

The Iraq War, 2003-2011

History 450/550 – CRN 12833/16529

Fall 2016

Mon., Wed., 12-1:20; 185 Lillis

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.

Truth has long legs and treads the paths of deceit.

Mia Couto, The Last Flight of the Flamingo (2004), p. 83.

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Office hours: Wednesday, 9:45-11:30; Thursday, 1:30-2:45, or by appointment (I am on campus most days so don't be shy)

>>>> To get to my office: enter south (front) entrance of McKenzie, take staircase on immediate left one floor up, exit to the left, take a right and follow the hall until it opens up a second time. My office is on the left. If the door is closed, please knock.

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." Even as the violence spawned by the war that began in 2003 continues, however, and even as much of what happened remains murky and incomprehensible, each year more of it comes into tolerable historical focus.

The central aim of this course is to come to some understanding, first, of what motivated the Bush administration to invade Iraq in 2003 and, second, of why that invasion, initially so successful in deposing Saddam Hussein, so signally failed to create a stable political regime in subsequent years. Much of the course will thus be devoted to

what happened after the invasion with an especial focus on Iraqi factors. We will devote the last couple of weeks on more recent developments in Iraq, mostly notably the emergence of ISIS. Those developments will lead us to consider the Iraq War in a regional context.

An additional aim of this course is to think about and identify 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 related issue is how we can write the history of current and on-going events 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 the U.S.’s aims and actions cannot explain the subsequent dynamics of the conflict. Any account that seeks to understand what has happened in Iraq since the invasion must therefore 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. By the end of the term you should be able to take a position, at least provisionally, on four 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 trajectory of events from the fall of Saddam Hussein to 2008. (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 Iraqi factors? And 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) Developments in Iraq since the departure of U.S. forces in 2011 and, more specifically, the emergence of ISIS as a major factor in shaping the situation in Iraq and Syria.

4) 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 attendance and participation, two on-line written

midterms, an on-line 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.

Students can expect to master the following learning objectives:

- 1) Recognize and assess different explanations of the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq.
- 2) Understand the religious and ethnic composition of Iraq; its governmental and economic institutions; and the role these played after the fall of Saddam Hussein.
- 3) Recognize and assess different explanations of the course of events in Iraq from 2003-2008.
- 4) Understand how events in Iraq fit within the context of the wider Middle East.
- 5) Gain familiarity with the basic analytic tools and styles of argument of the history of contemporary events.
- 6) Learn about the documentary and analytic problems common to the history of contemporary events.

How grades will be computed:

Attendance and participation	10% of grade
Two on-line written midterm	20% of grade each
Research paper description	5% of grade
Research paper	25% of grade
Final exam	20% of grade due on-line,

Everything but the research paper description will be submitted on-line.

Important dates

- October 14: First midterm due on-line, 11:00 pm
- November 7: Second midterm due on-line, 11:00 pm
- November 14: Research paper description due in class
- December 2: Research papers due on line
- December 7: Final exam due on-line, 5:00 pm

Grading rubric:

A+: Work of unusual distinction.

A: Work that distinguishes itself by the excellence of its grasp of the material and the precision and insight of its argument, in addition to being well executed and reasonably free of errors.

B: Work that satisfies main criteria of the assignment, and demonstrates command of the material, but does not achieve the level of excellence that characterizes work of A quality.

C: Work that demonstrates a rudimentary grasp of the material and satisfies at least some of the assigned criteria.

D: Work that demonstrates a poor grasp of the material and/or is executed with little regard for college standards, but which exhibits some engagement with the material.

F: Work that is weak in every aspect, demonstrating a basic misunderstanding of the material and/or disregard for the assigned question.

This class is not graded on a curve.

Schedule of readings

You should do the reading for the class day under which it is listed. With the exception of the book by Mark Kukis, Voices from Iraq: A People's History, 2003-2009 (Columbia University Press, 2011), and Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror (Regan Arts, 2015), all readings can be found on the class Canvas site under "Modules."

The reading loads for Oct. 14, Nov. 4, and Nov. 11 are heavier than on most other days. They are crucial for understanding sectarian conflict in Iraq and the turnaround of 2007-2008. The reading for the last week of the term (the book on ISIS) is also quite heavy and the final paper is due on the last day of class. You should plan accordingly.

Pt. I: The decision to invade Iraq

Sept. 26: Introduction: the big questions and what we know (or think we know) about the Iraq War

Read: to think about (and we'll be reading it later and it will return to it on the final): Eliot Cohen, "Historian's Leapfrog and the War in Iraq"

Cohen lays out what he thinks the possible range of interpretations and issues future historians will debate: think about where you stand on these issues.

Question to think about: has he missed anything important?

Sept. 28: Why invade Iraq? The Bush Doctrine and the administration's decision to invade

Read: Henry Kissinger, "A False Dream," excerpted from Iraq War Papers, 5-8; 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).

Discussion topics: what was the Bush Doctrine and how did it differ from how Republican administrations had traditionally defined foreign policy (as represented here by Henry Kissinger)?

Oct. 3: 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.

Questions to think about: How does Bush's "declarative policy" match up against the evidence in Woodward's book? How about Cheney? If this is all you had to go on, what would you conclude about the basis of the decision?

Oct. 5: 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); and excerpts of interviews with James Fallows and Frederick Kagan on the *Frontline* website (see links on Canvas site)

Oct. 10: 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).

Additional suggested reading: Salam Pax, "Where Is Raed" (blog), January, 2003 (you can access the blog via the Canvas link to Iraq Bloggers Central); and Anthony Shadid, Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War (2005): ch. 2 (39-56).

Iraq Bloggers Central is a portal site with links to all English-language Iraqi

bloggers, 2003-2009 (see "Iraqi Bloggers (Inactive)").

Pt. II: Occupation, insurgency and civil war

Oct. 12: The invasion

No reading (lecture day): work on first midterm.

First on-line assignment due: Oct. 14, 11 pm, on the course Canvas site

Oct. 17: Iraq's ethnic and sectarian divisions: Sunni and Shi'a, Arab, Kurd, Turkman, and all the rest

Read: Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near*, ch. 11 ("The Mud Gets Wetter"), 261-91; 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. 19: 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. 24: Insurgencies

Read: Ahmed Hashim, "The Iraqi insurgency, 2003-2006"; documents from *The Iraq Papers*, 248-264; and Kukis, *Voices from Iraq*, pt. II (47-77).

The Shadid we read last week is also relevant.

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

Oct. 26: Military operations

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

Oct. 31: 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).

Additional suggested reading: 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 Canvas (it was also published in vol. 1 of Baghdad Burning, pages 231-5 and 258ff).

Nov. 2: A bit of Iraqi politics

Read: Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (2007): chs. 21-22 and 24-25 (370-402, 418-452); assorted documents from The Iraq Papers, 306-26 [skim constitution but pay attention to articles 106-113].

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

Nov. 7: The civil war - movie day

Second on-line assignment due: Nov. 7, 11 pm

Nov. 9: 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. 14: The surge and tribal politics

Read: David Kilcullen, The Accidental Guerrilla (2009): ch. 3 (115-185); also take a look at Iraq Index, December 2006 (this is when Bush announces the "Surge" but scan data for December, 2006). Make sure to look at civilian death rates. What other significant indices of the situation do you see?

Additional suggested reading: If you want to get a more visceral sense of what the situation was like 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, *Baghdad Burning*.

>>>>> **Nov. 14: Research paper description due:** submit in-class, typed and printed, a one-to-two paragraph description of your paper topic and a bibliography of potential sources materials.

Pt. III: Iraq since 2011 and the rise of ISIS

Nov. 16: The view from Iraq

Read: Kukis, Voices from Iraq, pt. V (175-215), Iraq Index, December 2011; and Peter Harling, "The New Normal in Baghdad," Le Monde Diplomatique March 1, 2013

Nov. 25: NO CLASS

Travel safely and read Isis: Inside the Army of Terror

Nov. 28: The origins of ISIS

Discuss: Weiss and Hassan, ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror, 1-113

Nov. 30: The Islamic State

Discuss: Weiss and Hassan, ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror, 114-242

Also useful: Anonymous, "The Mystery of ISIS," New York Review of Books, August 13, 2015 (a review essay of the book we're reading and a similar book by Jessica Stern and J.M. Berger, ISIS: The State of Terror (Ecco, 2015)).

>>>>>> **December 2: Research papers due, 5:00 pm (on-line submission)**

FINAL EXAM: Due on-line, Wednesday Dec. 7, 5:00 pm