GARY ROSEN

Introduction

THIS VOLUME IS NOT A HISTORY OF THE WAR IN IRAQ, NOR IS IT A systematic exploration of the issues raised by the war. It contains no government documents or presidential pronouncements, and there is not a single public official among its contributors. Though a diverse collection of opinion pieces and journal articles, it does not pretend to cover the full range of views on the American effort to overthrow and replace the regime of Saddam Hussein. It is a sampling taken exclusively from writers who belong, by self-identification or by the character of their arguments, to the political right. It is partial, partisan, incomplete – and yet it represents what is perhaps the most interesting and consequential foreign-policy discussion now going on in the United States.

This is true, in the first instance, because the levers of American foreign policy are in the hands of a Republican administration whose outlook has been shaped decisively by certain currents of conservative thought. George W. Bush's decision to go to war in Iraq did not spring directly from the pages of the *Weekly Standard*, *Commentary*, or the *Wall Street Journal*, but the influence of these and like-minded publications on the actions and rhetoric of the administration is unmistakable. The Bush Doctrine, with its combination of military assertiveness and democratic idealism, may have been declared in the wake of 9/11, but the intellectual groundwork for it was laid years before by the editors, pundits, academics, and think-tank denizens who call themselves – and are now widely recognized as – neoconservatives.

Because this group of thinkers has had so obvious an impact on the Bush administration, neoconservatism has been the object of a great deal of critical scrutiny by liberal and radical opponents of the war in Iraq. Some of this criticism has been constructive; much of it has been irresponsible, even hysterical, particularly in suggesting that the White House has fallen

prey to a secretive foreign-policy cabal. The irony of these dark mutterings is that, whatever their other faults, neoconservatives have never been shy about announcing and promoting their agenda. They are famously eager intellectual combatants, always ready to butt heads with opponents on the left or, for that matter, critics on their own side of the political aisle.

Indeed, what has often been overlooked in the attention paid to liberal unhappiness with the Bush Doctrine is the extent to which it has divided the right as well, especially on the issue of Iraq. Though the Republican rank-and-file has been overwhelmingly supportive of the war, conservative intellectuals of various stripes have been among the administration's most persistent critics. They have pointed to a range of failures in the planning and execution of the American occupation, raised serious doubts about the feasibility of bringing democracy to the Middle East, and questioned the justice and necessity of the war itself. Lacking the partisan hostility of other critics of the U.S. engagement in Iraq, these conservative dissenters have probed the claims of the Bush administration more fairly and intelligently, I would suggest, than the great bulk of their counterparts on the left.

In selecting items for *The Right War?*, I have tried to bring together the leading voices in this intramural debate. Conservative print journalism takes many different forms these days, and the articles included here reflect that diversity. They range from short, punchy newspaper pieces by columnists like David Brooks, George F. Will, and Max Boot to ambitious, long-form journal articles by writers like Norman Podhoretz, Francis Fukuyama, and Charles Krauthammer. They are drawn from the nation's leading newspapers as well as from the universe of opinion magazines in which conservative thought is welcome, from the *New Republic* on the hawkish left to the *American Conservative* on the cranky, alienated right. The merits of individual arguments aside, the contributions to this volume give some idea of the breadth and sophistication of a conservative movement too often caricatured for its supposed conformity and simple-mindedness.

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As students of the American right know, today's internecine battles are nothing new. Even in the final decades of the Cold War, when the various factions of the Republican coalition were relatively united in their concern about the Soviet threat, declaring oneself a conservative on foreign policy was to enter immediately into a fractious debate. The administrations of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, and George H.W. Bush were marked by bitter disagreements over the international priorities of the United States.

For neoconservatives – most of them refugees from an increasingly dovish Democratic Party – the task of the U.S. in its confrontation with the Soviet Union was to raise high the banner of the "free world," answering Communist aggression with no less determined American resistance. Unswayed by the purported reasonableness of this or that Soviet leader, they pointed to the irredeemable character of the Soviet system itself; the regime and its destructive ideology were what mattered. Compromise with totalitarian evil was out of the question.

Conservative practitioners of realpolitik, by contrast, put forward a very different agenda. Concerned more about stability and peace than about promoting American principles, these "realists," as they are known in foreign-policy circles, were content to deal with the world as it was, in the stark light of national interest, even if this meant striking deals with Communists. The Soviet Union, they insisted, had interests too, and these were not always incompatible with our own. For the advocates of détente, led by Henry Kissinger, coexistence was the practical course, democratic revolution a potentially dangerous pipe dream.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the differences between neoconservatives and realists were brought into even starker relief. Though both camps supported the first Gulf War in 1990–91, they diverged sharply in their opinions of its conclusion. Neoconservatives were indignant over (the first) President Bush's decision to allow Saddam Hussein not just to remain in power but to suppress, with characteristic brutality, the Kurdish and Shiite revolts inspired by the American invasion. The Bush administration and its conservative defenders, for their part, explained the policy in classic realist fashion, expressing worries about the chaos that might ensue, in Iraq and perhaps throughout the Middle East, if Saddam's Baathist regime were toppled.

To this already volatile mix was added a long-dormant strain of conservative foreign-policy thought: isolationism. The Cold War had suppressed the instinctive desire of many American conservatives to stand apart from the seemingly distant, corrupting affairs of other nations, a position motivated in part by a belief in American exceptionalism but also by fears about the size and reach of the federal government. In the lead-up to the first Gulf War, this cause was resurrected by Patrick J. Buchanan, whose readiness to blame the conflict on Wall Street and Jewish supporters of Israel was reminiscent – to the distress of most other conservatives – of the antiwar rhetoric of the "America First" movement of the early 1940's.

By the mid-1990's, this isolationist impulse – what its advocates understandably prefer to call foreign-policy traditionalism or nationalism – had

become more mainstream among Republicans, though not in the virulent form preached by Buchanan. On Capitol Hill in particular, many conservatives opposed the "humanitarian wars" waged by President Bill Clinton in Bosnia and Kosovo. In this, they were overwhelmingly seconded by conservative realists, who saw no vital American interests at stake in the Balkans. Neoconservatives thought it incumbent upon the U.S. to put an end to ethnic cleansing in the region and found themselves in a sometimes awkward alliance with liberals who, in other circumstances, were loudly critical of the exercise of American power.

The attacks of 9/11 brought an unusual degree of unity to the conservative foreign-policy establishment, as it did to the nation as a whole. Few on the right objected to the Bush administration's muscular response to the terrorists of al Qaeda and their Taliban patrons, even as many liberals counseled restraint and called for a more international approach. This conservative consensus dissolved quickly, however, once it became evident that the "war on terror" would not be confined to Afghanistan or to the groups directly responsible for the devastation of 9/11.

In his State of the Union address of January 2002, President Bush identified Iraq as one of the countries in a tripartite "axis of evil." His spokesmen soon made clear that the administration intended to confront Saddam Hussein and his Baathist regime. By the end of the year, Bush had secured authorization from Congress to use force against Iraq and had won a UN Security Council resolution demanding that the country disarm or "face serious consequences." On March 19, 2003, after months of fruitless diplomacy and inconclusive weapons inspections, Operation Iraqi Freedom began with air strikes on Baghdad by U.S. and coalition forces.

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A number of important articles in the conservative debate on Iraq appeared in the period leading up to the war and in the first months of the occupation. In August 2002, for example, Brent Scowcroft, a leading realist and a key national-security adviser in previous Republican administrations, wrote an op-ed for the *Wall Street Journal* titled "Don't Attack Saddam," arguing that so massive and risky an undertaking would be a needless diversion from the war on terror. Once the war started, Robert Kagan and William Kristol took to the pages of the *Weekly Standard* to editorialize, with increasing indignation, about the inadequacy of postwar planning and the need for more troops. As it became apparent that no major caches of WMD's would be found in Iraq, conservative opinion-makers (like everyone else) began to ask pointed questions about the

quality of prewar intelligence and the use to which it was put by the Bush administration.

All of these issues are touched upon in *The Right War?*, but only as they emerged in later discussions. For reasons of space and continuity, I have restricted the contents of the volume to articles that appeared in 2004–5, after these initial volleys of opinion. The chief advantage of this limited time frame is that it provides at least middling distance from the overheated polemical atmosphere in which the war began. As the American engagement in Iraq approached its first anniversary, conservative commentators started to step back from the conflict in an effort to gain a wider perspective. These reflections and second thoughts – arranged here in chronological order – were often occasioned by the news of the day (very depressing news, alas, for much of 2004), but all of them, I think, shed light on the large questions raised by America's most substantial foreign-policy commitment since the Vietnam War.

What does American history teach about the nature and limits of U.S. power? Are deterrence and containment still viable national-security doctrines in an age of suicide terrorism and weapons of mass destruction? What value should we attach to stability in parts of the world where the social and political status quo abets violent extremism? Should the U.S. – can the U.S. – be an agent for democratic change? Does such an agenda demand more cooperation with other nations, or less? Does the promotion of American principles serve American interests? If not, how should the two be reconciled?

The Right War? includes familiar clashes on these and other issues. Realists and neoconservatives take sharp aim at one another (and at assorted liberals), while traditionalists – preeminently Patrick J. Buchanan but also, to varying degrees, James Kurth, George F. Will, and Andrew J. Bacevich – decry the tragic consequences of it all. More surprising is the extent to which many of these writers turn a critical eye on their own camp or concede arguments to their antagonists. Among the neoconservatives, the contributions by David Brooks, Fouad Ajami, Francis Fukuyama, and Eliot A. Cohen are notable for their candid exploration of the failures of American policy in Iraq. As for the realists, the articles included here suggest an emerging split. Henry Kissinger and Fareed Zakaria contend that the (prudent, patient) promotion of democracy is now a necessary aspect of advancing American interests. On this point, Kissinger writes, the neoconservatives "have won their intellectual battle" – a concession that such old-school realists as Owen Harries, Robert F. Ellsworth, and Dimitri K. Simes are very far from granting.

The pessimism of many of these articles seems strangely off-key as I write this introduction in the spring of 2005. In the months since all but the last of them were published, Iraqis have voted in large and enthusiastic numbers, defying not only the terror campaign against their nascent democracy but also the dire predictions of the Bush administration's critics. The carnage has continued there, but so too have crucial, halting steps toward self-government. What's more, free elections have taken place in the Palestinian Authority, while in Lebanon, the "Cedar Revolution" has burst upon the scene, forcing an end to Syria's long domination of that country. Even Egypt and Saudi Arabia have given hints of democratic ferment.

The Middle East still has a great distance to go, and optimism, like pessimism, can be premature. But these events are enormously encouraging, especially for those of us who have supported the broad outlines (if not always the execution) of the Bush Doctrine and the transformation that it has wrought in American foreign policy – and in the world.

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON

1 Iraq's Future – and Ours

On November 21, 2003, some minor rocket attacks on the Iraqi oil ministry and on two hotels in Baghdad elicited an exceptional amount of attention in the global media. What drew the interest of journalists were the terrorists' mobile launchers: they were crude donkey carts.

This peculiar juxtaposition of 8th- and 21st-century technology was taken as emblematic of the entire American experience in Iraq – an increasingly hopeless clash between our overwhelming conventional strength and stealthy terrorists able to turn our own lethal means against us with cheap and ubiquitous native materials. How could we possibly win this contest, when an illiterate thug with a rusty RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) launcher could take down a West Point graduate along with his million-dollar Black Hawk helicopter while those upon whom we have been lavishing our aid cheered our deaths and ransacked the corpses?

In an extensive, on-the-ground account of the post-bellum chaos, George Packer in a recent issue of the *New Yorker* lists an array of missteps that brought us to this sorry pass. We put too much trust in exiled Iraqis; we allowed looters and fundamentalists to seize the initiative right after the war; we underestimated both the damage done to the infrastructure by Saddam Hussein and the pernicious and still insidious effects of his murderous, Soviet-style government hierarchy. Mark Danner, in the *New York Review of Books*, relates much the same story, emphasizing our tolerance of looting and our disbanding of the Iraqi army as factors contributing in tandem to the creation of the Iraqi resistance, now thriving on a combination of plentiful cash (from looting and prewar caches) and a surplus of weaponry and manpower (from the defunct army).

Both authors make good points, including about American naiveté and unpreparedness. But lacking in these bleak analyses of failures and setbacks are crucial and complicating elements, with the result that the overall picture they draw is both distorted as to the present and seriously misleading with regard to the future.

II

It is a genuine cause of lament that many American lives have been lost in what should have been an uncontested peace since the war ended in April. But let us begin by putting the matter in perspective. The reconstruction of Iraq is proceeding well: electrical power, oil production, everyday commerce, and schooling are all in better shape than they were under Saddam Hussein. More saliently, none of the biblical calamities confidently anticipated by critics of the March invasion has yet materialized. Those prophecies of Armageddon featured thousands of combatants killed, hundreds of oil wells set afire, mass starvation, millions festering in refugee camps, polluted waters in the Gulf, "moderate" Arab governments toppled, the "Arab street" in a rage, and a wave of 9/11-style terror loosed upon the United States.

We are an impatient people. In part, no doubt, our restlessness is a byproduct of our own unprecedented ease and affluence. Barbarians over the hills do not descend to kill us; no diseases wipe out our children by the millions; not starvation but obesity is more likely to do us in. Since we are so rich and so powerful, why is it, we naturally wonder, that we cannot simply and quickly call into being a secure, orderly, prosperous Iraq, a benign Islamic version of a New England township? What incompetence, or worse, lies behind our failure even to seize Osama bin Laden or Saddam Hussein?

But Iraq is not Middlebury or Amherst – and it will not be for another century. What is truly astonishing is not our inability in six months to create an Arab utopia, but the sheer audacity of our endeavor to send our liberating troops into the heart of an ancient and deeply chauvinistic culture that over the past decades had reduced itself to utter ruin. Saddam Hussein and his sons spent those decades gassing their own people, conducting maniacal wars against Iran and Kuwait, launching missiles into Israel and Saudi Arabia, despoiling the Mesopotamian wetlands and driving out the marsh people, and systematically murdering hundreds of thousands of innocents. Real progress would have meant anything even marginally better than this non-ending nightmare, let alone what we have already achieved in Iraq.

Nor did Saddam Hussein and his sons kill without help. After traveling 7,000 miles to dispose of him, we were confronted by his legacy – a society containing tens of thousands of Baathists with blood on their hands, 100,000 felons recently released from Saddam's prisons, and millions more who for decades took solace in a species of national pride founded on butchery and plunder. After a mere seven months, are we to be blamed for having failed magically to rehabilitate such people? Should we instead have imprisoned them en masse, tried them, shot them, exiled them?

Going into the heart of Mesopotamia, American troops passed Iraqi palaces with historic and often ominous names: Cunaxa, whence Xenophon's 10,000 began their arduous journey home; Gaugamela, where Alexander devastated the Persian imperial army; and, not far away in southeastern Turkey, Carrhae, where the Roman triumvir Crassus lost his 45,000-man army and his own head. Mesopotamia has long been a very dangerous place for Westerners. By any historical measure other than our own, it is nothing short of preposterous that, in less than a year's time, American troops would plunge into such a cauldron, topple the world's worst dictator, and then undertake to introduce the rudiments of a liberal society in the center of the ancient Islamic caliphate – all at a cost of a little over 400 lives.

Now, however, after one of the most miraculous victories in military history, we demand an almost instantaneous peace followed by the emergence of a sort of Iraqi Continental Congress. We demand the head of Saddam Hussein, forgetting that Adolf Eichmann disappeared for years in the post-Nazi archipelago abroad, and that neither Ratko Mladic nor Radovan Karadzic has yet been scooped from the swamp of the Balkans. Our journalists describe the chaos besetting a society allegedly traumatized by American war that in reality is struggling with the legacy of its own destructive past. In Iraq we are not trying to rebuild the equivalent of a flattened Hamburg or a Tokyo among the equivalents of shell-shocked and thoroughly confused Germans or Japanese. We are attempting something much more challenging: to impose a consensual system upon *spared* peoples, who in liberation did far more to destroy their own country (the losses to pillaging ran to about $12 billion) than we did in either the war or the ensuing occupation.

III

Most of the Baathists among our current enemies in Iraq chose to flee rather than stand and fight. The homes of Saddam's henchmen were not

all bombed. Their friends were not killed. Their pride was only temporarily lost – to be regained, evidently, upon their discovery that it is easier and safer to murder an American who is building a school and operating under strict rules of engagement than to take on Abrams tanks barreling into Baghdad under a sky of F-16's.

Such are a few of the ironies entailed in our stunning military success, even if overlooked in analyses of the recent turmoil. And there are still more. Hard as it may be to accept, a rocky peace may well be the *result* of a spectacularly rapid victory. Imagine our war instead as a year-and-a-half continuum of active combat, stretching from the late-March 2003 invasion until the scheduled assumption of power of the Iraqi provisional government this coming July. Now suppose that over the course of this time frame, about 5,000 of Saddam's hardcore killers had either to be killed, captured, or routed from the country if there were ever to be any chance for real peace to emerge. Somehow, under conditions of full-scale combat, one suspects the job would have been much easier.

Of course, we must not wish the war would have lasted that long in order to allow us freely to destroy Saddam's remnants, but we must at least appreciate that short wars by their very nature often require messy clean-ups. After the shooting stops, the aid workers arrive; the hard-core, hypercritical journalists remain; and soldiers must build rather than shoot.

Here, too, a little historical perspective helps. The U.S. and its allies do not have a good record of achieving quick and easy peace after quick and easy victory. Recall our twelve-year, 350,000-sortie, $20-billion experience maintaining no-fly zones in the aftermath of the four-day ground phase of the Gulf war; the thousands of Europeans and Americans who are still in the Balkans after the seven-week victory over Milosevic; the ongoing international effort to pacify Afghanistan after the United States and its indigenous allies routed the Taliban in a mere six weeks. It is simply much more difficult for static and immobile peacekeepers under global scrutiny to deal with resurgent, unconquered, and itinerant enemies. If things are rough now in Iraq, it is because they were not so rough during March and April.

There are other, cultural aspects to our dilemma as well. Many Americans have come to believe that war is the worst thing that can happen to humans. It would probably not have been easy in 1991 to convince them of the need to prolong our "highway of death" in southern Iraq, even if doing so would have prevented Baathist troops from escaping to Basra and killing innocents; or of the need to bomb Serbians in Sbrenica in order to