

The Iraq War

History 410/510 – CRN 42159/42160
Summer 2008 (7/21-8/13)

MTWR 10-11:50 146 Straub

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Office hours: Thursday 1-2:30; most days after class; or by appointment

Aims of course

“The Iraq War? But that’s not history, is it?” That is the response I often get when I tell people that I’ll be teaching “Iraq” this summer. It is true that the war has not yet ended but while it remains difficult to tell the story of some aspects of the war, other aspects have come into a tolerable degree of focus.

The central aim of this course is to make some sense of 1) the U.S. administration’s decision to invade Iraq (how did it arrive at the decision? When? What the process? What were the administration’s aims? How did it hope to achieve them?); and 2) the subsequent course events, from the first two years following the removal of Saddam Hussein from power and beyond. What of all this might we consider “history”? Which parts can now be told as history? Which parts cannot? Are there aspects of the war about which something of a consensus is likely to emerge? Are there aspects likely to remain controversial for the foreseeable future? Which ones and why?

Those are a few of the questions I hope to examine this quarter. The central organizing principle of the course, however, is much simpler. The central argument is that the war is about much more than U.S. aims and actions and that any account of the course of the war must take into account Iraqi (and other) perspectives. The course is thus organized around two books, one focusing primarily on the U.S. as the prime agent in the war (Thomas Ricks, Fiasco), the other focusing primarily on Iraqi experiences and responses to the U.S. invasion (Anthony Shadid, Night Draws Near).

Assignments and expectations

Attendance and fulfillment of course assignments is expected.

In addition to two in-class quizzes on assigned material, there will be short (five pages or so) paper based on an outside source and a (short) final exam. I will issue a guideline for the paper shortly.

Grades will be compiled as follows:

Quizzes (two): 15% each

Final: 30% (August 14, 10:15, in our classroom)

Paper: 30% (due anytime before 5:00 pm August 19)

Class participation and presence: 10% or my discretion (for those who really cannot speak in class, I may reduce this part of the grade at my discretion)

Schedule of readings: all readings in addition to Ricks and Shadid can be found on the class Blackboard site under “Extra Reading Materials.”

Anything listed after “Also” is optional. All else is required.

Week 1

July 21: Introduction

July 22: Decisions

Ricks, Fiasco, 3-57; and President Bush, West Point address, June 1, 2002.

Also: the implications of the new national security policy are explained by one of its critics in Richard Falk, “The New Bush Doctrine,” The Nation, July 15, 2002; for a sense of neo-conservative positions, see Kagan and Kristol, “What to Do about Iraq,” Weekly Standard, January 21, 2002.

July 23: Planning for war

Ricks, Fiasco, 58-111

Also: the administration and Defense were repeatedly warned about the failure to prepare for the occupation. For an example, see the report authored by Conrad C. Crane and W. Andrew Terrill of the U.S. Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute, “Reconstructing Iraq: Insights, Challenges and Missions for Military Forces in a Post-Conflict Scenario,” February 2003.

July 24: The view from Iraq

Shadid, Night, 1-56; and “Saddam’s Delusions: The View from the Inside” (this second is an examination of the Iraqi leadership’s views on the eve of the war. Simply unreal: must be read to be believed)

Week 2

July 28: The invasion

Ricks, Fiasco, 115-148; Shadid, Night, 59-150

Also: at any point this week you might take a look at the materials in the “Early Analyses” folder: especially “Results in Iraq: 100 Days Toward Security and Freedom,” August 8, 2003; Secretary Rumsfeld’s and General Franks’ July, 2003 appearance before the Senate Armed Services Committee is also interesting.

As for the rest of the materials in the file: Max Boot is a historian/military analyst associated with neo-conservative circles; Stephen Biddle and Anthony Cordesman are among the most prominent military analysts/strategists in the U.S.; the Williamson Murray and Robert Scates piece is an excerpt from an early “official” history of the invasion.

July 29: The “aftermath”

Shadid, Night, 153-231

July 30: The CPA

Ricks, Fiasco, 149-213

July 31: The occupation

Shadid, Night, 235-329

Week 3

August 4: Getting Tough

Ricks, Fiasco, 214-297

August 5: Insurgents

Shadid, Nights, 333-396

August 6: Taking stock

Ricks, Fiasco, 302-362

August 7: More insurgents

Shadid, Nights, 397-465

Week 4

August 11: Where things stood, January, 2005

Ricks, Fiasco, 363-429; Shadid, Night, 467-476

August 12: Conditions resembling civil war

“The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict,” International Crisis Group, 27 February 2006; and selections from “In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency,” International Crisis Group, 15 February 2006.

I have posted pdf copies of these reports on the course Blackboard site. Both documents are also available from the International Crisis Group webpage (which is worth perusing. You can find some images of the materials used for “In Their Own Words,” on the site.)

Also: if you want some grim humor: “Nearly 21 Million Iraqis Not Yet Killed,” Avant News, Sept. 13, 2006.

August 13: The surge

I have posted a number of items on the Blackboard site. We can make a final selection later but the provisional reading is selections from: Frederick Kagan and Michael O’Hanlon, “Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq,” Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institute, January 2007/December 21, 2006; Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, “Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War,” Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institute, January 2007; Michael O’Hanlon and Jason H. Campbell, “The Road Ahead: Progress and

Challenges in Iraq,” Harvard international Review, Spring 2008; Bruce Riedel, “Iraq: Winners and Losers at Five Years,” July 14, 2008; Michael Massing, “Embedded in Iraq,” New York Review of Books July 17, 2008; the Iraq Body Count and the latest Iraq Index update from the Brookings Institute.

Some of you might want to peruse the blog of Iraqi journalists at:
<http://washingtonbureau.typepad.com/iraq/>

I have also posted links to an American Enterprise Institute conference, “The Way Ahead,” and a response posted on Salon.com (in all truth, the former especially is repetitive of the other materials posted under the names of Kagan, O’Hanlon and Pollack).

August 14: Final exam

10:15, in our classroom. Bring a blue/green book (available in Bookstore)