United States pursued with respect to post-revolutionary Iraq. Much of the historical writing on the Iraqi Revolution has focused on the impact of the Iraq crisis on other areas of the Middle East or on Anglo-American relations. Mirroring the neglect of Iraq in the broader historiography, diplomatic historians have devoted little attention to the impact of the 1958 crisis on US–Iraqi relations.⁷

In the aftermath of the July revolution, American officials debated quite seriously the possibility of invading Baghdad and toppling the new government of Iraq. Detailed operational plans were developed, but the invasion never happened. The Eisenhower administration chose restraint. It also labored to ensure that other governments followed suit. For differing reasons, the British, Iranian, Turkish, Egyptian, and Israeli governments also explored the possibility of invading Iraq, but were persuaded not to do so, in part because of US efforts. Why the Eisenhower administration rejected military intervention as an option for itself and its allies is the subject of this chapter. It argues that the Eisenhower administration refrained from military action to provoke regime change not for idealistic reasons stemming from the morality and legality of overthrowing a foreign government, but for pragmatic reasons stemming from the consequences of doing so. Remarkably, the Eisenhower administration expressed little concern that military intervention would precipitate war with the Soviet Union, despite the blustery threats made by Nikita Khrushchev during the Iraq crisis.⁸ But it was deeply troubled by the probable impact an intervention would have on the broader battle for hearts and minds in the Cold War. The Eisenhower administration calculated that military intervention would damage the broader geopolitical position of the United States because it would have a catastrophic impact on world public opinion. It would damage the US reputation in the world and severely undermine American efforts to win friends and allies in the Middle East and the broader Third World. Moreover, American officials acknowledged, an invasion would be disastrous within Iraq itself. A hostile nationalist backlash would precipitate armed resistance against US forces, if not civil war. Any government imposed on Iraq would be overthrown in time. Civil war and chaos would probably result, and radical movements hostile to the United States would gain influence in Iraq and elsewhere in the region. In short, intangible ‘psychological’ factors – the impact on hearts and minds – restrained the Eisenhower administration from using military power in Iraq.

The chapter also examines the secret debate that took place within the Eisenhower administration about clandestine operations. Believing that direct military action would inflict irreparable harm on America’s reputation and capacity for global leadership, the Eisenhower administration explored the possibility that it could achieve its goals in Iraq by working covertly with Iraqi opposition groups and various foreign intelligence services. Because many sources remain classified, it is impossible to determine what

kinds of covert operations the United States implemented in response to the Iraqi revolution. This chapter does suggest, however, that the available records provide circumstantial evidence linking the Eisenhower administration to various assassination and coup attempts perpetrated at the end of the 1950s. If the Eisenhower administration was prudent and restrained in its application of military power, it appeared less so in the matter of covert action.

Dual containment in the Middle East

US policy toward Iraq in the aftermath of the revolution was primarily shaped by the larger strategic calculations that governed US foreign policy to the region as a whole. Generally speaking, the overarching objective of US national security strategy can be stated simply: preserve Western access to the region's oil resources. The imperative of protecting Western access to Middle Eastern oil is one of the most consistently argued themes running through US national security documents after 1946. A top State Department official articulated this theme clearly in the midst of the 1958 Iraq crisis, announcing succinctly: 'The principal Western interest in Iraq ... is oil.'⁹

Although today US prosperity virtually demands a continued flow of oil from the Middle East to the United States, in the early Cold War years the American interest in the region's oil resources was less directly linked to the American economy. To be sure, by 1958 American oil companies had developed an important stake in the petroleum reserves of Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other overseas locations. Yet because the United States imported only a small percentage of its petroleum needs until the early 1970s, the flow of oil from the Middle East did not have as direct an influence on the American economy as it does today.¹⁰ The same could not be said of Western Europe. By the early 1950s, key European economies appeared reliant on Middle Eastern petroleum for their economic and strategic health. The United Kingdom especially depended on Persian Gulf oil for both fuel and hard currency. As Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, noted: 'If the oil fields of Iraq and Kuwait fell under hostile control, the financial impact on the United Kingdom might be catastrophic.'¹¹ The turmoil in Iraq loomed especially large for American officials because the economic health of America's closest Cold War ally was at stake.

Because the military strength and economic prosperity of America's NATO allies were intertwined with Persian Gulf oil, US policy toward the Middle East was, in a sense, hostage to European fuel needs. The National Security Council (NSC) established, as a matter of policy, that the United States had to do everything in its power to ensure the uninterrupted flow of oil to Western Europe from the Middle East – an area known in the 1950s as the Near East. 'The critical importance of Near Eastern oil to our NATO allies requires that we make every effort to insure its continued availability to us and to our allies,' the NSC announced in its November 1958

statement of US policy toward the region. Accordingly, the United States should be

prepared to use force, but only as a last resort, either alone or in support of the United Kingdom, to insure that the quantity of oil available from the Near East on reasonable terms is sufficient ... to meet Western Europe's requirements.¹²

Such a clear statement of US readiness to employ any measure to preserve Western access to Middle Eastern oil on favorable terms surfaced time and again in US policy papers during the postwar period.

Two interrelated concerns also dominated US thinking with respect to the Middle East. First there was the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Washington was determined to prevent the region from falling under communist control or Soviet influence. The United States was especially concerned to keep the Soviets from encroaching on the region's oil reserves, which would have a disastrous impact on strategic plans for the defense of Western Europe. The second concern was Arab nationalism. Led by the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, Arab nationalists threatened to undermine Western hegemony in the Middle East. Nasser and his supporters opposed foreign military establishments on Arab territory, railed against the exploitive economic practices of European colonial powers, and conspired against the conservative autocratic regimes that dominated the region's politics and appeared to do the bidding of the West. Many also called for Arab unity and the building of a single pan-Arab state. This dream appeared possible at about the same time as the Iraqi coup. Egypt and Syria had merged to create the United Arab Republic (UAR) five months earlier, in February 1958, and Nasser signaled his interest in bringing more Arab states into the fold. This seemed to jeopardize the pro-Western regimes of the area which ruled with the thinnest base of popular support. Further exasperating the United States, many nationalists urged a neutralist path between the opposing power blocs of the Cold War. For much of the 1950s, American officials ranked nationalism as a greater concern than communism, for the simple reason that nationalism had much wider popular appeal than atheistic communism in the widely Islamic Middle East. In addition, Arab nationalism posed a direct threat to the conservative, pro-Western, and often authoritarian regimes that guaranteed Western access to Persian Gulf oil at reasonably low prices.

Accordingly, US strategy toward the Middle East evolved into a form of 'dual containment.' It was directed at preventing communist encroachment while simultaneously limiting the appeal of Arab nationalism. Since Nasser was often the chief spokesperson and most powerful promoter of Arab nationalism, this dual containment strategy in practical terms meant containing both Egypt and the USSR. The American response to the Iraqi revolution would be shaped by this dual containment strategy as well as by the related goal of protecting Western oil access.¹³