

# **The Iraq War, 2003-2011**

History 410/510 – CRN 17235/17237

Fall 2013

Tues, Thurs., 10-11:20; 189 PLC

If only human beings were not masks behind masks behind masks. If only this world was a clean board of lines and intersections. If only time was a sequence of considered moves and not a chaos of slippages and blunders.

David Mitchell, The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet (2010), p. 357.

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## **Aims of course**

When I first started teaching “The Iraq War” in the summer of 2007 (the height of the civil war that was tearing Iraq apart, as we will see), I would often get the question, “The Iraq War? But that’s not history.” Increasingly, however, the war is history. Each passing year gives us the distance necessary to create the historical narratives that we use to order our memory of the past, even the very recent past.

A central contention of this class is that if some aspects of the war remain difficult to understand, other dimensions have come into a tolerable degree of focus. One of the aims of this course is to distinguish between those questions that can be answered, at least provisionally, and those that must remain open, whether because the necessary materials are not yet available, or because we lack proper perspective. Another issue is how the history of current and on-going events can be done at all. What kinds of assumptions must be made to stake out historical claims about events that might not have ended? What might we conclude about the validity of such claims? We are constantly being told what the war was “about” and whether it was “worth it.” On what basis can we evaluate such claims?

Those are just some of the issues lurking in the background of this course. We will address them as they come up but the organizing principle of the course is much simpler. The central argument is that the origins of the war lay in the Bush administration’s decision to depose Saddam Hussein but that U.S. aims and actions can

only go so far in explaining the dynamics of the conflict. Any account of the war must take into account the actions of Iraqis and other regional agents.

We will thus begin with U.S. decision-making and planning and then bring in other factors as we get to the invasion and occupation. We will try to draw some conclusions regarding three fundamental issues:

1) The U.S. administration's decision to invade Iraq (How did it arrive at the decision? When? By what process? What were the administration's aims? How did it hope to achieve them?)

2) The subsequent course of events (Why did the situation in Iraq deteriorate so quickly? To what extent was the situation in Iraq due to U.S. policies and actions on the part of the occupational authority? To what extent was it due to forces within Iraq itself? To what extent was it due to foreigners other than U.S. agents? What happened in 2007-2008 to improve the situation? Was there any realistic possibility that the occupation might have turned out differently?)

3) More generally what is/was the Iraq War about? (How does it fit into the larger "war on terror"? What is its significance for Iraq? For the Middle East more generally? What might the future hold?)

### **Assignments and expectations**

Attendance and completion of course readings and assignments is expected.

Grades will be compiled on the basis of two on-line written assignments, an in-class final, and a short research paper on a topic of your choosing.

The assignments are designed to develop and test 1) basic factual knowledge of the Iraq War; and 2) broader interpretive concepts as these apply to the Iraq War. I assess grades according to a combination of these two elements. Please note the implication: you cannot receive top scores simply by "knowing the facts." The facts and evidence are just the beginning. The more important and interesting part of historical thinking is what one does with all of the facts.

Two **on-line written assignments** (15% of grade each): these will take place on the class Blackboard site. Due dates: Oct. 18 and Nov. 11, respectively

**Final exam** (25% of grade) in our classroom, 8:00 am on Monday, Dec. 9

**Research paper** (35% of grade): a research paper (8-10 pages) on a topic of your choosing. On **Nov. 22** you *must* turn in a **brief description of your topic with a bibliography** of the materials you intend to use (10% of course grade).

The due date for the paper will be determined by a class vote: either at the end of tenth week or during finals week.

**Graduate students:** we will talk. Everything is the same except the research paper.

**Schedule of readings:** You should do the reading for the class day under which it is listed. All readings can be found on the class Blackboard site under “Course Readings.”

The reading loads for the weeks of Oct. 25-27 and Nov. 15-17 are heavier than others. You should plan accordingly.

There is one book that is available for purchase at the bookstore:

Mark Kukis, Voices from Iraq: A People’s History, 2003-2009. Columbia University Press, 2011.

## **Pt. I: The decision to invade Iraq**

Oct. 1: Introduction: the big questions and what we know (or think we know) about them; plus Kissinger as an example of the realism in foreign policy

Read: Henry Kissinger, “A False Dream,” excerpts from Iraq War Papers, 5-8

Oct. 3: Why invade Iraq? The Bush Doctrine and the administration’s decision to invade

Read: President Bush, West Point address, June 1, 2002; Kagan and Kristol, “What to Do about Iraq,” Weekly Standard, January 21, 2002; Barton Gellman, Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency (2008): ch. 9 (215-53)

Oct. 8: Why invade Iraq? Inside the White House and how decisions are made

Compare previous day’s readings to Bob Woodward, Plan of Attack (2004): 1-8, 154-66, 173-79, 192-204, 220-35, and 240-54; and Philip Zelikow, “U.S. Strategic Planning in 2001-02,” from Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro, In Uncertain Times: American Foreign Policy after the Berlin Wall and 9/11 (2011): 96-116. How does Bush’s “declarative policy” match up against the evidence in Woodward’s book? How about Cheney? If this is what you have for direct evidence, what would you conclude about the basis of the decision?

Oct. 10: Pre-war planning

Read: Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq (2006): ch. 8 (138-163)

Also: read excerpt of interviews with James Fallows and Frederick Kagan on the Frontline website (see links on BB)

Oct. 15: The impending invasion as seen from Iraq

Read: “Saddam’s Delusions: The View from the Inside” Foreign Affairs vol. 85 (May/June 2006): 2-26. (This article is drawn from a larger book, Iraqi Perspectives Project, A View of Operation Iraqi Freedom from Saddam’s Senior Leadership (2006) – a pdf version is posted if you care to take a look).

And Mark Kukis, Voices from Iraq, intro and part I (xi-43).

Also of interest: Salam Pax, “Where Is Raed” (blog), January, 2003 (you can access the blog via the Blackboard link); and Anthony Shadid, Night Draws Near: Iraq’s People in the Shadow of America’s War (2005): ch. 2 (39-56). I’ve also established a link to Iraq Bloggers Central, a portal site with links to all English-language Iraqi bloggers, 2003-2009.

## **Pt. II: Occupation, insurgency and civil war**

Oct. 17: The invasion

No reading: work on first assignment?

**First on-line assignment due: Oct. 18, 11 pm**

Oct. 22: Iraq’s ethnic and sectarian divisions: Sunni and Shi’a, Arab, Kurd, Turkman, and all the rest

Read: Ali Allawi, The Occupation of Iraq, ch. 7 (132-47); Cockburn, Muqtada al-Sadr, chs. 2, 7, 9, 11; Quil Lawrence, Invisible Nation, ch. 9 (182-201); Kukis, Voices from Iraq, pt. II is also relevant though I’ve formally assigned it below.

Oct. 24: Bremer and the CPA

Read: Rajiv Chandrasekaran, Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone (2006): chs. 4, 6, and 12 (58-80, 102-126, 223-233); and see Fred Kaplan's piece, "Who Disbanded the Iraqi Army?"

Oct. 29: Insurgencies

Read: Ahmed Hasim, "Iraq's Chaos"; Shadid, Night Draws Near, chapters 13 and 16 (pages 333-376 and 418-465 in the paperback edition: the hardcover has different pagination); and documents from The Iraq Papers, 248-264;

And Kukis, Voices from Iraq, pt. II (47-77).

Also: take a look at data in the Iraq Index, March 2004

Oct. 31: Military operations

Read: Thomas Ricks, Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq (2006), ch. 11 (214-269)

Nov. 5: Abu Ghraib and the issue of prisoner abuse

Read: Thomas Ricks, Fiasco, ch. 12 (270-297); documents from The Iraq Papers, 422-425, 431-46; and for an account of how the policies described by Ricks from the perspective of an Iraqi family caught up in it, Farnaz Fasshihi, Waiting for an Ordinary Day: The Unraveling of Life in Iraq (2008): ch. 15 (136-156)

Also: for one Iraqi's response (by the best-known English-language Iraqi blogger, Riverbend), see the Baghdad Burning blog entries for March 29 and then April 30, 2004 and following. There is a link on BB (it was also published in vol. 1 of Baghdad Burning, pages 231-5 and 258ff).

Nov. 7: A bit of Iraqi politics

Read: Ali A. Allawi, The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace (2007): chs. 13, 25, and epilogue (233-48, 436-460); assorted documents from The Iraq Papers, 306-26 [skim constitution but pay attention to articles 106-113]; also Adeed

Dawisha, Iraq: A Political History from Independence to Occupation (2009): ch. 11 (242-74).

**Second on-line assignment due: Nov. 11, 11 pm**

Nov. 12: The civil war - movie day

Nov. 14: Iraqi voices

Read: Kukis, Voices from Iraq, pts. III and IV (81-171); we'll also talk about the movie; and remind me to say something about research papers (you need to submit a description of your topic and bibliography next week)

Nov. 19: The strategic shift of 2007 (the "Surge")

Read: Steven Metz, "Decisionmaking in Operation Iraqi Freedom: The Strategic Shift of 2007," Operation Iraqi Freedom Key Decisions Monograph Series, Strategic Studies Institute, May 2010, pages 1-42; also take a look at Iraq Index, December 2006 (this is when Bush announces the "Surge" but scan data for summer, 2006) – make sure to look at civilian death rates.

If you want to further your depression, you can read Nir Rosen, "Slaughterhouse," from Bloodlands (2010) 75-119. And for a first-hand account of the worsening situation and her family's decision to leave, see the links to Riverbend's blog.

Nov. 21: The surge and tribal politics

Read: David Kilcullen, The Accidental Guerrilla (2009): ch. 3 (115-185)

**Nov. 22: Research paper description due: submit on-line**

### **Pt. III: Assessing the War**

Nov. 26: Are we safer now? A balance sheet for the U.S.

Read: Peter J. Dombrowski and John S. Duffield, "Are We Safer Now," from idem, ed., Balance Sheet: The Iraq War and U.S. National Security (Stanford, 2009), 158-202.

Nov. 28: No class

Dec. 3: The view from Iraq

Read: Kukis, Voices from Iraq, pt. V (175-215), Iraq Index, November 2013, and **TBA**.

Dec. 5: What was it all about?

Read: Andrew J. Bacevich, "The United States in Iraq: Terminating an Interminable War," in Matthew Moten, ed., Between War and Peace: How America Ends Its Wars (2011), 302-322; and Bush at VFW National Convention, Aug. 22, 2007 (from The Iraq Papers); Iraq Study Group Report (excerpt from The Iraq Papers).

FINAL EXAM: Monday, Dec. 9, 8:00 am