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H-Diplo Review Essay, "An Orthodox Interpretation of the Bush Wars: A Review Essay on Several Recent Studies on George W. Bush's Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan."

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Reviewed for H-Diplo by **Thomas Maddux**, California State University Northridge

During the past two years, several secondary studies on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have appeared that point to the emergence of an overall orthodox assessment of George W. Bush's wars. These interpretations reflect a good deal of the contemporary criticism that emerged especially after the failure to locate weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq and the outbreak of the insurgency there as well as the revival of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The authors focus on a number of issues such as the wisdom of Bush's decisions to go to war, the appropriateness of the grand strategy pursued in both wars, the impact of the military strategies to defeat al Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi Army in Iraq, the management of the postwar occupation in Iraq and U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, and the insurgencies in both countries. There is a degree of consensus, if not complete agreement, among authors such as Terry Anderson, Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, Dan Caldwell, and Peter Hahn. Most of the authors devote far more attention to Iraq than to Afghanistan and they differ in the intensity of their criticism of President Bush and his chief advisers.¹ The authors are also less certain about the long-term results in Iraq and especially Afghanistan. The books do not address all relevant issues related to George W. Bush's wars; most notably the domestic dimensions of the 'War on Terror' receives little attention with only Anderson mentioning the domestic fears after September 11th 2001 which contributed to anti-Muslim crimes, the arrests of persons suspected of links to terrorism, the passing of the USA Patriot Act with related secret executive orders, and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security.² The global war on terror is also not

¹ Terry H. Anderson, *Bush's Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, *Afghanistan: How the West Lost Its Way* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Dan Caldwell, *Vortex of Conflict: U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); and Peter L. Hahn, *Missions Accomplished? The United States and Iraq since World War I* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). For H-Diplo roundtables on all of the books except Caldwell's study, see <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/>

² Anderson, 71-75.

evaluated in these books. Each of the books is appropriate for classroom use in history or international relations courses.³

The authors take different approaches with respect to the background that they provide on either Iraq or Afghanistan, but they offer a sufficient amount of information for undergraduates. In *Vortex of Conflict*, Caldwell devotes almost a hundred pages to the nature of U.S. involvement with Islamic countries with separate chapters on Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. A chapter on the development of terrorism up to 2001 and a succeeding one on President George W. Bush and the evolving Bush doctrine provide a good foundation for what follows. The only drawback is that in Section Two of the book, which focuses on seven major issues from assumptions to strategy, Caldwell occasionally includes the same brief story or quote more than once. Ahmad Chalabi, for example, the exiled leader of the Iraqi National Congress who was favored by Defense Department officials, is introduced on pages 121-122, on page 142 and again on page 181. In *Bush's Wars*, Terry Anderson devotes two chapters to the background on Iraq and Afghanistan with emphasis on British involvement in both countries followed by United States Cold War engagement with Iraq and Saddam Hussein. In addition to covering the Gulf War in 1991-1992, Anderson addresses the efforts of President Bill Clinton to respond to the emergence of al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden in the 1990s. Peter Hahn in *Mission Accomplished: The United States and Iraq since World War I* offers the most developed analysis of the Iraqi background and the evolution of U.S. policy in three chapters that bring the story to 1989, along with a chapter each on the Gulf War and containment of Saddam in the 1990s and then a chapter each on "George W. Bush and the March to War in Iraq" and the "Occupation of Iraq, 2003-2010." Tim Bird and Alex Marshall in *Afghanistan: How the West Lost Its War* devote one rewarding chapter to "The Great Enigma: Afghanistan in historical context" which explores the ethnic tensions, political regimes, imperial occupations from the British through the Soviet Union, economic and development problems, and the fragmentation of the Afghan mujahedeen, the origins of the Taliban and its seizure of Kabul in 1996. Bird and Marshall also devote attention to the involvement of Afghanistan's neighbors in its conflicts, particularly Pakistan and its ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence Agency) with its focus on manipulating Afghanistan as part of its preoccupation with issues involving India.

The area of greatest agreement is on Bush's decision to go after Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda after the September 11th 2001 attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. None of the authors question this decision and they note the widespread public, Congressional, and international support that Bush received to go after al Qaeda and the Taliban when its regime in Kabul refused to turn over bin Laden. "This was entirely justified, supported by almost all nations of the world," affirms

³ Readers should also consult Lloyd C. Gardner's *Three Kings: The Rise of an American Empire in the Middle East after World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2009), and *The Long Road to Baghdad: A History of U.S. Foreign Policy from the 1970s to the Present* (New York: The New Press, 2008) which explore the development of a U.S. desire for a strategic base in the Middle East along with access to oil and a related effort to manage the Palestinian mandate issue after World War II. In the *Long Road to Baghdad*, Gardner emphasizes the U.S. desire to replace Iran after 1979 with a new base for U.S. interests in Iraq.

Anderson.⁴ Caldwell provides a detailed account of how September 11th transformed the orientation of the Bush administration and of President Bush's sense of mission to go after terrorists in general with a 'global war on terror' and the Bush Doctrine which abandoned the policies of deterrence and containment for offensive actions against terrorist groups like al Qaeda and state supporters with preventive war if necessary. Jackson reserves any criticism of Bush and the implementation of his strategy until he examines specific issues in the second section of his study. Bird and Marshall focus on the Bush administration's perception of threats in response to 9/11 that "had come together to form a potent and dangerous brew that posed an existential threat to the US and the West in general: terrorist groups with a global reach, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and the malign influence of 'rogue states'."⁵

Bird and Marshall and Anderson devote the most attention to the initial U.S. military success in Afghanistan, although they point to assumptions in Washington that limited any lasting military success against al Qaeda and Taliban supporters. As Anderson notes, the Bush administration inserted CIA officers and Special Forces teams into Afghanistan in less than a month after 9/11, and using millions of dollars they recruited various warlords who were hostile to the Taliban, creating a so-called Northern Alliance, to drive Taliban forces out of Northern Afghanistan with the important assistance of the U.S. Air Force.⁶ President Bush and his chief advisers, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Vice President Richard Cheney, and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, wanted to avoid the Soviet Union's recent experience of getting bogged down with conventional forces in Afghanistan. Rumsfeld wanted to push a transformation of the U.S. military with new technology into a more mobile, powerful, and smaller force. President Bush also insisted on no 'nation-building' which bolstered the desire of Washington to get in and out of Afghanistan as quickly as possible. When U.S. Special Forces and indigenous forces located bin Laden and al Qaeda supporters in the mountains on Tora Bora on the border with Pakistan, CIA leaders on the ground made several efforts to get U.S. troops to block a possible escape into Pakistan since Pakistani troops were not in the passes (as promised by the Pakistani government) and Americans on the ground realized that the Afghan forces in the area were not prepared to take on al Qaeda in the caves of Tora Bora. U.S. forces were available, most notably U.S. Marines southwest of Kandahar, and Army forces of the 10th Mountain Division at a base in Uzbekistan and near Kabul. Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld, however, rejected using U.S. troops and Bin Laden and his supporters escaped into Pakistan.⁷

Just as the Bush administration shifted its attention very quickly to Iraq in 2002, the authors also make a similar transition. After discussing the selection of Hamid Karzai as the leader of

⁴ Anderson, 229.

⁵ Bird and Marshall, 48.

⁶ Anderson, 81-84.

⁷ Bird and Marshall, 89-93.

an interim Afghan government, Anderson shifts quickly to Iraq, offering a chapter on the “Rush to War” and does not get back to Afghanistan until the end of his study. Caldwell notes in his comments on postwar operations in Afghanistan that Washington officials wanted “to get in and get out quickly” and he quotes Assistant Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz who said in November 2001 that “one of the lessons of Afghanistan’s history, which we have tried to apply in this campaign, is if you’re a foreigner, try not to go in. If you go in, don’t stay too long, because they don’t tend to like any foreigners who stay too long.”⁸ Bird and Marshall, however, stay with Afghanistan and emphasize the Bush administration’s effort to minimize the U.S. role and its military presence without developing a clear strategic framework that identified what objectives were to be achieved and what were the available means to achieve these ends. Since the U.S. had relied on traditional warlords in the Northern Alliance in the north and west and new ones in the south and east to displace the Taliban, Karzai had to deal with them as the U.S. pulled back, which left Karzai in Kabul and the warlords in control of most of the country. Bird and Marshall emphasize that the U.S. and its coalition partners [as NATO joined the U.S. in the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF)], United Nations representatives, and other allies such as Japan failed to address the key question of how “Afghanistan fit into a broader regional and global geopolitical vision that would enhance international security” and a series of related questions on the status of the Taliban.⁹

Washington’s desire to limit the U.S. presence and commitment of funds shaped its approach along with the increasing preparations for going after Saddam Hussein. The Special Forces officers who had been so successful in establishing relations with the warlords were pulled out and a limited military force of 18,000 under Operation Enduring Freedom was retained to handle any military operations. The first international donors’ conference in Tokyo in January 2002 raised only a promise of \$5 billion in assistance for Afghanistan with the U.S. pledging \$290 million versus Iran pledging \$540 million. Washington also stepped back on reform in Afghanistan and took responsibility for only the mentorship of an Afghan National Army (ANA), with Germany guiding the Afghan National Police, Italy overseeing over judicial reform, Japan managing the challenge of demobilization and disarmament of the various warlord forces, and the United Kingdom taking responsibility for counter-narcotics. Bird and Marshall emphasize a lack of success in all of the reform sectors with emphasis not on “a corrupt Afghan reality”. Instead, they point to “a failed Western model” which they label as a “decentralized, and economically highly privatized, ‘liberal peace’ agenda’.”¹⁰ According to Bird and Marshall, what should have been pursued was a state that would provide economic growth, services, security, and drug control instead of being a facilitator that left governing outside of Kabul to warlords and various Western agencies.

⁸ Caldwell, 172.

⁹ Bird and Marshall, 109.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 130-131.

All of the authors note the negative impact of the Iraq war on the U.S. role in Afghanistan and its contribution to the revival of al Qaeda and the Taliban. Caldwell, for example, discusses the creation of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) in late 2002 that were primarily staffed by military personnel with a mission “to enhance security, to strengthen the reach of the central Afghan government, and to facilitate reconstruction.”¹¹ He concludes, however, that the PRTs lacked trained military and civilian advisers and coordination with the military especially when the latter arrested village leaders with whom PRT leaders were developing a relationship or bombed their villages. Bird and Marshall compare the U.S. focus on immediate political and military objectives with the PRTs versus the different approaches of NATO-ISAF efforts as well as criticism from the increasing number of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) operating in the country who objected to U.S. politicization and militarization of aid delivery for immediate objectives versus the “building-up of indigenous Afghan capacity” and “healthy and sustainable longer-term economic development.”¹²

U.S. officials including Secretary Rumsfeld, who visited Afghanistan in May 2003, expressed optimism about the decline of the Taliban and the end of major combat operations. As Bird and Marshall demonstrate, however, the Taliban began to reorganize in 2002, and step up insurgent attacks as well as “re-establishing a recognized chain of command ... [and] a viable infrastructure in southern Afghanistan,” and expanding their bases in Pakistan.¹³ A “downward spiral” in Afghanistan occurred in which Taliban attacks increased in size and intensity, British forces struggled to stay in Helmand province, and the “the international effort was hopelessly fragmented,” according to Bird and Marshall: “the intervention was, in reality, a series of multiple interventions. Dozens of states, international organizations, NGO’s, private companies and interest groups had all initiated on going activity in Afghanistan with a bewildering array of often competing agendas”.¹⁴

The flawed assumptions of Bush and his advisers on shifting as fast as possible from Afghanistan to Iraq certainly limited U.S. attention and resources to Afghanistan and facilitated the vast number of different and sometimes contradictory approaches to dealing with both the desire to promote economic development and with pacification of the Taliban. In evaluating Washington’s shift in focus to Saddam Hussein, the authors note a number of considerations. They agree that the Clinton administration attempted to maintain both the containment policies from the Gulf War and the continuing effort to verify that Saddam had no WMD and had finally, as Peter Hahn notes, added regime change to its policies after Neoconservatives who advocated the removal of Hussein mounted a public campaign and Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998. Despite the recommendations of Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz and other Neoconservatives in the Bush administration, President Bush

¹¹ Caldwell, 186.

¹² Bird and Marshall, 139.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 146-147.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

declined to change the basic Clinton policy of containment before 9/11, and was supported in that decision by Secretary of State Colin Powell and the State Department's Policy Planning Staff Director Richard Haass.¹⁵

When September 11th changed the dynamics and President Bush launched his global war on terror, the removal of Saddam Hussein became a more accessible objective for Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney, and other Neoconservative advisors. As the authors emphasize, the Bush administration had failed to respond to the warnings of the Clinton administration and CIA intelligence specialists that al Qaeda was an increasing threat and capable of planning a big surprise attack. The trauma of the 9/11 attacks, followed by the anthrax powder sent through letters in the mail, heightened fears of further attacks through October 2001. In a recent study of the memoirs and interviews of Bush officials in the many contemporary accounts, Melvyn Leffler concludes that "no account of the Bush administration's foreign policies should underestimate the degree to which fear and anxiety, guilt and responsibility shaped the mentality and psychology undergirding the administration's approach to the Global War on Terrorism."¹⁶

The efforts of the Bush administration to develop a persuasive rationale for an invasion of Iraq to remove Hussein attract criticism from all of the authors. Although Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney, Powell and Rice believed that Saddam had WMD, or that if he evaded the sanctions and acquired WMD, he would provide them to terrorists like al Qaeda, these Washington officials attempted to bolster this belief by developing evidence of a relationship between Hussein and al Qaeda. When CIA officials led by Director George Tenet and other officials pointed out the absence of ties between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda and the reality of their adversarial relationship, Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld dismissed that assessment and Cheney launched his own intelligence effort to find the evidence that he wanted and kept up pressure on the CIA. As Caldwell points out in the strongest section of his book that examines specific issues such as intelligence and war plans, "al Qaeda did not have a significant presence in Iraq prior to the American invasion and occupation."¹⁷ Anderson supports this assessment and cites the comment of Michael Scheuer, who directed the CIA bin Laden unit, that Saddam would never have given WMD to bin Laden "because al Qaeda would have been just as likely to use them against him as they would against the United States. They hated Saddam."¹⁸

¹⁵ Hahn, 128-133, 138-140.

¹⁶ Melvyn P. Leffler, "The Foreign Policies of the George W. Bush Administration: Memoirs, History, Legacy," *Diplomatic History* 37:2 (April 2013): 213. Hahn makes a similar point of emphasis on the fear, trauma, and insecurity that influenced U.S. officials on 143.

¹⁷ Caldwell, 114.

¹⁸ Anderson, 124. For further discussion on Bush and other officials' efforts to link Saddam Hussein with al Qaeda, see 104-124 and Hahn, 145-148, and for the Cheney quest to link WMD with Saddam, see Gardner, *Long Road to Iraq*, 129-138, 149-157.

As the White House manipulated the WMD and al Qaeda issues, persuaded Congress to authorize the use of force in Iraq to defend the U.S against the “continuing threat posed by Iraq” and to enforce UN resolutions on Iraq, and persuaded the UN to pass another resolution demanding cooperation from Bagdad on WMD inspections, the Bush administration moved to launch a military invasion of Iraq that would confirm Secretary Rumsfeld’s plan for the transformation of the U.S. military with a fast, high-tech attack force with limited ground forces. The authors agree, however, that most of the Bush administration’s assumptions on how the Iraqis would react to the demise of Hussein and his Baathist regime were very flawed. By turning over postwar planning to Rumsfeld and the Defense Department, Bush not only intensified the bureaucratic conflict between the Defense and State Departments but also led Rumsfeld and his advisers to ignore or minimize the extensive plans that a State Department “Future of Iraq” initiative had drawn up in 2,500 pages of reports as well as other studies and expert advice which emphasized the challenges that would be faced in the occupation of Iraq including the maintenance of order, sectarian conflict, and the importance of restoring basic services.¹⁹ As the authors critically emphasize, Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith and others insisted, against the contrary advice of U.S. Army leaders, that only a small force of approximately 100,000 U.S. soldiers with 20,000 British troops would be necessary in Iraq. Wolfowitz and Cheney, who seem to have been wrong on most predictions, stated that a large U.S. force would not be necessary to defeat Saddam Hussein’s forces and that the Iraqi people would welcome the U.S. forces, who would leave in ninety days. Rumsfeld and his advisers wanted to ‘get in and get out’ of Iraq as soon as possible. As Caldwell concludes, with the support of the other authors, the “Bush administration’s foreign policy was ‘faith based’ rather than reality based. Plans built on faith and erroneous assumptions cannot succeed, and in the Iraq War the most basic assumptions were mistaken and doomed the American effort from the start.”²⁰

The decisive U.S. success in seizing Bagdad in 500 hours, however, seemed to confirm Rumsfeld’s military strategy and President Bush flew to the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* as the sun set off the coast of San Diego to announce the end of major combat operations beneath the infamous banner announcing ‘Mission Accomplished.’ The authors recognize the immediate military success but agree with Hahn’s list of significant flaws in the plans for occupation and available forces.²¹ Without having sufficient troops to maintain order, U.S. army forces were unable to prevent two months of looting, which contributed to the undermining of important services for the population in Iraq such as electricity. The U.S. also lacked troops to guard the borders and make it difficult for al Qaeda recruits to move into Iraq. Within a month of seizing Bagdad and pulling down the statue of Saddam Hussein, U.S. soldiers found themselves in a gun battle with Sunni insurgents in Fallujah, a Sunni town west of Bagdad.

¹⁹ See Hahn, 167-168; Anderson, 141-142; and Caldwell, 174-176.

²⁰ Caldwell, 126.

²¹ Hahn, 157-161.

The response of Washington officials to the breakdown of order in Iraq, the absence of sufficient troops to deal with occupation problems, and the emerging insurgency receives substantial criticism from both officials serving in Iraq and secondary authors. Retired Army Lieutenant General Jay Garner, the officer who was in charge of postwar operations in Iraq, discovered the absence of concrete plans upon his arrival in Baghdad. When he attempted to create a new Iraqi security force of 100,000 from Hussein's army and to rely on Iraqi civil servants including members of the Baath party to restore a functioning government, Rumsfeld rejected his plans as well another plan to recruit reliable Iraqis within the key ministries to restore services. Bush went along with Rumsfeld and Cheney's recommendations and replaced Garner with former Ambassador L. Paul Bremer under a new Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Washington devoted more attention to finding WMD, with 1,400 military and civilians assigned to this ultimately unsuccessful quest, than to Bremer's requests and the expanding problems in Iraq, which, as the authors emphasize, were intensified by Bremer's inability to cooperate successfully with U.S. military leaders and his determined efforts to get rid of the Baath party and the Iraqi army. In CPA Order Number One, Bremer put the Pentagon's favorite, the Iraqi exile leader Ahmed Chalabi, in charge of carrying out de-Baathification, and in CPA Order Number Two, against the advice of U.S. Army leaders but with Washington's approval, he dissolved the Iraqi government, the Ministry of Defense, and all military, security and intelligence components. Although Hahn notes arguments in favor of Bremer's orders, he concludes, with support from Anderson and Caldwell, that other U.S. officials in Iraq opposed both actions and recommended that Baath party members, a group which included teachers, civil servants as well as high level officials and army members below the high command level, should have been retained to help restore stability. By firing thousands of soldiers with their arms, Bremer provided resentful, unemployed, trained recruits for the growing insurgency.²²

Although Rumsfeld, Cheney and Wolfowitz initially denied the reality of an insurgency in Iraq, the Ramadan Offensive that started in October 2003 forced them to recognize that an insurgency existed that involved more than Rumsfeld's reference to 'deadenders'. In rejecting Bremer's plan for a two-year process to restore sovereignty to an elected Iraqi government, Washington insisted on a transfer of authority from the CPA to a new Iraqi government which eventually emerged after elections for a national assembly in January 2005, the ratification of a constitution in October, a second national election in December for a Council of Representatives, and, the eventual creation of a coalition government under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. With Sunnis boycotting the elections, the new coalition was dominated by Shiite party representatives and Kurds. Bush and his advisers such as Secretary of State Rice welcomed the political developments as they shifted from the threat of WMD which couldn't be found as the rationale for the war to assisting the spread of democracy in the Middle East.²³

²² See Hahn, 170-173; Anderson, 149-158; and Caldwell, 176-181.

²³ Leffler concludes that the "rhetorical migration to democracy-promotion came primarily after the occupation began, and probably was directly correlated to the failure to find the WMD that had allegedly been their main reason for going to war." Leffler, 208.

Although some observers suggested that the U.S. occupation lasted too long, the authors do not agree, given the challenges of getting Sunnis and Shiites to cooperate especially under the circumstances of an escalating insurgency and growing ethnic cleansing by both groups as Kurds focused on developing their semi-autonomous region and regaining what they considered lost territory and oil resources in the Kirkuk area. Instead, the authors focus on the expanding insurgency and the U.S. response which they consider to have been pretty ineffective. Hahn identifies three distinct strands of the insurgency, including Sunnis who in March 2004 challenged U.S. forces in Fallujah, 40 miles west of Baghdad, and resisted until a Marine and Army assault in November drove the insurgents out of a town that was devastated by U.S. firepower. Muqada al-Sadr led a second strand of poorer, urban Shiites who formed a Mahdi army that dominated Sadr City near Baghdad and Najaf and Karbala in southern Iraq. U.S. and coalition forces contested these areas with the Mahdi through 2004. A third part of the insurgency included non-Iraq Islamic fighters who came to Iraq in response to the U.S. invasion, with Abu Musabv al-Zarqawi as the most widely recognized, al Qaeda affiliated leader who focused on terrorist acts against U.S. and Iraqis who were connected to the new transitional government.²⁴

Despite the favorable political developments in Iraq and U.S. efforts against the Mahdi army and the successful bombing raid against al Zarqawi, the overall military situation continued to decline in Iraqi, with a 91 percent increase in terrorist attacks in 2006, an 88 percent increase in U.S. casualties, mounting Iraqi civilian casualties and refugees, increasing costs to the U.S. of over \$100 billion in 2006 alone, rising U.S. public pressure to withdraw from Iraq, and declining public approval of Bush's management of the war. Instead of following the recommendations of military and civilian advisers, President Bush decided by the end of 2006 to expand the U.S. military presence by 30,000 in what was called 'The Surge' and to adopt a different strategy of counterinsurgency (CI). The authors provide significant analysis of the origins of this strategy, from a thorough review by the Iraq Study Group appointed by Bush and Congress, to individual military leaders such as retired general Jack Keane as well as the "council of colonels", a group of Army and Marine leaders recruited to consider alternative strategies, to officers who had served in Iraq such as David Petraeus as well as individuals outside the government. Petraeus had commanded the 101st Airborne Division in Mosul in northern Iraq in 2003 and, according to Caldwell, "viewed the protection of the population and the reestablishment of government and the economy rather than strictly military operations, as the top priority." As Caldwell concludes, Petraeus' "division's experience showed that an approach other than kicking down doors and shooting people could work."²⁵

The authors agree that the surge, along with a shift in Anbar Province by the U.S. Army, contributed to a gradual decline in the violence and the insurgencies. In Ramadi, the

²⁴ Hahn, 181-184.

²⁵ Caldwell, 233. For other assessments on the origins of the surge, see Hahn, 186-190, Anderson, 192-203, 206-210, and Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A. Friedman, and Jacob N. Shapiro, "Testing the Surge: Why Did Violence Decline in Iraq in 1007?", *International Security* 37:1 (Summer 2012): 7-40 and a review by Austin Long on H-Diplo, April 12, 2013 at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-AR21.pdf>

provincial capital, the army had turned the town into rubble in an attempt to deal with Islamic insurgents from al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, who were linked with al Qaeda in Iraq, and who controlled much of the city and province with terrorist bombings and coercion of the population to accept their fundamentalist Islamic beliefs. U.S. officers turned to the Sunni tribal militias and leaders who were interested in protection versus the terrorists and who joined Awakening Councils in September along with 25 of 31 tribes in Anbar. The U.S. gained recruits with payments to local police forces called the Sons of Iraq, which as a result turned effectively against al Qaeda insurgents. As Anderson points out, this shift occurred when, "American commanders began paying former insurgents who had fought and killed U.S. troops."²⁶ The CI strategy also had gradual success in Bagdad under Lieutenant General Ray Odierno and General Petraeus. Faced with a continuing high level of violence by Sunnis and Shiites as well as al Qaeda terrorists, Odierno and Petraeus moved to clear, hold, and build by moving U.S. forces from large, secure bases into smaller posts in the city with more interpreters and partner companies with Iraqi security forces. They gradually moved into every neighborhood, patrolled on foot, and brought in Sons of Iraq to work with them in Sunni neighborhoods. As Anderson notes, militias attacked U.S. forces in almost every district and U.S. casualties were the highest of the war in 2007. After Muqtada al-Sadr ordered a halt to action by his Mahdi Army in August, violence began to decline. As U.S. forces moved out of Bagdad with the Iraq security forces, violence declined and the U.S. began to turn over provinces to Iraqi forces and to pay Shia militiamen to work in public service jobs.

There is a consensus among Caldwell, Anderson, and Hahn that the shift to CI and the surge brought a definite improvement over Rumsfeld's transformation strategy and the reliance on firepower and violence with substantial destruction of Iraqi cities such as Falluja and Ramadi and extensive Iraqi civilian casualties. "Despite the uncertainties" in Iraq, Caldwell suggests that "the surge was far more successful than Rumsfeld's transformational strategy."²⁷ Anderson notes a number of positive results by July 2008 when the surge forces had been withdrawn from the total U.S. troop presence: Bagdad and other cities were more secure; "160,000 contractors were able to work on reconstruction projects throughout the country"; oil and electricity production had almost returned to pre-invasion levels; displaced families returned; and a degree of business and nighttime activity resumed. As Anderson affirms, "the surge and counterinsurgency stopped the country from falling further into civil war and curtailed the insurgents and militias, while it stabbed deep into the heart of al Qaeda in Iraq."²⁸ In his book, Hahn reviews the assessments of critics who note the many remaining problems in Iraq, particularly ethnic strife between Sunnis and Shiites as well as reservations about the government of Nouri al-Maliki, but Hahn endorses the more positive views that give President Bush credit for replacing Rumsfeld and approving CI and the surge when many observers recommended against it. "Developments in Iraq during the 3 years following the

²⁶ Anderson, 203. See also Caldwell, 234-237.

²⁷ Caldwell, 240.

²⁸ Anderson, 210.

surge confirmed these positive assessments over the contemporary critics of Bush's policy," concludes Hahn.²⁹

One important area of disagreement among the authors focuses on the extent to which President Bush made the major decisions as opposed to deferring to the advice of Cheney and Rumsfeld. The authors agree that Bush made firm decisions without a great deal of deliberation and evaluation and was reluctant to reconsider or reverse his decisions. Hahn suggests that Bush "provided resolve, stamina, and broad policy direction but allowed" Cheney and Rumsfeld "and other officials to make actual policy."³⁰ In a section on "Policymaking", Caldwell suggests that as a result of his lack of experience in international relations, Bush "essentially handed the administration's foreign policy portfolio to Cheney" who became the "architect" for Bush foreign policy and "Rumsfeld was the contractor, the policy-maker responsible for translating Cheney's decisions into actual programs and policies."³¹ Caldwell also emphasizes the significant interagency differences between the Defense and State Departments, which became a 'war within a war' over Iraq at the top and working levels and contributed to Bush not having received an appropriate range of options. Anderson fully recognizes the influence that Cheney and Rumsfeld had on Bush's decisions (in contrast to Secretary Powell) but he does not go as far as Hahn and Caldwell. In his essay, Leffler suggests that memoirs support the emphasis on "flawed, even dysfunctional" decision-making, with Cheney and Rumsfeld blaming Powell and Rice at the NSC, but officials in the NSC, State Department and even the Defense Department "indict Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith for their unwillingness to confer and collaborate." Leffler, however, emphasizes that the memoir literature reveals Bush as the "decision-maker. Bush invited Cheney to participate fully in all decisions, and he clearly confided in him and respected his advice. But Bush did not always follow Cheney's recommendations."³²

Despite the somewhat different views on Bush and decision-making, the interpretations of the four authors reflect an emerging critical consensus on Bush's wars more than a decade after 9/11. The authors support the decision to go after al Qaeda and bin Laden in Afghanistan but criticize Bush and his advisors for quickly shifting military and intelligence resources from Afghanistan to Iraq. In their haste to avoid 'nation building' and the recent Soviet experience, Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld left Afghanistan vulnerable to a return of al Qaeda and the Taliban from Pakistan and, as Bird and Marshall emphasize, created a chaotic reconstruction program directed by NATO allies, NGOs, UN and U.S. agencies that pursued different and sometimes conflicting programs to turn Afghanistan into a state with a 'liberal' western government.

²⁹ Hahn, 192.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

³¹ Caldwell, 191-192, and 195-202.

³² Leffler, 209-211.

They recognize the initial military success in Iraq but criticize the assumptions and lack of sufficient forces and plans to restore order and carry out a successful reconstruction. Bush receives credit for his decision to approve ‘the surge’ and a change in strategy to CI, but the authors question the overall wisdom of Bush’s decision to attack Iraq. In his evaluation of Clinton’s efforts to contain Saddam and verify the absence of WMD, Hahn notes that certainty could not be attained. With hindsight, Hahn suggests that containment through sanctions and inspections had worked and Hussein had abandoned a WMD program but kept this a closely held secret so that his adversaries, most notably Iran, would be restrained by the prospect of Iraq having WMD. “The maintenance of the containment approach into the new century had a fair chance of preserving essential U.S. interests in the Middle East during the lifetime of Saddam Hussein,” argues Hahn, “at a small fraction of the costs incurred in the alternative approach implemented by” Bush.³³ In a balanced assessment of the results, Hahn weighs the gains in Iraq with the removal of Saddam and the costs to the U.S. in dead and wounded soldiers, the financial drain and rise in the U.S. debt, the impact on the economic recession of 2008, and the economic decline of the U.S. in its share of global gross domestic product. Hahn also appropriately includes the impact of the Iraq war in mobilizing Islamic terrorists to invade not only Iraq and Afghanistan but also other vulnerable countries and the enhancement of the influence of Iran throughout the region. “President Bush’s eventual achievement of quasi-stability within Iraq—a case of grasping progress from a perilous situation—mitigated only some of the considerable damage,” Hahn stresses, “inflicted on U.S. interests at home and overseas by his policy over 8 years.”³⁴

In a chapter on “Lessons and Legacies: Twenty-Six Articles,” Caldwell is less directly critical of the Bush decision for war with Iraq, but his articles add up to a realist recommendation for far more caution than that which was exercised by Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld. “Wars have unintended consequences, and these should be expected, however unpredictable,” is Caldwell’s first argument with reference to the war expanding the overall terrorism problem and increasing the influence of Iran in Iraq and the region.³⁵ After noting that wars are costly, with the prediction that Bush’s wars may eventually cost \$3 trillion, Caldwell also points out that as a result of being engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. had less time and resources to deal with other problems such as Iran, nuclear weapons in North Korea, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “Never underestimate the enemy” as the U.S. did in both wars after the initial military success against al Qaeda and the Taliban and the Iraqi Army, Caldwell cautions, and be as realistic as possible on objectives, providing security for the local population, and developing plans before the war begins, and “make adjustments as the war develops.”³⁶ All of Caldwell’s twenty-six articles offer criticism of Bush’s wars.

³³ Hahn, 132.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

³⁵ Caldwell, 248.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

Whereas Caldwell is restrained in his critique, Anderson offers a more critical “Concluding Remarks and Legacies” section. After approving the attack on the Taliban regime as “entirely justifiable”, Anderson criticizes the invasion of Iraq as a “radical departure from previous presidential behavior, and not justifiable-even if Saddam had WMDs.”³⁷ After reviewing various assessments of why Bush went to war in Iraq, from the threat of WMD to a neoconservative desire to spread democracy in the Middle East as well as secure oil resources in Iraq, Anderson includes personal factors such as Bush’s linkage of religious beliefs and his own sense of personal destiny and opportunity for greatness. “Was the price in blood and treasury worth getting rid of Saddam” is the question Anderson raises when he moves to a consideration of the costs, both military and in terms of reconstruction, with emphasis on the high amount of corruption. In short, Anderson finds little that is positive to have emerged from the Bush wars besides some gains for Afghans, particularly women, with the removal of the Taliban, and gains for Shiites with the removal of Saddam Hussein and his regime.³⁸

All the authors are cautious with respect to the final results of Bush’s wars, as they were passed on to his successor, Barack Obama, who has followed through with the U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq despite the U.S. military’s desire to retain bases in Iraq and conservative complaints about the U.S. losing a strategic position in the Middle East. President Obama also approved ‘the surge’ of U.S. troops into Afghanistan to stop the expanding Taliban insurgency and to try to pressure the Taliban into negotiations with the Karzai government that would enable a U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan. Consequently, as the authors recognize, the orthodox interpretation is subject to revisions in the long term as historians gain more perspective on the results in Iraq and Afghanistan and the role of the U.S. in the Middle East weighted as well as the long term impact on the U.S.

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³⁷ Anderson, 229.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 236-238.