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The Iraq War: A Military History

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Murray, Williamson, and Robert H. Scales, Jr. *The Iraq War: A Military History*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press (Belknap), 2003. 312pp. \$25

The pairing of Professor Williamson Murray and retired Army major general Robert Scales, Jr., is a potent and unusual combination of combat experience and superb scholarship. *The Iraq War* captures both the strategic underpinnings of the war and the operational designs that led to the stunning success of the initial military campaign of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The end product is an extremely rare occurrence—an insightful overview and assessment of the second Gulf war produced while the guns were still warm.

That this duo joined forces to produce such a superlative history is not unexpected. Murray's reputation as a military historian of the first rank was recently confirmed in his highly acclaimed *A War to Be Won* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2000), an operational-level perspective of the Second World War coauthored with Allan Millett. Murray's credentials also include his role as the principal author of the Gulf War Air Power Survey, a history of air operations in Operation DESERT STORM. His partner in this current effort is a model soldier-scholar, combining a thirty-year military career as an Army artilleryman with solid credentials, including a Ph.D. in history from Duke University, a tour as Commandant of the Army War College, and several previous books on fire-power and future conflict. He was also the project director and principal author of the U.S. Army's official history of the first Gulf war. The critical themes of his previous book, *Yellow Smoke: The*

Future of Land Warfare for America's Military (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), on the future of land power in the twenty-first century, are suffused throughout *The Iraq War* and help put the last conflict into a larger historical setting.

This book is a pleasure to read, combining lucid prose and mastery of both history and operational detail to permit the reader to grasp clearly the dynamics of the race to Baghdad. Unlike the initial reporting of the fighting by embedded journalists, these analysts are not limited to a narrow "soda straw" viewpoint of the war. They put the war in its proper strategic and historical context, and the conduct of the fighting in its proper place with the evolving changes in the conduct of war. The crisp text is artfully edited, and it is amplified by several dozen photographs and a set of high-quality color maps. The latter are all-too-rare additions to history texts and further distinguish this book from pretenders.

The concluding chapter provides critical insights on the political and military implications of this war. This chapter alone is worth the price of the book; one can only hope that it will be widely distributed among the halls of Congress as well as in the educational centers of the U.S. armed forces. This evidence of the enduring nature of war, with its immutable fundamentals, will not surprise realists, combat veterans, or military historians. Nonetheless, it should be required reading for enthusiasts of the putative "dot.com" economy and their irrational exuberance for information technology. As Murray and Scales stress, despite overwhelming technological superiority, commanders "had to make decisions of life and death under

split-second pressures and an unprecedented barrage of information that was often ambiguous, uncertain, contradictory, or quite often wrong.” The authors acknowledge a number of changing characteristics in war, including the emphasis on speed, precision, simultaneity, and the need for modular force structure, interdependence between service units, and jointness at lower levels. Yet they also stress that true knowledge was rare. No matter how sophisticated the intelligence collection, a real picture was rarely formed until a human being laid eyes on the target. Finally, the authors adroitly connect the growing complexity of today’s battlefield with the need for high-quality leaders who have been immersed in an intensive training and education regimen. The adaptability of U.S. commanders made up for strategic and intelligence inadequacies. It was this mental agility that permitted the creative, quick thinking that was so evident as American forces transitioned from deliberate planning at Central Command to reacting to real but unforeseen circumstances on the ground.

This final chapter overlooks a critical shortfall in U.S. strategic readiness. The U.S. military must become adept at “multidimensional operations” to combat insurgencies and prop up failed states. Murray and Scales admit that the United States could have been better prepared for the transition to stability operations, and they admit that its military is inclined to “avoid the messy business that lies beyond clear-cut, decisive military operations.” The U.S. military excels at *combined arms*—the combination of infantry, armor, and artillery to enable fire and maneuver. It is not as good at *combined means*—

employing other instruments of national power, including the full panoply of the interagency community toward a desired end state. The American way of war is unsurpassed at the fighting aspects of war, but this does not necessarily translate to winning the peace. This shortfall was manifested by the failure of both the Bush administration and the military to prepare fully for its occupation of Iraq and the continuing need to conduct the sort of nation-building activities that are occupying the U.S. armed forces in Asia. The Pentagon is now examining innovative organizational and doctrinal changes to address the problem. However, the solution lies beyond that five-sided structure and must include a maladroit national security architecture that has resisted substantive post-Cold War realignment.

This is a remarkably impressive work, especially since it was produced so close to the fighting. Undoubtedly, a more comprehensive assessment of the war will eventually be produced, probably years from now when distance, objectivity, and primary source material are available. For the foreseeable future, however, *The Iraq War* will be the definitive history of this complex and multifaceted campaign.

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Art, Robert J., and Patrick M. Cronin, eds. *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2003. 442pp. \$19.95