

Advanced Institutes, Summer 2015
LESSONS OF THE IRAQ WAR
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As we'll see, the emergence of ISIS is not the first time American policymakers have been taken by surprise by events in Iraq. Nor is this the first time that leaders in Washington have suddenly been forced to choose from a menu of seemingly bad options in response to a crisis unfolding there, with uncertain but potentially far-reaching consequences for American national security.

In fact, the United States has been militarily engaged in Iraq—in one form or another—for nearly a quarter--- century. This means that, for many of you, our wars in the “Land of the Two Rivers” are older than you are. By way of (less personal) comparison, this is already more than half the length of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, which ran from the late 1940s until the early 1990s.

Of course, few would claim that America's battles in and with Iraq have defined U.S. foreign policy in the way that our “long twilight struggle” with Soviet communism did. Yet at the same time, seldom has a single country had such a disproportionate and defining impact on our engagement in the world, how we think about our foreign policy, and how others think about it.

Fundamentally, our purpose will be to examine how the United States—over a succession of four very different presidents—grappled with the challenges presented by Iraq, the decisions and strategies our leaders formulated in response to these challenges, and what then happened as they attempted to carry them out. In the course of doing so, we will hopefully come to learn a bit about how the U.S. government works (and how it doesn't work), how U.S. foreign policy gets made (and unmade), and what the experience of foreign policy decision-making is like.

Our approach will be chronological—proceeding from Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 through the present day and the crisis now unfolding.

Note: All readings, except *Endgame*, can be found in your course reader.

Sunday, August 9, 2015

The Gulf War

Noon to 4:00 p.m.

Gulf War (1990–91)

Reading:

- Kenneth Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, Chapter 1 (“From Sumer to Saddam”)
- George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, Chapters 13, 17, 19
- Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *The Generals' War*, Chapters 1, 2, 20
- “Poll Finds Americans Divided on Force or Sanctions in Gulf,” *New York Times*, December 14, 1990

- Senate Floor Statement by Senator John Kerry on the authorization for the use of force against Iraq, January 11, 1991
- Transcript of interview with Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, “This Week with David Brinkley,” April 7, 1991
- Senate Floor Statement by Senator Joseph Lieberman, “The Refugee Crisis in Iraq,” April 9, 1991
- Paul Wolfowitz, “Victory Came Too Easily,” *The National Interest*, Spring 1994

Discussion Questions:

1. Was the Gulf War of 1991 a “war of necessity”? Why did it happen? Was it avoidable? Why did leaders at the time decide to undertake it? What role did memories of previous conflicts play in shaping their thinking?
2. What were the arguments in Congress in January 1991 that were made for and against giving President George H. W. Bush authorization to use military force against Saddam Hussein? What was public opinion on this matter, and to what extent should that matter to leaders and policymakers?
3. How did the Gulf War end, and why did U.S. policymakers end it when and how they did? Was it the right decision, or did they make a mistake? What were its strategic and moral consequences? What were the alternative courses of action, and why didn’t they pursue them?

6 PM to 8 PM

Dinner and Discussion

Monday, August 10, 2015

The Interwar Years

9:15 AM to 12:15 PM

Iraq under Clinton and Bush before 9/11

Reading:

- Kenneth Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, Chapter 3 (“Containment and Beyond”)
- Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, Chapter 7 (“Remembering the Past and Imagining the Future”)
- Project for the New American Century, Letter to Congressional Leadership, May 29, 1998
- “How to Attack Iraq,” *Weekly Standard*, November 16, 1998
- Kenneth Pollack, Daniel Byman, and Gideon Rose, “The Rollback Fantasy,” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1999
- “In Saddam’s Future, A Harder U.S. Line,” *Washington Post*, June 3, 2000

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the Clinton Administration’s strategy for dealing with Saddam? How did it evolve over time? Was it the right approach, and was it sustainable? What were the alternatives its critics called for? How plausible were they? What were the assumptions

- and attitudes about Iraq at the end of the Clinton Administration?
2. How did the Bush Administration handle Iraq before 9/11? What were the policies and proposals advocated by the newly-installed senior officials when they were out of government in the 1990s? What did they do once they were back in power?
 3. Assume 9/11 never happened—how would the George W. Bush Administration have approached the problem posed by Saddam Hussein?
 4. Assume Gore-Lieberman defeated Bush-Cheney in 2000—how would the Gore Administration have thought about and approached the problem posed by Saddam Hussein post-9/11?

1:15 PM to 4:15 PM

Iraq after 9/11

Reading:

- Kenneth Pollack, *The Threatening Storm*, “Conclusions” (“Not Whether But When”)
- George Packer, *The Assassin’s Gate*, Chapter 1 (“An Unfinished War”),
- Peter Baker, *Days of Fire*, pages 213–27; 240–51
- Robert Kagan and William Kristol, “What to do about Iraq,” *Weekly Standard*, January 21, 2002
- Douglas Feith, *War and Decision*, pages 195–210
- Tony Blair, Iraq portion of speech to TUC, September 10, 2002
- Transcript of Richard Holbrooke on Fox News Sunday, September 1, 2002
- Brent Scowcroft, “Don’t Attack Saddam,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 15, 2002
- Floor Statements on Iraq Authorization for the Use of Military Force, October 9– 10, 2002 by Senators Kerry, Feingold
- Thomas Friedman, “Because We Could,” *New York Times*, June 3, 2003

Discussion Questions:

1. What changed after 9/11 that led U.S. policymakers and foreign policy thought leaders to advocate invading Iraq? What were the arguments they cited? Who argued against going to war with Saddam, and what were the arguments they deployed?
2. What role did memory of previous conflicts and analogies to them play in shaping arguments for and against the 2003 invasion of Iraq in 2002–2003? What had been the U.S. experience with military intervention during the 1990s elsewhere in the world, apart from Iraq?
3. Did advocates of intervention share a common vision for what the U.S. should do in Iraq, and why? If not, what were the divisions, and how did they impact the pre-war planning?
4. Richard Haass argues that the first Gulf War was a “war of necessity,” whereas the 2003 invasion was a “war of choice.” Is he right?
5. What were the politics surrounding the congressional debate to go to war in 2003? How did they compare with those of 1991? What was the role of public opinion?

Tuesday, August 11, 2015

2003 to 2006

9:15 AM to 12:15 PM

2003 to 2004

Reading:

- Peter Mansoor, *Surge*, Chapter 1 (“A War Almost Lost”)
- Peter Baker, *Days of Fire*, pages 257–67; 270–73; 307–09
- Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *Endgame*, Chapters 1 (“Desert Crossing”), 2 (“Politics of the Gun”), 3 (“Sovereignty Within Limits”), 6 (“Our Man in Baghdad”)
- Tom Donnelly, “Secretary of Stubbornness,” *Weekly Standard*, September 15, 2003
- Danielle Pletka, “Troops in Iraq: More Isn’t Better,” *New York Times*, September 23, 2003
- Michael Gordon, “101st Airborne Scores Success in Northern Iraq,” *New York Times*, September 4, 2003
- Rod Nordland, “Can This Man Save Iraq?,” *Newsweek*, July 5, 2004
- “Kerry Lays Out Iraq Plan,” *Washington Post*, September 20, 2004

Discussion Questions:

1. What were the most consequential mistakes made by the U.S. in Iraq in the wake of overthrowing Saddam’s regime? What were the alternative policies that might have been adopted in 2003–2004, to what extent were they explored, and why weren’t they adopted?
2. Following the ouster of Saddam Hussein and the declaration that “major combat operations” had ended on May 1, 2003, U.S. military strategy had at least two distinct phases over the next 3 years – one under Gen. Sanchez (2003–2004), the second under Gen. Casey (2004–2006)? What were they, and how did they differ? What were the assumptions driving these strategies, and were they accurate?
3. What was the U.S. political strategy for post-Saddam Iraq? Were policymakers in the Bush Administration united on what it should look like, and if not, what did they disagree over? What was the political strategy under Paul Bremer (2003–2004), and how did this change after John Negroponte and later Zal Khalilzad (2004–2006) became ambassador?
4. Was the Sunni insurgency in the wake of Saddam’s overthrow the avoidable consequence of specific U.S. mistakes and missteps? Or was the country’s implosion the inevitable consequence of deeply-embedded forces in Iraqi society that were set free by Saddam’s ouster, regardless of what the U.S. did?
5. How do we explain the absence of WMD? What was the moral and strategic significance that Saddam in fact did not possess these weapons? What lessons should we draw about U.S. intelligence and policymaking from this failure?
6. What were critics of the Bush Administration in 2003–2004 arguing the U.S. was doing wrong in Iraq? As the Democratic presidential candidate in 2004, what did then-Senator John Kerry propose as his alternative approach? In hindsight, was this a trenchant critique and did it point towards a better policy?

1:15 PM to 4:15 PM

2005 to 2006

Reading:

- Peter Baker, *Days of Fire*, 456–59; 463–67; 486–91
- Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *Endgame*, Chapter 11 (“The Year of Living Dangerously”)
- Nir Rosen, “If America Left Iraq: The Case for Cutting and Running,” *The Atlantic*, December 1, 2005
- Joseph Biden and Les Gelb, “Unity Through Autonomy in Iraq,” *New York Times*, May 1, 2006
- John McCain, “Winning the War in Iraq,” Speech at the American Enterprise Institute, November 10, 2005
- George Packer, “The Lesson of Tel’Afar,” *The New Yorker*, April 10, 2006
- Robert F. Worth, “Blast Destroys Shrine in Iraq, Setting Off Sectarian Fury,” *New York Times*, February 22, 2006
- Dafna Linzer and Thomas Ricks, “Anbar Picture Grows Clearer, and Bleaker,” *Washington Post*, November 28, 2006

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did many in the Bush Administration believe they had started to succeed in Iraq by early 2005? What was the strategy as President Bush’s second term began? What were the assumptions about what was happening in Iraq?
2. What was the significance of the February 2006 Golden Mosque bombing in Samarra? To what extent is it fair to say that this event changed the trajectory of the war?
3. What was the military significance of Colonel H. R. McMaster’s efforts in the city of Tel’Afar? How did they fit into the broader military strategy under General Casey?
4. As violence levels in Iraq rose, several alternative strategies were put forward. What did Senator McCain argue for the U.S. to do? What did Senator Biden? What did Nir Rosen?

Wednesday, August 12, 2015

The Surge

9:15 AM to 12:15 PM

Debate over the Surge

2:15 PM to 4:15 PM

Execution of the Surge and Aftermath

Reading:

- “The Iraq Study Group,” Executive Summary, December 6, 2006
- Kenneth Pollack and Daniel Byman, “Executive Summary” from *Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War*, Brookings Institution Report, January 2007

- Frederick W. Kagan, “Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq,” January 2007, pages 1–23
- Peter Baker, *Days of Fire*, pages 507–32
- George W. Bush Speech to the Nation, January 11, 2007
- “Poll: Most Americans Opposed to Bush’s Iraq Plan,” *Washington Post*, January 11, 2007
- “GOP Senator: Bush Plan Could Match Vietnam Blunder,” CNN, January 11, 2007
- “Poll Shows View of Iraq War is Most Negative Since Start,” *New York Times*, May 25, 2007
- Harry Reid, “Congress Leading the Way for a New Direction in Iraq,” Speech to the Woodrow Wilson Center, April 23, 2007
- Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *Endgame*, Chapters 15 (“Some Friendly Advice”), 18 (“Petraeus Takes Command”) and 19 (“The Enemy Within”)
- “Uneasy Alliance is Taming One Insurgent Bastion,” *New York Times*, April 29, 2007
- Kenneth Pollack and Michael O’Hanlon, “A War We Might Just Win,” *New York Times*, July 30, 2007
- Testimony of General David H. Petraeus to Congress, September 10–11, 2007

Discussion Questions:

1. By late 2006, U.S. policy in Iraq had reached a turning point. What were the different approaches being counseled at the time, by whom, and what were the arguments for or against them? What was the Iraq Study Group, and what did it propose? What was the AEI Iraq Study, and what did it propose? Which approach did President Bush ultimately pick?
2. What did the “surge” actually consist of militarily and politically? What did the U.S. do differently under General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker versus under General Casey?
3. What was the U.S. public reaction to the surge? What was the congressional reaction? What conclusions can we draw from this experience about what the role of public opinion and Congress in foreign policy should be?
4. Violence levels began to drop significantly in Iraq by mid-2007. Why did this happen, and to what extent can we say the surge “succeeded”? In what ways did it fail?

Thursday, August 13, 2015

Iraq under Obama

9:15 AM to 12:15 PM

Iraq Policy under Obama (2009–2011)

Reading:

- “Bush, in a Shift, Accepts Concept of Iraq Timeline,” *New York Times*, July 19, 2008
- Barack Obama, “My Plan for Iraq,” *New York Times*, July 14, 2008
- Robert Gates, *Duty*, pages 324–26
- Obama Speech at Camp Lejeune, February 27, 2009
- Frederick W. Kagan and Kimberly Kagan, “Iraq’s Remarkable Election,” *Wall Street*

Journal, February 6, 2009

- Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *Endgame*, Chapters 35 (“The Numbers Game”) and 36 (“Mission Accomplished”)
- Emma Sky, “How Obama Abandoned Democracy in Iraq,” *Politico*, April 15, 2015
- Kenneth Pollack, “Five Myths about the Iraq Troop Withdrawal,” *Washington Post*, August 10, 2010
- Kenneth Pollack, “Something Is Rotten in the State of Iraq,” *The National Interest*, September-October 2011
- Leon Panetta, “How the White House Misplayed Iraq Troop Talks,” *Time*, October 1, 2014
- Brett McGurk, “Not An End, But a Beginning in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, November 3, 2011

Discussion Questions:

1. What role did the Iraq War play in the 2008 presidential campaign? What was the Obama Administration’s proposed strategy for Iraq before coming to office? What were its core assumptions, and what was the political and ideological frame for the policy? How did it change after he became president—and how did it remain the same? How were the approach and assumptions of the incoming Obama team about Iraq different from those of the outgoing Bush Administration?
2. How did the U.S. diplomatic/political strategy in Iraq change under Obama, following the replacement of Ambassador Crocker with Ambassador Hill?
3. What was the outcome of the 2010 national elections in Iraq? How was the Obama Administration’s strategy?
4. Why did the U.S. military presence end in Iraq at the end of 2011? How important was this decision for the future of Iraq?
5. What were the most consequential mistakes of the Obama Administration in 2009–2011? Were there alternatives that might have been pursued, and if so, why did policymakers not pursue them?

2:15 PM to 4:15 PM

Iraq Policy under Obama (2011-Present)

Reading:

- Jack Healy, “Arrest Warrant for Sunni Leader in Iraq Opens New Rift,” *New York Times*, December 19, 2011
- Michael Knights, “Is Iraq Heading Towards Civil War?” *New York Times*, March 20, 2013
- Dexter Filkins, “The Thin Red Line,” *The New Yorker*, May 13, 2003
- Michael Crowley, “The Ghost of Iraq Haunts Obama’s Syria Attack Plan,” *Time*, August 30, 2013
- Adam Entous, et al, “Inside the White House, a Head-Spinning Reversal on Chemical Weapons,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 15, 2013
- Jessica Lewis, Al Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent, “Introduction” and “Background” Sections, Institute for the Study of War, September 2013
- Liz Sly and Ahmed Ramadan, “Insurgents Seize Iraqi City of Mosul as Security Forces Flee,” *Washington Post*, June 10, 2014
- Peter Baker, “Relief Over U.S. Exit From Iraq Fades as Reality Overtakes Hope,” *New York Times*, June 22, 2014

- Colin Kahl, “No, Obama Didn’t Lose Iraq,” *Politico*, June 15, 2014
- Ali Khedery, “Why We Stuck with Maliki—and Lost Iraq,” *Washington Post*, July 3, 2014
- James Jeffrey, “Behind the U.S. Withdrawal from Iraq,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 2, 2014
- Alissa Rubin, et al, “U.S. Jets and Drones Attack Militants in Iraq, Hoping to Stop Advance,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2014
- Barack Obama, “Statement by the President on ISIL,” White House, September 10, 2014
- Michael Shear and Michael Gordon, “Obama Promises Again Not to Send Ground Troops to Fight Militants,” *New York Times*, September 17, 2014
- Anthony Blinken, “Remarks by Deputy National Security Advisor Tony Blinken at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on the Campaign to Counter ISIL,” The White House, October 29, 2014
- Liz Sly, “David Petraeus: The Islamic State Isn’t Our Biggest Problem in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, March 20, 2015
- Borzou Daragahi, “Former Iraq Prime Minister Maliki Clings to Remnants of Power,” *Financial Times*, March 16, 2015
- Helene Cooper, “U.S. Strategy in Iraq Increasingly Relies on Iran,” *New York Times*, March 5, 2015
- Tim Arango, “Key Iraqi City Falls to ISIS as Last of Security Forces Flee,” *New York Times*, May 17, 2015
- Derek Harvey, Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, May 21, 2015, pages 30–36
- Ken Pollack, “Iraq After the Fall of Ramadi,” Brookings Institution blog post, May 21, 2015
- Terry Atlas, “Why Body Count Is Bad Metric for Judging Islamic State Fight,” Bloomberg, June 4, 2015
- Michael Gordon, “U.S. Embracing a New Approach on Battling ISIS in Iraq,” *New York Times*, June 10, 2015
- Michele Flournoy and Richard Fontaine, “To Defeat the Islamic State, the U.S. Will Have to Go Big,” *Washington Post*, June 24, 2015

Discussion Questions:

1. What went wrong in Iraq after 2011 that made possible the takeover of northern Iraq by ISIL in June 2014? To what extent did other factors in the region play a role?
2. How did the Obama Administration think about Iraq strategically after 2011? How did it fit into the Administration’s broader worldview?
3. To what extent and in what ways did the U.S. experience in Iraq affect the Obama Administration’s attitude towards the uprising in Syria that began in 2011? What in turn were the consequences of this posture for Iraq and U.S. national security interests there?
4. Was the deterioration of Iraqi democracy and security since 2011 out of American control, or the consequence of specific mistakes on the part of the U.S. that might have been avoided? Be prepared to defend either thesis. If the latter, what were the decision points when the U.S. should have taken a different approach? Why didn’t we?
5. Was the resurgence of al Qaeda in Iraq predictable? If so, why was the Obama Administration caught off guard?

6. What is the Obama Administration's strategy against ISIL today? How has it evolved since 2014? To what extent has past U.S. experience in Iraq informed the Obama Administration's post-2014 Iraq strategy? Do you believe it is succeeding?

6 PM to 9 PM

Dinner and Discussion

Friday, August 14, 2015

Conclusions

9:15 AM to 12:15 PM

Lessons, Patterns, and Themes

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some of the recurring patterns in U.S. foreign policy that we can see over the course of our involvement with Iraq over the past 25 years? Are there particular mistakes we seem to repeat again and again? Does our experience in Iraq point to any recurring "blind spots" in the way we operate in the world?
2. What does our experience in Iraq suggest about the way in which policymakers use—and misuse—history and our memory of "the last war" in devising and advocating strategies for the world?
3. What does Iraq tell us about the role that public opinion should play (or not play) in influencing foreign policy?
4. What has been the impact of Iraq on how Americans, and policymakers, look at the world today, and America's role in the world? How enduring are these attitudes likely to be?
5. What if any lessons do you think we should we draw from our experience in Iraq? What lessons shouldn't we draw?

12:15 PM to 2 PM

Lunch