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The US Failure in Iraq Post-2003 and Backlash against US Foreign Policy

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Abstract: Why was the US intervention in Iraq in 2003 and thereafter unsuccessful? Many writers, such as Brendan R. Gallagher, have rightly pointed to the poor US planning and the prior conditions in Iraq. I suggest a third aspect—nationalist resistance to the idea of foreign forces controlling Iraq and denying Iraqis full decision-making autonomy. The heavy US application of military force sparked a backlash which manifested itself in three ways. First, US military intervention in Iraq created or facilitated the growth of actors who are or later become US adversaries. Second, it changed the balance of power in favor of US adversaries and against the United States and its allies. Third, it made the United States government central to the war narratives of some actors. Demonizing or fighting the United States became a rallying cry and a source of recruitment and fundraising.

Keywords: Middle East, Iraq, US foreign policy, war, backlash, military intervention.

Introduction

Why did the United States war on Iraq in 2003 ultimately fail? Brendan R. Gallagher makes a compelling case that poor US planning for the post-combat phase set the stage for failure.[1] But in doing so, he leaves out part of the story, the way in which the use of force can often backfire and undermine the national security of the state using force. In other words, even excellent planning might not have mitigated all potential problems created by the massive US military presence in Iraq. And given that one implication of his work is that the United States should have gone in bigger and stayed longer, the possibility of Iraqi backlash would have been that much greater.

Three things happened in Iraq that helped define the US failure and they all fall under the rubric of what counter-measures military force can spark. First, US military intervention created or facilitated the growth of actors who were or later became US adversaries. Second, it changed the balance of power in favor of US adversaries (especially Iran) and against the United States and its allies. Third, it deepened the centrality of the United States government to the war narratives of some actors. Confronting, demonizing, or fighting the United States became a rallying cry and a source of recruitment and fundraising.

Already in 2005, Andrew J. Bacevich highlighted the hubris that came with the US belief that the dominant application of military force would lead the United States to prevail in the Greater Middle East, including Iraq, post-2003.[2] But he did not spell out how that belief would translate into specific national security setbacks. In looking at the US failure in Iraq, the aim of this article is twofold:

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1) To expand on Gallagher's emphasis on planning and "preconditions in the targeted country" as the key variables that dictate whether US intervention, in Iraq or elsewhere, is likely to succeed.[3] There is a third variable that is relevant, the agency of the local actors in the face of US military action. Thus, my conclusion is greater skepticism than Gallagher about the possibility that any version of the US invasion of Iraq could have led to a stable outcome in Iraq.

2) To build on Bacevich's argument by detailing three specific problems that resulted from the US use of military force in Iraq.

In the next section, I explain Gallagher's argument and suggest a third relevant factor for understanding success and failure. I then note Bacevich's more general hesitation about the efficacy of US military force. Next, I note work highlighting that the pursuit of security may often actually generate more insecurity. What happened to the United States in Iraq has a deeper grounding. I then explore the 2003 US invasion of Iraq. I suggest three pathways by which US military intervention in Iraq harmed US national security, thereby fleshing out Bacevich's critique. In general terms, some of this study also reminds us of the damage that was done to Iraqis and Iraq itself during the US invasion, US occupation, and Iraqi insurgency.

Failure in Iraq

Most of the time, in the post-Cold War period, the United States has prevailed in the initial combat phase of military intervention but then the period of reconstruction or nation-building does not go well. In looking at four cases—Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq (2003), and Libya—Gallagher argues that US success and failure in the reconstruction phase depends upon the interaction between two factors, the "preconditions in the targeted country" and the quality of US planning for the post-combat effort to rebuild the country and set up its new government. In Iraq, he argues that poor US planning was a major culprit for US failure.[4]

Gallagher does ask whether success in Iraq was possible even had the US government conducted excellent planning, but in doing so his analysis of Iraq—the target country—is too narrow.[5] Specifically, in addition to US planning, he also is focused on the pre-existing factors in the country, such as the level of economic development, the ethnic and religious picture (e.g., is there fragmentation?), the state of infrastructure, and the nature of Iraqi institutions. It is a more static picture about the existing lay of the land at the time of the US invasion. While certainly important, another internal aspect is the agency that Iraqi actors could exercise in the face of invasion, occupation, and the loss of autonomy. They can and did fight back in the face of the US violation of Iraqi sovereignty and nationalism.[6]

My point is that the outcome in Iraq turned on three baskets of issues, two of which Gallagher emphasized.[7] This includes US pre-war planning for the postwar phase; the

demographic, institutional, economic, and other conditions in Iraq at the time of the invasion; and, I would add, the reaction of the Iraqi people to a foreign takeover by the United States, a country deeply hostile to the Iraqi government and its leader, Saddam Hussein.[8] What Iraqi political actors planned to do with the country post-combat was just as important as what the US government planned to do in the country at that point.

What Iraqi actors could do is neither wholly independent of nor determined by US planning. The looting and general security vacuum that developed in Iraq as the US forces toppled the Iraqi government and disbanded the Iraqi army likely affected Iraqi decision making. In the absence of domestic stability and security, Iraqi leaders and militias took matters into their own hands. At the same time, even a well-conceived and well-executed US plan would still have been a massive violation of Iraqi sovereignty and deep intrusion into Iraqi control of Iraqi affairs. Even in the absence of looting and a general security vacuum, Iraqi elements could still have been motivated to fight back.[9]

Once we consider the agency of Iraqi actors, it becomes clearer how Gallagher's preferred approach for Iraq might have been a double-edge sword. If the US goal was stability and the democratization of Iraq, Gallagher explains that could have meant a longer, larger US presence: "we might have spearheaded an international stabilization force of roughly 350,000 to 400,000 troops to secure Baghdad, Mosul, Basra, and other major cities for an extended period." That is more than double the number of military personnel who were actually mobilized. Promoting democracy, he concludes, "is a long-term enterprise."[10] James Dobbins agreed: "Rebuilding a failed state takes an enormous commitment of manpower, money, and time."[11] But a longer, larger US presence also would have been more likely to anger Iraqis and fuel the backlash. A heavy footprint is intrusive, offers more points for friction, and might well mean less Iraqi decision making for that time period. To put it another way, a heavy footprint might well fuel a militarized Iraqi response.

The exact definition of US success in Iraq also matters to this assessment of what went wrong. For Gallagher, success is "if the targeted country has sustainable progress in stability and democratizing institutions for at least a decade."[12] But if we are judging the success of a US intervention, I would add that the result cannot be a worsening of US national security. A successful intervention of Iraq should have been positive both for Iraq (stability, democratization) and for the United States. In practice, it failed for both, with Iraqi instability and governance problems as well as greater insecurity for the United States.

For Bacevich (writing in 2005), US policy leading up to and including the 2003 invasion of Iraq was overly reliant on military force, leading to an unrealistic assessment of the likelihood of success in 2003. Broadly across the region, he notes, "The growing reliance on military power served only to rouse greater antagonism directed at the United States."[13] In the early 2000s, officials from President George W. Bush's administration had

growing confidence in US military power after more than two decades of an increasing US military and political presence in the Greater Middle East. While Bacevich worries about the backlash against US policy in Iraq (2003 and thereafter), he does not detail the exact pathways by which US force spurred Iraqi reactions.[14] I take up those pathways below.

Backlash

The notion that military policy can be counterproductive is well-grounded in the study of international relations. If one critique contests the morality of international hegemonic (or imperial) behavior, a second one questions the efficacy of meddling and intervention.

Robert Jervis described the spiral model, in which each state military action is met by a reaction from a neighbor and potential adversary, with events eventually spiraling toward war.[15] The interactions ratchet up toward confrontation even when neither side is intent, from the beginning, on starting war. Building on the security dilemma, Jervis argued that defensive measures don't necessarily fortify the defense; most importantly, they may have the opposite effect, ultimately leading to a situation of greater insecurity. The security dilemma was, in the words of John Herz, "a vicious circle of power competition and armament races, leading eventually to war."[16]

The spiral model does assume states are not seeking to expand. But what if one or both countries have expansionist intentions? We still might posit an interactive action-reaction effect that spirals out of control toward war. Rather than standing pat or backing down, states might take escalatory steps in response to their rival's intentionally threatening or aggressive military policies.

My application to the Arab-Israeli conflict is a case study of the way forceful actions undermine an actor's national security and other basic goals such as independence.[17] For example, I wrote about Egypt's escalations versus Israel in May 1967. The end result? In the June war, the Egyptian armed forces were crushed in just six days of fighting. Egypt lost control not only of the Gaza Strip but also the entire Sinai Peninsula, a sovereign piece of Egyptian territory. Israel more than tripled in area as a result of the war.[18]

Another example was the second Palestinian uprising (2000-2005), in which Palestinian militias and Israeli armed forces battled.[19] This second intifada was much more militarized than the first, with suicide bombings as one central Palestinian tactic. The casualties and the violence drove the Israeli Jewish public right, and the belief that Israel had no Palestinian partner for a negotiated solution became widespread and deeply entrenched. The Israeli left, including the key Israeli proponents of a negotiated resolution based on mutual concessions, has not recovered since. Today, the Palestinian national movement is very far from any successful outcome. The Palestinian leadership is fragmented, and the Gaza Strip is besieged by Israel. In 2022, Palestinian casualties,

mostly at the hands of the Israeli military, were at the highest level since the second intifada more than 15 years earlier. The possibility of a two-state solution is near dead, with over 650,000 Israeli Jewish settlers now living in the occupied West Bank.[20]

Other scholars have more explicitly engaged US foreign policy history. Chalmers Johnson focused on covert US actions and how it often helped spark "blowback."[21] Though his work is more about covert action and CIA activity, Johnson did highlight US aerial bombing as another tactic that caused others to fight (back) against the United States.[22]

Alexander Anievas considers these feedback dynamics from an economic perspective, relating how US economic policy causes a cyclical backlash against the United States. The US government fostered market-based economies around the world to further the reach and growth of the global capitalist economy, including US-based multinational corporations. This capitalist push weakened local institutions and social structures, leading to disorder amidst a nationalist backlash. In turn, US military intervention aimed to defeat the nationalists and restore stability for the markets. But that could be more provocative than pacifying. The result, Anievas wrote, was "a vicious cycle of revolution and counterrevolution."[23]

One caveat is that I don't try to isolate the exact part of the Iraqi invasion and occupation that caused the backlash. Was it the invasion and civil war as a whole? Was it the US violation of Iraqi sovereignty? Was it the US dismissal of international inspectors and multilateralism? Was it US torture at the Abu Ghraib prison? At this point, I do not think my evidence is fine-grained enough to draw such distinctions.

Beforehand, US officials predicted a rapid exit from Iraq.[24] They expected to be drawing down US forces in Iraq by the end of the summer of 2003. That did not happen. An insurgency broke out and instead of a few months, US forces stayed in Iraq for years.

The war and insurgency were costly. One survey found that the war led directly and indirectly to almost 500,000 Iraqi deaths from 2003 to 2011, not to mention the injuries, trauma, and displacement.[25] Iraqis faced year of chaos, insurgency, and instability. Brown University's Costs of War project put the total of direct death at 275,000 to 306,000, including Iraqi civilians, Iraqi and foreign military personnel, and others.[26] About 8,500 US, British, and other external military personnel and US contractors were killed.[27] One 2021 estimate of the US costs for Afghanistan, Iraq, and other post-9/11 military action is over $8 trillion, including $2.2 trillion in future obligations for veterans' medical and disability costs.[28] A 2023 estimate of costs in Iraq and Syria for 2003-2023 estimated a cost thus far of $1.8 trillion, with another $1.1 trillion in expected post-war veterans' care costs by 2050.[29] As Hal Brands concluded, "No serious observer can dispute one early judgment on Iraq: it was a debacle."[30]

Beyond General Characterizations, How Did the US Invasion of Iraq and its Aftermath Affect US Security?

1) It led to the creation of a new US adversary, the Islamic State.

In Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the Sunni Muslim minority in Iraq was disproportionately powerful but that changed with the US invasion. When the US toppled Hussein's government in 2003, the new Iraqi state left Sunni Iraqis greatly disempowered, both politically and militarily. One key misstep was that rather than keep Iraqi Sunni military personnel on the Iraqi government payroll, the Coalition Provisional Authority quickly disbanded the Iraqi army. This move created a reservoir of armed, disgruntled Sunni Iraqis who played an important role in destabilizing the country and drawing Iraq into civil war. The US intervention disrupted Iraq's existing power hierarchy, turning some powerful figures into "losers" under the new political system. Those pushed to the margin fought back.

Some of these former soldiers helped strengthen al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), an organization led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. [31] Al-Zarqawi had been planning and organizing to confront the United States even before the US attack commenced in March 2003.[32] In that sense, AQI became the vehicle by which some angry Sunni Ba'athists expressed their opposition to the US invasion and the change in Iraq's government. After al-Zarqawi's killing in 2006, AQI re-named itself as the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI).

Eventually, the United States and the Iraqi government had the upper hand over the insurgents and agreed to a timetable for the withdrawal of US forces.[33] The US-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement (2008) called for the full removal of the US military by the end of 2011. It was years after the United States government originally thought it would leave, but it was a departure timetable, nonetheless.

But then the Arab Spring (2011) and the ensuing civil war in neighboring Syria created another opportunity for some of the Iraqi Sunni insurgents. ISI began to get stronger again: "With the US pullout in 2011, an opportunity to expand the operation to war-torn Syria, and in a wider sense [Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri] al-Maliki's sectarian governance, it managed to resurface once again."[34] With the move into Syria, as well as Iraq, the name again changed to the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS). By 2014, ISIS was capturing land in Syria and Iraq and the Islamic State was a territorial reality. Having implemented the Bush-era withdrawal agreement and hoped to leave Iraq behind, the administration of President Barack Obama was drawn back in to stop the Islamic State.

The overall point here is to emphasize the two ways by which the US invasion against Hussein's Iraq contributed to the emergence of a new adversary, the Islamic State. One is hard to quantify, the number of ex-Iraqi soldiers and other Iraqi Sunnis who ended up as ISIS or Islamic State fighters, officials, and sympathizers. Tomáš Kaválek makes clear that ex-Ba'athists played an important role in ISI's military improvements. Under Abu

Bakr al-Baghdadi (leader of ISI/ISIS from 2010 to 2019), radical Islamism was a better recruitment tool but Iraqi Ba'athist knowledge "further transformed the organization into a more capable body, especially regarding security, intelligence, and military operations."[35] In 2014, one-third of the top 20 ISIS leaders were former officers in the Iraqi military under Hussein and several more of those leaders had been in Iraqi intelligence.[36]

But there is a second way as well. The US invasion helped create the political vacuum and insecurity that fueled the rise of AQI/ISI/ISIS.[37] If one government fails or is absent, another governmental actor may well step in to fill the gap.

In response to the Islamic State's growth, the United States committed military personnel and resources to the fight. In the fall of 2014, it began aerial bombing in Syria and established the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) to fight the Islamic State. In 2016, one US scholar claimed the Islamic State "has achieved more than al-Qaeda ever has, and it has many more recruits and far more support among Muslims as well."[38] In 2017, the US military had 2,000 personnel in Syria.[39] ISIS also may have inspired a deadly attack in San Bernardino, California.

The broader but harder to detect effects may be important as well. For example, the Islamic State received extensive media coverage and that may have downstream benefits to the organization itself or others in the violent, Islamist space.[40] Or, the Islamic State adherents might target and weaken authoritarian governments in the region that are allied with the United States.[41] Or, the rise of ISIS may have complicated the Obama administration's "pivot" to Asia and the reduction of US meddling in the Middle East. These kinds of effects are plausible even if the exact causal evidence is harder to tease out.

2) The US invasion shifted the balance of power in favor of a different US adversary, Iran.

In the almost 45 years since the Iranian Revolution, the United States has focused significant resources on confronting and marginalizing the Islamic Republic of Iran. But Iran has neither been defeated nor convinced to changes its policies and rejoin the pro-US camp in the region. The 2003 US attack on Iraq helped Iran in terms of the distribution of military power.

First, it removed Hussein's Iraq as a strategic rival and counterweight to Iran. Recall that Iran and Iraq had been at war from 1980 to 1988. That war ate up the time and resources of both countries, leaving them little capability, if not will, to emphasize confronting others such as the United States. For the US government, limited US steps, such as re-establishing diplomatic relations with Iraq or maintaining US naval patrols in the Persian Gulf, were sufficient to capitalize on an already-advantageous situation: two potential rivals fighting each other.[42]

In the 1990s, Iran and Iraq were no longer at war, and the US military took on the direct responsibility of managing both US rivals in a policy dubbed dual containment. That was expensive and included stationing many US military personnel in the region. Both countries were subject to significant US economic sanctions. By 2000 or so, though, dual containment was not seen as a long-term answer. For example, leading neo-conservative hawks instead pushed for toppling Hussein's Iraqi government.

When the United States did just that—invaded Iraq and eliminated the Hussein government—it meant Iran's "primary rival" in the region went from powerful to zero power.[43] As Louise Fawcett noted, Iraq had been a "useful balancer" against Iran.[44] Iraq's 400,000 or so army and Republican Guard soldiers, thousands of tanks and armored vehicles, and hundreds of combat aircraft and helicopters were erased from the ledger.[45] This was especially true given that Iraq then spent years consumed by its own civil war and in absolutely no position to challenge Iran. Iran still had strategic concerns about Saudi Arabia and Israel, but it was not fighting directly with either.

Second, several newly empowered Iraqi Shiite parties were very sympathetic to Shiite-led Iran. After trying for years to gain ground inside Iraqi politics, Iranian officials had access to Iraqi decision makers in a manner that was totally different from before the US invasion of Iraq: "The war provided Iran with the opportunity to act out its regional ambitions via Iraq."[46] Some Iraqi officials were now likely consult with Iran and seek Iranian opinion on strategic policies that previously had been decided with little direct input from Iranian officials. To put it another way, pro-Iranian Iraqi officials now had the ability to try to shape Iraqi national interests in a way that Iran would like.

Iran also directly supported and trained Shiite militias inside Iraq such as the Badr Corps, the military wing of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (later the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq). In 2020, the US assassination of Qassem Soleimani, then head of Iran's Quds Force, took place in Baghdad, not in Iran. It is the Quds Force—a branch of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—that works with allied militias outside Iran.

The US invasion did create some challenges for Iran. The Iranian government worried that the empowerment of Iraqi Kurds could embolden Iranian Kurds to seek more power. At the same time, Iran worried that "the formation of a Sunni mini-state in the central regions of Iraq could potentially be a base for Arab nationalists and extreme Sunni Islamists." The Islamic State made this concern concrete. Moreover, as it appeared Iran was getting more powerful due to Saddam's fall, other countries like Saudi Arabia and the United States did more to counter-balance Iran.[47]

In sum, overall, the Gulf strategic balance and the Iraqi domestic political balance shifted in Iran's favor as a result of the 2003 US invasion.[48] In early 2023, one US analyst observed, "The pro-Iran militias remain very powerful and their political leaders dominate Iraqi politics and institutions."[49] Or, retired Lt. Gen. Jay Garner, who initially led the

US reconstruction of Iraq, put it more bluntly: "We overthrew Saddam and handed the country over to Iran."[50]

3) The US invasion gave a major rhetorical and symbolic boost to US adversaries.

The US invasion (2003) reinforced the centrality of the United States government to the hostile narrative of US adversaries, acting as a motivation for recruitment and support. This conceptual claim is difficult to isolate because so many US government actions in the Middle East have been seen as aggressive and hostile and thereby could have this effect. That includes the post-1979 rivalry with Iran, the 1991 war on Iraq, the presence of US military personnel in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s, support for Israel against Palestine, and attacks on al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban post-9/11. In writing about ISIS, Samantha Mahood and Halim Rane made the general point: "Perceptions of Western foreign policies as being against Islam and in support of Israel are equally harmful in perpetuating anti-Western sentiment and Islamic radicalization."[51] But that doesn't help assess the relative importance of the 2003 invasion and its aftermath to that process.

There is some suggestive evidence, but a systematic judgment on this point remains incomplete. Thomas Hegghammer found that in al-Qaeda declarations, Iraq became a more prominent focus than even Palestine. Iraq also became the most discussed topic on radical Islamist web forums. Most material posted to the sites, such as videos, concerned Iraq.[52] For many violent jihadists, the invasion confirmed "Washington's evil intentions."[53] In two cases where violent attacks happened (Madrid, Amsterdam), Petter Nesser found that the Iraq War was an important motivation for the militants.[54] Another study found that in July 2007, "the geographical focus in 78 [percent] of the material on the quasi-official Jihadist websites was on Iraq."[55]

Although my focus in this section is on rhetoric and symbolism, there are material elements as well that relate Iraq to Islamist militancy. Some scholars studied whether the Iraq War increased terrorist attacks.[56] Another physical factor was the prisons in Iraq where militants might meet each other, get trained and indoctrinated, and build networks.[57] We know that foreign fighters "created new terrorist networks and gained valuable battlefield experience."[58]

Conclusion

Of course, it is difficult to weigh the messy US invasion and occupation against a counter-factual Iraq where Hussein or his acolyte was still brutally ruling Iraq in 2010 or even 2020.[59] While neither scenario is necessarily reassuring, we can be certain of the casualties and devastation only of the Bush administration's pathway of invading Iraq, deposing Hussein, and installing a new Iraqi government. It was extremely costly and went nothing like they claimed to have expected.

One can see how this situation becomes a self-justifying cycle for the alleged need for the US armed forces to intervene globally. Analysts may see that as problem for Washington. From the perspective of minimizing violent invasions and their inhumane fallout, it is a problem. From the perspective of committed hawkish US officials seeking to use US power judiciously to coerce the world into submission to US dominance, it is also a problem.

Expending so many resources on one state and one war leaves less for the other foreign adventures. Furthermore, the lack of US success sends the wrong message to other US adversaries. It is an anti-deterrent.

The pathways outlined here help delineate what it means to say that national security policy, and maybe US national security policy specifically, often creates a situation that is worse off and more costly than when the intervening state began. The counterproductive result can be new or reconstructed enemies, a shifting balance of power to the benefit of rivals, fuel for hostile fundraising and membership recruitment, and the expending of limited resources, thereby squeezing out support for other internal or external policies.

As I noted above, the ethical challenge to a major power's military interventions is important to address. But even if we set those moral qualms aside, we still need to recognize how often the pragmatic case for intervention falls apart, sparking costly and damaging results that may lead to even deeper and messier military meddling. I am deeply skeptical that this is a fixable problem. A military violation of sovereignty is such a violent act that destruction and mayhem are highly likely if not inevitable. Nationalism, and defending one's nation-state from foreign invaders, is a potent motivating ideology. In a situation of military intervention, it becomes a powerful fuel for forming opposition. Not to mention that the intervenor's existing rivals elsewhere may look at this as an opportunity to fan the flames, possibly worsening the costs for everyone involved.[60] Military intervention begets military intervention.

The course of the Iraq war, and the different pathways to lesser security afterwards, may lead to a healthy skepticism about how leaders talk about war. Maybe the default position should be to assume war results in high costs, a long duration, and multiple spillover effects.

Jeremy Pressman, PhD, studies international relations, protests, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and US foreign policy in the Middle East. He co-founded and co-directs the Crowd Counting Consortium, an event counting project that has tallied and made publicly available data on all manner of protests in the United States since 2017. Pressman received his PhD in political science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and previously worked at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He has held fellowships at Harvard University, Brandeis University, the University of Sydney, the UConn Humanities Institute, and the Norwegian Nobel Institute, where he was a Fulbright fellow.

His most recent book is *The Sword is Not Enough: Arabs, Israelis, and the Limits of Military Force* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2020). Pressman questions the over-reliance on military force and highlights the negative military and political consequences such as greater insecurity. Pressman has spoken at length about the book at UCLA (https://www.international.ucla.edu/israel/article/231049) and in podcasts such as "In the Moment" (Town Hall Seattle, https://townhallseattle.org/event/jeremy-pressman-mira-sucharov-with-daniel-c-kurtzer-podcast/) and "Power Problems" (CATO Institute, https://www.cato.org/multimedia/power-problems/limits-force-israel-palestine).

Pressman also wrote *Warring Friends: Alliance Restraint in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), a part of the Cornell Studies in Security Affairs; and, with Geoffrey Kemp, *Point of No Return: The Deadly Struggle for Middle East Peace* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997). He has published journal articles in *Diplomatic History*, *International Security*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *Science Advances*, *Social Movement Studies*, and elsewhere (https://jeremy-pressman.uconn.edu/writings/journal/).

Endnotes

1 Brendan R. Gallagher, *The Day After: Why America Wins the War but Loses the Peace* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

2 Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced By War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). See also Andrew J. Bacevich, *America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (New York: Random House, 2016). For a much broader point about the difficulties of succeeding at military intervention and regime change, see Alexander B. Downes, *Catastrophic Success: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Goes Wrong* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021)

3 Gallagher, *The Day After*, 11.

4 Others who have noted poor US planning for Iraq include Hal Brands, "Blundering Into Baghdad: The Right - and Wrong - Lessons of the Iraq War," *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 2 (2023): 176–84; Robert K. Brigham, "The Lessons and Legacies of the War in Iraq," in *Understanding the U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, ed. Beth Bailey and Richard H. Immerman (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 286-307; Daniel Byman, "An Autopsy of the Iraq Debacle: Policy Failure or Bridge Too Far?," *Security Studies* 17, no. 4 (December 9, 2008): 599-643, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410802507974; Toby Dodge, "The Causes of US Failure in Iraq," *Survival* 49, no. 1 (March 2007): 85-106, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396330701254545; and Kenneth M. Pollack, "The Seven Deadly Sins of Failure in Iraq: A Retrospective Analysis of the Reconstruction," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 10, no. 4 (2006).

5 Flibbert suggested the war was "badly conceived," not just "badly conducted." Rather than categorical claims that US success was or was not possible in Iraq, some scholars and analysts wanted to leave that point open, like Dobbins: "Whether one concludes that the war itself was a mistake or merely that its execution was badly managed…" Andrew J. Flibbert, "The Consequences of Forced State Failure in Iraq," *Political Science Quarterly* 128, no. 1 (2013): 67-95 at 91; and James Dobbins, "Who Lost Iraq? Lessons from the Debacle," *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 5 (2007): 61-74 at 64.

6 Another work that does not emphasize this point and has a rosier view of what the United States could have achieved in Iraq is Brands, "Blundering Into Baghdad: The Right - and Wrong - Lessons of the Iraq War."

7 Byman also emphasized Iraq's structure and poor US planning (as well as poor policymaking). See Byman, "An Autopsy of the Iraq Debacle."

8 Another factor that only partly comes out in my analysis is the extent to which the US military attack damaged Iraqi institutions: "The war's initial assault on Baghdad included attacks on nearly every government ministry, as American forces attacked a wide range of public facilities and infrastructure." This assault continued with the leaders of the US occupation who "were fairly systematic in ridding Iraq of state administrative authority and transforming its institutional landscape." Andrew J. Flibbert, *Iraq: Power, Institutions, and Identities* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 94-95. We might think of it as pre-existing, internal conditions plus the war's consequences.

9 Examples of others who mention Iraqi nationalism and the reason why an Iraqi backlash might be expected in the face of a US invasion include Dodge, "The Causes of US Failure in Iraq"; and Samer Shehata, "Understanding America's Failure in Iraq," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 6, no. 1 (2005): 71-80.

10 Gallagher, *The Day After*, 144, 130-131, 215.

11 Dobbins, "Who Lost Iraq?," 73-74. See also Mueller (page 116), citing Shinseki's testimony. John Mueller, "Al-Qaeda and the 9/11 Wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan," in *The Stupidity of War: American Foreign Policy and the Case for Complacency* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 89-120.

12 Gallagher, *The Day After*, 32.

13 Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*, 194.

14 As Mueller (*The Stupidity of War*, 116-117) noted, the US invasion also spurred Iranian, Syrian, and al-Qaeda pushback against US forces and US interests.

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