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Book Reviews by Daniel Moran of: The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons written by Anthony H. Cordesman & The Iraq War: A Military History written by Williamson Murray



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The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons. By Anthony H. Cordesman. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, in cooperation with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2003. ISBN 0-275-98227-0. Maps. Tables. Notes. Pp. xiv, 572. \$44.95.

The Iraq War: A Military History. By Williamson Murray and Major General Robert H. Scales, Jr. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003. ISBN 0-674-01280-1. Maps. Photographs. Tables. Notes. Index. Pp. 312. \$25.95.

The United States and its allies went to war against Iraq in 2003, as Williamson Murray and Robert Scales reasonably propose, “to make an example out of Saddam’s regime, for better or worse” (p. 44). Exactly what the war exemplified, and whether the results are better or worse than might have been achieved by other means, are, to say the least, matters of continuing dispute. In the meantime, we might as well start getting the facts straight, at least as far as military operations are concerned. The two books above are both contributions to that necessary work. They are exercises in bridge-building, reaching forward from wartime journalism and postwar postmortems to the more mature scholarship of the future. Given the time pressure under which they were prepared, they are far better than anyone would have had reason to expect.

Anthony Cordesman’s book draws heavily on the steady stream of after-action and “lessons-learned” reports that have been generated since major combat operations ended last April. It shares the didactic purpose and style of its sources, and is written rather close to the note cards. Considerable space is given over to documentary excerpts, some of which are pretty daunting; for instance, an eighteen-page verbatim selection (pp. 257–74) from what must have been an interminable (and baffling) Air Force briefing on “effects-based bombing.” This is, in other words, a book that requires some chewing. People who already know the difference between a WMD (weapon of mass destruction) and a WCMD (wind-corrected munitions dispenser) will find it essential as a reference. Those who don’t know, or don’t care, will prefer Murray and Scales, a less relentlessly informative but distinctly more polished work, intended for nonexperts.

Cordesman’s aim is basically to aid the distillation process by which the raw and contradictory experiences of combat get turned into the strategy and doctrine of the future. Murray and Scales, on the other hand, seek to synthesize and improve upon journalistic accounts of the war. They present the Iraq war as a human drama, within a rhetorical framework whose basic elements—courage and foolishness, chance and fate, excellence and incompetence—have been familiar since Herodotus first showed how to craft a narrative from the chaos of war. Their ideal reader is the average citizen who followed the war day-to-day on TV, in the papers, or on the web, and would now like to know what in the world just happened.

Murray and Scales bring a strong combination of technical expertise and literary finesse to their task, and the result is a book that one can easily imagine wrapped up under a tree. They connect the dots about as well as

anyone could in these early days, and provide much useful contextualization, above all by relating the operational methods of Operation Iraqi Freedom to those of Gulf War I. The book is lightly sourced, and as the acknowledgments make clear a lot of the connective tissue was derived from interviews with senior commanders and Pentagon staffers, whose cooperation is also evident in Cordesman's more thoroughly documented volume. Partly as a consequence, the decisions and conduct of those at the sharp end are more celebrated than scrutinized; though Murray and Scales have some pointed comments to make about the "shock and awe" phase of the air campaign (p. 75), which incinerated a disproportionate number of empty government buildings, along with the irreplaceable records inside—as good as a war crime to historians, and no small loss to the intelligence community, either. To the extent that Murray and Scales have an argument to make, it is in favor of combined-arms air-ground integration, and against excessive reliance on speculatively coercive or semiotic strike operations. They do not think armed forces are particularly good at sending messages. The conquest of Iraq, as they plainly show, was achieved by killing people and destroying things. Precision weaponry and ultra-refined command and control can do no more than moderate these grim realities.

Neither book has anything very striking to say about where the war came from, nor about where we go from here. Under the circumstances, such reticence is another sign of good judgment. Murray and Scales have a chapter on "The Origins of War" that stretches back to Tamerlane, but they still found no reason to include the word "terrorism" in their index. Cordesman notes in his conclusion that the Iraq war must be viewed as a "one-country solution to a twenty-plus country problem" p. (572). Here, at any rate, are straws in the wind.

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Eye on Korea: An Insider Account of Korean-American Relations. By James V. Young. Edited by William Stueck. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2003. ISBN 1-58544-262-3. Maps. Photographs. Notes. Index. Pp. xi, 188. \$39.95.

In 1963 a green second lieutenant from Oklahoma arrived in the poor and barely stable Republic of Korea. Twenty-seven years later, fluent in Korean and fully conversant with the ways of its senior politicians and military men, he left the prosperous country as a full colonel, "the U.S. Army's first fully trained and experienced Korea specialist" (p. vii). This book is his account of a career in civil-military relations, within and between Korea and America. Editor Stueck helped the author turn what was originally written for a popular Korean audience into a thoughtful reflection on American-Korean relations.