



The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End

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The End of Iraq describes America's failed strategy toward that country & what must be done now. The USA invaded Iraq with grand ambitions to bring democracy & thereby transform the Middle East. Instead, Iraq has disintegrated into three constituent components: a pro-western Kurdistan in the north, an Iran-dominated Shiite entity in the south & a chaotic Sunni Arab region in the center. The country is plagued by insurgency & is in the opening phases of a potentially catastrophic civil war. George W. Bush broke up Iraq when he ordered its invasion in '03. The USA not only removed Saddam Hussein, it also smashed & later dissolved the institutions by which Iraq's Sunni Arab minority ruled: its army, its security services & the Baath Party. With these institutions gone & irreplaceable, the basis of an Iraqi state has disappeared. This book describes the administration's strategic miscalculations behind the war as well as the blunders of the occupation. There was the failure to understand the intensity of ethnic & religious divisions. This was followed by incoherent & inconsistent strategies for governing, the failure to spend money for reconstruction, the misguided effort to create a national army & police, then the turning over of the country's management to Republican political loyalists rather than qualified professionals. As a matter of morality the Iraqi Kurds are no less entitled to independence than are Lithuanians, Croatians or Palestinians. If the country's majority Shiites want to run their own affairs, or even have their own state, on what democratic principle should they be denied? If the price of a unified Iraq is another dictatorship it's too high a price to pay. The USA must focus now, not on preserving or forging a unified Iraq, but on avoiding a spreading civil war. It must accept the reality of Iraq's breakup & work with Iraq's Shiites, Kurds & Sunni Arabs to strengthen the already semi-independent regions. If they're properly constituted, these regions can provide security, tho not all will be democratic. There's no easy exit from Iraq. We have to relinquish present strategy--trying to build national institutions when there is in fact no nation. That effort is doomed. It will only leave the USA with an open-ended commitment in circumstances of uncontrollable turmoil. Galbraith has been in Iraq many times over the last 21 years during historic turning points for the country: the Iran-Iraq War, the Kurdish genocide, the '91 uprising, the immediate aftermath of the '03 war & the writing of Iraq's constitutions. In The End of Iraq, he offers 1sthand observations of the men who are now Iraq's leaders. He draws on his nearly two decades of involvement in Iraq policy working for the US government to appraise what has occurred & what will happen. This book is a definitive account of the war & its ramifications.

The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End Details

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Jim says

The sub-title of this book is really inaccurate for the major theme of the book. I should think a better sub-title would be along the lines of "Sowing the seeds of Kurdistan Independence." The author for a number of years was closely connected with the Kurdish people, their sufferings imposed by the Saddam Hussein government and the Kurds' strong and long-held desire to have an independent nation. In the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq, which the author quite correctly describes as the height of incompetence on the part of America's political leaders, the author served as an advisor to the Kurdish political parties, helping them to develop their own constitution, describing the role of federalism to the Kurds and how, correctly implemented, could work to the Kurds' great advantage in a future Iraq (until such time as Kurdish independence becomes a fact). So the vast majority of the book concerns the Kurds, the creation of a semi-independent Kurdistan.

The second theme of the book is that Iraq, by the beginning of 2006, when this book was published, was already a defacto conglomeration of three semi-independent states: Kurdistan, the Shiite south, which is dominated by Iranian influence, and the Sunni middle of Iraq, which was in the throes of a civil war and of the three "states" was the least organized and independent. The author's conclusion is that the U.S., after years of trying to enforce the idea of unified Iraq, should acknowledge the effective break-up of the country and begin to remove its forces. Of course, this is before the civil war in Iraq became so extreme and groups like Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia came to wield so much power through terrorism.

As the author points out, Iraq was never, from its initial creation by the British, a unified country. It was kept together only through the strong-armed tactics of successive Iraqi regimes and the consistent attacks on the Kurdish population of the north, which was by far the most vocal in expressing its desire for independence from Iraq. The present Iraqi constitution, according to the author, acknowledges the federal nature of the country and the defacto independence of Kurdistan as well as the growing independence of the Shiite south. This division of the country is a fact, and American policy, according to the author, should acknowledge this reality and act accordingly.

Steven Peterson says

As one reads this volume, there are some negatives: a tilt toward the Kurds, an almost excessive delight in criticizing the Bush administration. However, the focus of the book is important--where is Iraq going? Looking at the book from a few years after its publication is useful, to see how time has dealt with the author's analysis.

The author is confident that Iraq as we know it is apt not to continue. Kurdistan will go its own way--whether within some sort of decentralized and weak central Iraqi government or as an independent country. The Shiite south, centered in Basra, will at least have considerable autonomy and develop an Islamic "republic" within its boundaries--possibly very sympathetic toward Iran. What happens with Baghdad and its mixed population and the Sunni areas such as Anbar province is not so clear.

Implications for the United States? A breakup of Iraq as hypothesized by Galbraith certainly complicates American policy in that region of the world. Kurdistan is likely to be an ally--a plus. The Shiite south? If it

allies with Iran, not such a plus. What about Baghdad? If there is continued violence between Shiites and Sunnis, might this be destabilizing in the region, by enhancing tensions in other Middle Eastern countries with substantial Shiite populations?

Many unanswered questions emerge from this book--but the questions are important and Galbraith has done a service by forcing readers to address these.

That said, there seems little likelihood that his prediction of a dismembered Iraqi state will come about. The politics of Iraq is messy, but there appears to be some coherent center to political affairs. We shall see. . . .

Jim says

A critical and informative analysis of the failures of the Bush administration to understand how their decisions would help destroy a country. At this point, I don't see how we can avoid not letting the country be divided into three parts. Galbraith seems to join the long line of Bush critics who seem to say that Bush simply doesn't get it. Most troubling is the repeated error the Bush administration makes/made in putting party loyalists and "yes" men in top positions rather than seeking out professionals who knew what they were doing. Now, I am not a supporter of Bush, so my opinions are biased, but I really feel this administration has been totally dishonest. Anyway, it is informative, and the reader has to make up their own mind.

Clinton says

Peter Galbraith ingeniously describes the chaotic and unstable condition in Iraq after the incursion by the Coalition of the Willing to free the Iraqis from a despot. Peter really explains everything clearly through first hand experiences.

The Bush Administration has entangled the U.S. into an almost inescapable and manifested a monumental predicament for the Iraqi and American people. The argument for war was defeated and liberating the Iraqi people was the next best plan. However, the Bush Administration went almost forcefully into the war and most notably in a post-war ad lib. They had no strategies in preparing or contingencies for a post-war plan for Iraq except that they were going to be liberated and live all peacefully. Not only has the planning been dismal, but the implementation of post-war policies has been inept. The results of democratic Iraq is futile due to the time and money spent since March of 2003. The Bush Administration convinced America an easy and successful campaign, but it has been anything but that. The Bush Administration has been irresponsible and unaccountable for a miserable failure.

Overall, Peter Galbraith really explains everything quite understandably from the Iran-Iraq war to Saddam's atrocities to the first Gulf War in 1991 to the current political matters on the difficulty of creating a federal government of three distinctly different groups: the Sunni Arabs, the Shiites and the Kurds.

Bill Kerwin says

This is a convincing exposure of the Bush administration's ignorance and incompetence in Iraq, written by a man who was not originally unsympathetic to the idea of invasion and occupation. Galbraith really knows

the Kurds well, and is very informative on the subject of their culture and their attitudes.

Thomas says

I heard of this book from watching the author on CNN discussing the current problem with ISIS in Iraq. Reading his comments from 2006 and seeing what is happening to that country now, it's clear he was precient in quite a few areas.

I found it to be a fast read and it held my attention. His political leanings are made clear early on and while it doesn't make his analysis any less true, it does get a bit tiresome to hear him go on and on about the failings of the previous administration. We know...get over it, and move on to solutions.

The great thing about this book compared to some others I've read about the Iraq issue is that Galbrith makes no bones about his preferred solution: let Iraq split into three states. It's an obvious choice and after reading the book you'll wonder why the US didn't support such a position from the beginning.

Overall, it was an interesting read, fast paced, and full of good analysis. I liked it.

Mike says

As one whose level of ignorance about Iraq was on a par with that of George W. Bush's when he elected to commit America to a war there, this book, written by someone whose job it is to understand these things — and who does understand them — provided me with a much-needed clarification of what sort of shit we got ourselves into. The invasion was poorly conceived and planned with an almost pathological disregard for facts. The occupation or as the administration imagined it 'nation building' was critically hampered by the ideological inflexibility of those managing the war effort. It did not help matters that important positions were given to good republicans who were generally unsuited to the job. This book doesn't reveal much that wasn't already reported at one point or another. What it does do is put all the important pieces together in a way that gives coherence to the overall story.

As I am wont to do during Chicago's summertime months I was down by the lakefront and sunning myself while reading this book. Laying on my back, dressed appropriately for the occasion (i.e. mostly naked), I noticed a rather out of place gentleman making his way along the strand, taking an erratic path from one individual or small group to another and pausing briefly at each to speak, traversing the arrayed sunbathers as if he were a tourist enjoying the archipelago of their leisure. He was dressed incorrectly (fully clothed; long sleeves) and has something — an extra shirt maybe — wrapped about his hand like a bandage. Eventually stopping at my station, he was the first to speak, "I see you're reading about Iraq." He then went on to recite the FOX News laundry list of reasons why the invasion was a good idea: Saddam was an ally of Osama Bin Ladin and and the Taliban, the terrorists would fight us over here if we weren't there, we deposed a dictator and imposed a democracy, etc. Not wanting to argue politics with a stranger I politely declined to dispute his statements, stating that what I was learning from the book was at odds with what he was saying and hoping we could just agree to disagree. In response he reiterated the FOX News talking points, but with a slight irony to his delivery as if he were playing the fool and seeing if I could catch on. Once again I declined to argue, again mentioning that the version of events in the book was quite different from the one he was describing. "That must be a good book then, what does it say?" As I went over Galbraith's outline of the situation my companion's eyes lit up; before I could call it he chimed in that the central region in Iraq is Sunni. He then sunk back into his faux-naïveté asking me if hadn't we then made an impossible mistake,

sending all those soldiers to Iraq on a fools errand? In his voice there was also a tone of regret, as if he had been one of those sent to fight for no good reason, and had perhaps returned damaged in ways that don't easily heal. "It probably was a mistake, a big waste for most everyone involved," I said. At this my companion said "good book" and then, almost to himself, "good soldier." Somehow satisfied, he wandered off.

????? ??? ??? says

Galbraith's analysis of US policy about Iraq packs no punches, and reveals the distance between rhetoric and reality in the Bush administration. Obviously well informed, and unabashedly pro-Kurd, Galbraith marshals his arguments well and makes clear the fictitious nature of the Iraqi state, My main niggle is his occasional unrestrained glee and self-importance when he lets us know how he has made an incisive point to a bemused and ignorant US official, and is subsequently proved right.

Lizzie Rogers says

This book is written with a clear agenda as the subtitle suggests and Galbraith's self-importance is sometimes distracting. However, the book is such a scathing, but interesting attack on the Bush administrations handling of Iraq that it is nonetheless a compelling read. He pays special attention to the Kurds which are often glossed over in our media because of his personal relationships with Kurdish leadership. I think that Galbraith raises interesting points also about the future of Iraq and I would be interested to hear what he has to say about the current issues connected to the Peshmerga and Turkey.

Alan says

Note: I read this book in 2006. Since then, allegations have been lodged against Galbraith for being a behind-the-scenes partner in an investment firm trying to profit from Kurdish independence and the license to drill for oil that would likely follow. The case against Galbraith seems strong. It diminishes the confidence I had in this book.)

One of the guidelines learned decades ago in army intelligence officers' school was "evaluate the source as much as the information."

In approaching the pile of articles and books about Iraq that is piling up in places like The Atlantic Monthly and Borders bookstores -- trying to piece together a semblance of accurate history and truthful, realistic intelligence -- one must conclude that Peter W. Galbraith has a credibility that far surpasses that of just about anyone else. At least I have encountered none whose judgment on the matter I would trust more.

As the enigmatic New York Times columnist David Brooks puts it: "President Bush doesn't lack for critics when it comes to his Iraq policies, but the smartest and most devastating of these is Peter W. Galbraith."

Let's get two things out of the way right up front: Yes, he is the son of John Kenneth Galbraith. But the younger Galbraith makes his own way; he makes no mention of his family tree until a fine-print acknowledgement tucked-in near the index, when he writes movingly: "Here I will only say he that inspired

me, by example and in his words, to pursue a career devoted to mitigating the consequences of war and, now, to write about it."

Second, when one grasps the details of how Galbraith gathered his knowledge during 25 years of service as a staff officer to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and ambassador to Croatia, when one sees where he has been and when, with whom he has spoken to and under what circumstances, and his own private forays across Iraqi rivers on the edge of combat (because he cared enough), the conclusion can only be: This guy has been there. This guy knows the score. The miracle is that he survived to give us this book.

If you have read anything about T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia), or even seen the movie, think "Galbraith of Iraq," moving behind the scenes, sometimes officially, often privately, coaching Iraqis and especially Kurds on how to deal with American illogic. But Galbraith needs no Lowell Thomas to spin tales of intrigue from the desert. He is his own man, writing from his own journals, and although less flamboyant and (apparently) less addicted to combat than Lawrence, his intimate knowledge and credibility among key Iraqis may do us a lot more good.

At bottom, the point of the book is that Iraq is a fabrication of Winston Churchill and friends as they closed the coffin on the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. As such, it forced Shiites, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds into an ethnic and religious salad bowl that was doomed from the start. It never was a real nation, contends Galbraith, and thus it is pointless to force it to be so now. Furthermore, he points out, the new Iraqi constitution, crammed down their throats by Paul Bremer and Condoleezza Rice, actually pretty much locks in an independent Kurdistan, anyway, even as the Bush administration continues to bluster futilely about a democratic nation called Iraq. We are wasting our time, Galbraith says, more or less.

The book can conveniently be divided into four sections: a laying-out of the first Bush administration's duplicity in dealing with the Kurds (it went far beyond anything we might have guessed), a mind-blowing (and painfully specific) expose' of the second Bush administration's chutzpah and stupidity in non-planning and then occupying Iraq, then a review of reality as he sees it, followed by a prescription.

Some highlights:

[regarding the looting Baghdad:] "On April 11-two days after Saddam's regime collapsed and The United States became legally responsible for Baghdad-looters attacked the museum. The museum housed artifacts going back to the beginning of human civilization ... As the looters attacked, the museum staff begged for help from the Marines at a nearby traffic circle. Although they were just 100 yards away, they refused to help ... I arrived at the museum on the morning of April 15, the day after the Marines were fully deployed to protect the building ... over the three weeks I was in Iraq [one of scores of times:], I went unchallenged into many Iraqi buildings and facilities. ... Looters were at work in every building I visited, but not once did I have any sense of danger ...I rescued several treaties ...Many of the sites had obvious intelligence value ...yet neither the Pentagon nor the CIA seems to have made any effort to mine these sites for intelligence ...As part of its case for war, the Bush administration alleged that Iraq was covertly acquiring materials for weapons of mass destruction, like yellowcake from Niger, while Vice President Cheney insisted Saddam's embassies were in contact with al-Qaeda. The Foreign Ministry would have been a logical place to find documents relating to Iraq's foreign intelligence activities and procurement of forbidden materials. But looters were the only people I saw prying open foreign ministry safes."

"On my return to Washington in May, I spent an hour at the Pentagon briefing Paul Wolfowitz on what I had seen in Iraq. My account of looting of government ministries and sites with dangerous materials visibly upset Wolfowitz. I hoped his anger was directed at the planning failures I was describing, but I realized he was angry with me for being critical. After that meeting, neither Wolfowitz nor his staff returned my phone calls and I had no further contact with the Pentagon." "For a full year before the war, the State Department had spent millions of dollars working with Iraqi exiles and experts to prepare a 15-volume blueprint for how Iraq might be governed after the war. The Administration was so disorganized and so faction-ridden that the

Defense Department (for which Bremer would work and which handled his briefings) did not tell him that this State Department study existed. He would learn of it in the press sometime after arriving in Baghdad."

"Bremer's grand entry represented a 180-degree turn in strategy from Garner's."

"Bremer was Kissinger's protege'

"Two months before he ordered troops into [Iraq, Bush:] didn't know that Islam was divided between Shiites and Sunnis."

Six young people who had not applied for jobs in post-war Iraq, and who had no relevant job experience, were hired without interview and without security clearance and ended up being responsible for spending Iraq's budget, writes Galbraith. "Finally the young people realized that the one thing they had in common was they had posted their resumes at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative Washington think tank. The Pentagon hired eleven people off the Heritage Foundation Web site, including those six who handled Iraq's budget."

"Without there being an Iraqi nation, it was impossible to create a genuine national army."

In recommending that Iraq be allowed to dissolve into a Shiastan (for the Shiites), a Sunni Arab zone, and a Kurdistan, Galbraith recognizes that critics will say such a solution will yield its own problems. But after weighing the possible repercussions, this experienced appraiser of Iraq thinks it is the best of only bad options.

"There is no good solution to the mess in Iraq," Galbraith writes. "The country has broken up and is in the throes of civil war. The United States cannot put the country back together again and it cannot stop the civil war."

To the nay-sayers who say Turkey would never stand by and let an independent Kurdistan arise, Galbraith has reasoned reply: "Turkish attitudes toward Iraqi Kurdistan have evolved significantly since 2003 ... a Turkish military intervention in northern Iraq would derail its chances of joining the European Union." (Moreover, he reminds us that a little-remembered add-on treaty of Sevres at the end of World War I -- which the Turks lost -- guarantees the Kurdish peoples of Turkey independence from Turkey if they should but ask for it. He doesn't make any claim that it could actually happen in today's modern context, though.)

And as for a Shiastan becoming a mere satellite of Iran, Galbraith says the Shiites of that region already are more loyal to Iran than to Iraq. It is their theology that binds them, not boundaries on a map.

Maybe Paul Wolfowitz didn't want to listen to Galbraith. But at least we can.

Joseph Stieb says

A solid version of the many "what went wrong" books about the Iraq War from a very interesting and accomplished author. Galbraith's central argument is that the basic US error in IQ (he claims in this book to be agnostic about whether the invasion was the right move) was thinking of Iraq and the Iraqi people as a single entity and trying to reforge a nation rather than accept that IQ has never been a unified state or people and work toward ameliorating the process of partition/federalization. I think he makes a solid case. He shows convincingly that the Kurds would not accept anything but a weak federal structure, and they allied with the Shia to pass a constitution that gave the central government very little coercive power. For instance, the

central gov't according to the 2005 constitution cannot tax provinces without their consent. The big stick in the craw of this deal were the Sunni, who were kicked out of power by the invasion, saw their institutions, and largely self-excluded from the process of making a constitution. The roots of the insurgency lie in their dispossession, insecurity, and anger. Galbraith acknowledges that his federalized, de facto partition solution is not perfect and leaves many problems unresolved (what to do about war-torn Baghdad, for instance?), but in general he is right.

Galbraith highlights the deep ignorance that the US had about IQ before going in. There were experts on IQ who could have warned about things like the fact that the Shia would probably form a theocratic state that would align with Iran (which, of course, happened) or that the Sunni would violently resist their dispossession unless protected and offered a new place in the new Iraq. Another shocking example: in a meeting with several exile Iraqis in early 2002, Bush appeared not to know that Islam was divided between Shia and Sunni (much less the Sufi) and required a mini-lesson from the Iraqis (note: this is why electing leaders who know a bit about the issues actually matters; it's not enough that they surround themselves with good advisors, they need independent bases of knowledge and the ability to weigh evidence themselves). He lambastes Jerry Bremer, head of the CPA, for lacking any knowledge of IQ and trying to force a centralized American solution to a state that was coming apart at the seams. He, like many other writers, reveals the incredible lack of expertise and competence in the CPA, which was staffed with political appointees and ideologues who were way out of their element.

This book is very useful for intra-Kurdish politics, the constitution-making process, the roots of the insurgency, and thinking more broadly about the Iraqi state and history. I don't agree with Galbraith everywhere. For instance, he's unduly critical of Bush I for not capitalizing on Desert Storm to bring SH down; this is odd given his later complaints about American intervention tearing the Iraqi state apart. Still, he makes a solid, practical case in a concise book. Useful for anyone studying Iraq, humanitarian intervention, or USFP in general. Still not as thorough or compelling as other accounts, though, particularly Ricks' Fiasco and Packer's Assassins' Gate (i.e. the gold standards).

Steven says

Read in 2015. One of many things that helped cure me of a liberal interventionist mindset.

Michelle says

A highly readable look at how Iraq came apart in the wake of the U.S. invasion.

Mansoor Azam says

An excellent critique of US is a sure response on the face of it. Mr Peter Galbrith is certainly a writer to read on Iraq. his position, experience, contacts and time spent in Iraq does give him the accredits to speak candidly about the issue.

The book starts an ends on US decision to invade Iraq and the dilema it found itself in aftermath. but ends on the twilight days of Bush. still it carries first hand knowledge on issues relating to Iraq. Writer's involvement with Iraq & its Kurds dates back a couple of decades and sure provides fascinating and interesting facts hardly known outside power corridors.

It may look to some as having one time agenda; that's anti Bush. but there is sure merit in the accusations. one is bewildered with the tales of under planning or sheer lack of planning and understanding of Iraqs problem by top most echelons.

on the other hand one caan make a case that this book is what one can term easily as a PR campaign to project the case of independent Kurdistan. the writer being so obsessed with Kurdish issue is clearly biased. If you read this one, the one feeling that stays with you is that Kurds deserve to be independent and thats the only possible logic presented. This is where this brilliantly authored piece is tarnished heavily in my opinion. Being so biased in favour of Kurds Mr Peter lost the accumen of a historian and a balancer and propogated only one view thus destroying the value of, in my opinion, an otherwise excellent commentary on Iraqs problem. The more I read this the more I was reminded of pre partition sub continent and the dilemma of how to give democratic vote rights and ratios to three major religious entities i.e hindus, muslims and sikhs. Had the author opened his mind he would have given solutions but a mind already biased is closed one and thus seldom open to ideas.

but all in all a great read and to thinking minds in it lays the genesis of present day ISIS.

Ben Rand says

There was a time when I, along with many others, thought going to war in Iraq was the right thing to do. I also remember when I heard the report that "looters" had robbed a compound full of high explosives that we hadn't bothered to guard...after all the bullshit shovelled on us about WMD. And that was the last straw. This book really highlights the idiocracy of our government. I can't believe we're lead by such ignorant, arrogant jackasses with apparently no ability to pick up a history book and read. Galbraith lends a world of credibility in his narrative. He was there, on the ground, knows all the players in Iraq personally. Bush et al should have been listening to him.
