

# The Iraq War

History 450/550 – CRN 12851/12866

Fall 2019

Tuesday, Thursday, 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.

Professor Alex Dracobly

MCK 329

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**Office hours:** (fall term): Wednesday and Thursday, 11:45-1:30.

I am generally available immediately after class. Just give me a second to pack up and we can talk.

Or by appointment (I am on campus most days and typically have a fairly open schedule outside of classes. We can arrange a time by email, phone or in class. Or stop by if you're in the neighborhood: knock if the door is closed).

>>>> To get to my office: enter the 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: if I am there, I am usually available. I'll tell you if I really cannot talk at that moment.

## 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." Since that time, however, something of a consensus has emerged regarding the main trajectory of the war, even as we still await an end to the longer war the 2003 invasion initiated.

The central aim of this course is to come to some understanding of, first, what motivated the Bush administration to invade in Iraq in 2003; and, second, why that

invasion, initially so successful in deposing Saddam Hussein, failed to achieve its larger strategic aims and, in particular, the establishment of a stable Iraqi polity friendly to the U.S. Toward the end of the term we will turn to more recent developments in Iraq, mostly notably the rise and fall of ISIS. Those developments will lead us to consider the Iraq War in a regional context.

An additional aim of this course is to distinguish those questions that can be answered, at least provisionally, as against those that must remain open, whether because the necessary materials are not yet available, or because we lack proper perspective, or simply because they are by their nature unresolvable. A 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 some of the larger 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 increasingly shift our attention to Iraqi and regional factors as we get first to the invasion of Iraq, the subsequent occupation, and finally the post-occupation period. 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 did/does it fit into the larger “war on terror”? What is its significance for Iraq? And how about for the Middle East more generally?

## 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 two short papers. For attendance and participation everyone will receive a baseline grade of 7.5/10 at the beginning of the term – this may move up or down depending on attendance and participation.

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 important but they represent the point of departure, not the end point. 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
First short paper	10% ...
First on-line written midterms	20% ...
Second short paper	10% ...
Third short paper	15% ...
Second on-line midterm	20% ...
Final assignment	15% ... (due on-line)

The final assignment is in lieu of an in-class final.

Everything will be submitted on-line to the course Canvas site.

### Late policy

With the exception of the final assignment, late submissions are accepted for up to a week after the due date.

One day (24 hrs.) or less: 10% reduction of total value of the assignment

More than one day: 20% reduction of total value of the assignment

### **Important dates**

October 10: First paper due, 11:00 pm

October 17: First midterm due on-line, 11:00 pm

Nov. 3: Second paper due on-line, 11:00 pm

November 12: Third paper due, 11:00 pm

November 24: Second midterm due on-line, 11:00 pm

December 9 (Monday): Final assignment due on-line, 11 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 Carter Malkasian, Illusions of Victory: The Anbar Awakening and the Rise of the Islamic State (Oxford University Press, 2017).

The two course books are available for purchase from the UO Bookstore.

The reading loads for Oct. 18, Nov. 6, and Nov. 13 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**

**Oct. 1:** Introduction: the big questions, what we know (or think we know) about the Iraq War, and framing the question

**Read:** Henry Kissinger, “A False Dream,” excerpted 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).

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. 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.

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

**Due: First paper, 11 pm (National Intelligence Estimates)**

**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).

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)").

**Oct. 17:** The invasion

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

**First on-line assignment due:** Oct. 17, 11 pm, on the course Canvas site

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

**Oct. 22:** 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. 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 Hashim, "The Iraqi insurgency, 2003-2006"; Carter Malkasian, Illusions of Victory, chs. 1 and 2 (1-51); 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.

**Oct. 31:** Military operations

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

>>>>: Also, take a look at data in the Iraq Index, March 2004, and have a way of consulting it in class (print out, computer, phone ...). This document is the material for the second paper.

>>>>> **Nov. 3: 11 p.m., second paper due (Iraq Index analysis)**

**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).

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. 7:** 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. 12:** Iraqi voices

**Read:** Kukis, Voices from Iraq, pts. III and IV (81-171)

**>>>> Nov. 12 third paper due (Iraqi perspectives)**

**Nov. 14:** The Surge and Awakening

**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. 19:** The Surge and Awakening in Ramadi

**Read:** Malkasian, Illusions of Victory, chs. 3-5 (53-159).

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

**Nov. 21:** 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. 24: second on-line midterm due: 11 pm**



**Nov. 26:** The Islamic State, origins, ideology, and first establishment in Iraq

**Read:** Brian Fishman, The Master Plan, 1-84. (Available as an ebook via Knight Library website: see Canvas for a link).

**Dec. 3:** The Islamic State in power

**Read:** Brian Fishman, The Master Plan, 182-214; Malkasian, Illusions of Victory, ch. 6; and Rukimini Callimachi, “The ISIS Files,” NY Times, April 4, 2018 (there is a link on Canvas). Callimachi’s audio-video series, “Caliphate,” is also highly recommended.

**Dec. 5:** Iraq today, regional and international implications

**Read:** Malkasian, Illusions of Victory, ch. 7 (196-208); and Kevin W. Martin, “Syria and Iraq: ISIS and Other Actors in Historical Context,” in Feisal al-Istribadi and Sumit Ganguly, eds., ISIS: Regional and International Implications, 89-118 (available as an ebook via Knight Library website: see Canvas for a link).

**FINAL ASSIGNMENT:** Due on-line, Monday, Dec. 9, 11 pm

SAMPLE ONLY