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Book review by James Wirtz of The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War without End

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study of development, regional economic integration, globalization, or the bi-
national issues between Mexico and the United States. And it probably does not really claim to make such contributions. Instead, the value of the book consists in its descriptive nature. Number by number, acronym by acronym, year by year, statistic by statistic, the book weaves a scenario that sheds light on the major problems facing Mexico today.

But drawing conclusions about Mexico’s current pressing needs, one fact at a time, is only half of the book’s promise. This half it does very well. The other half of the promise, starting with its subtitle, is to draw important conclusions about the impact that Mexico has had and will have on the United States. On this score, the book fails. Although the reader learns vastly about the challenges that await Mexico in the coming decades, the actual impact of Mexico’s choices on the United States and its people’s well-being is never fully developed.

The most interesting and enlightening chapter is *Mexico versus China*, where the reader is led through the geostrategic position of each country and the potential for harm to the Mexican economy with China’s entrance onto the world stage. Still, the author does not fully triangulate the relationship with the United States by elaborating further on the interaction between the two countries and on what Mexico’s choices may mean for the United States. Thus, even this fascinating chapter illustrates how the book falls short of its promise to draw conclusions about the impact of Mexico on the United States.

The book is quite readable for an undergraduate class and the general public. It contains information and statistics couched in a historical perspective. Students and general readers who want to know the basics of Mexico’s economic and political environment today, its perils, challenges, and opportunities, will be enlightened by reading it. More advanced readers who expect a more sophisticated analysis of and policy prescriptions on the U.S.–Mexico relationship will be disappointed.

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Part memoir, part political diatribe, and part current history, Peter Galbraith’s critique of the effort to bring democracy to Iraq is complex, discouraging, and not entirely consistent. In Galbraith’s view, Iraq was held together by the sheer brutality of Saddam Hussein and his henchmen. By crushing the Ba’athists, the George W. Bush administration unleashed ethnic and religious forces that had been suppressed for decades. The administration might be forgiven for hoping for a more positive outcome in Iraq, but Galbraith, an American with
some unique experience with Kurdish military and political leaders, expected the worst. Much in the same way the collapse of the Soviet Union prompted Yugoslavia’s descent into ethnic violence and civil war, the end of the Ba’athist regime in Baghdad has led the Kurds, Sunnis, and Shiites of Iraq to look to their own interests first. Galbraith believes that civil war in Iraq is all but inevitable, if not already well under way. U.S. forces will not be able to hold Iraq together: too much blood has been shed in ethnic strife and political repression for the peoples of Iraq to live together.

Although Galbraith blames this state of affairs on Republican administrations, he never offers a compelling alternative for ending the brutal dictatorship in Baghdad. He speaks glowingly about the U.S. containment of Iraq practiced during the 1990s, but the status quo did in fact come at the price of many thousands of Iraqi lives every year, the further exacerbation of ethnic and religious animosities within Iraq, and a fundamentalist backlash against the United States (that is, al Qaeda). Galbraith also takes the Bush administration to task for not only disbanding but humiliating the Iraqi military, while also offering the seemingly contradictory judgment that it was impossible to continue to allow the Iraqi military to be dominated by Sunnis loyal to the old regime.

According to Galbraith, the idea of creating a multi-ethnic, liberal democracy in Iraq was never embraced by most Iraqis. The Kurds had long ago opted out, the Shia desire a theocracy, and the Sunnis, now that the tables have turned, live in fear of becoming political and religious underdogs in Iraq. Better military tactics, strategy, or even diplomatic prowess, or the lack thereof, was not going to change the situation on the ground in Iraq. Given Galbraith’s analysis, it is hard to escape the feeling that his Bush bashing is really beside the point.

Galbraith believes that U.S. policymakers must accept the fact that Iraq will inevitably disintegrate into Kurdish, Sunni, and Shia enclaves and adopt policies to facilitate the separation of Iraq into its constituent parts. He also suggests that the time has come to pick allies—his preference is to strengthen the already positive U.S. relationship with the Kurds—to better prepare for the time when Iraq no longer exists. U.S. policymakers also have to begin to worry about the geo-strategic consequences that will follow the disintegration of Iraq. Iranian power and influence are likely to surge in the absence of an Iraqi counterweight, a development that might drive a wedge even deeper between Sunnis and Shia, and draw the United States even more deeply into Middle East politics.

The End of Iraq offers a Machiavelian perspective on the future of Iraq, if not a sustained analysis of Bush administration policy making or the trends that are shaping events in the Middle East. And despite all the criticism Galbraith heaps on Republicans, his fundamental point, which has nothing to do with partisan politics, offers a sufficient explanation for the turmoil in Iraq today. The various ethnic groups that populate Iraq will not and cannot live together. If his central thesis is correct, it is hard to
reject his idea that the best way to end the war in Iraq is to expedite the country’s dismemberment.

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The capacity of presidents to “legislate” by issuing executive orders, proclamations, and other administrative instruments has been the subject of close scrutiny in recent years. Kenneth Mayer’s With the Stroke of a Pen (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), Phillip Cooper’s By Order of the President (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), and William Howell’s Power Without Persuasion (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003) have all analyzed the president’s power to use executive orders. Adam Warber contributes to this literature by offering an empirical study, analyzing the text of all executive orders from March 1936 through the end of the administration of Bill Clinton. He also provides an assessment of executive orders during the first term of George W. Bush.

Warber separates executive orders into three categories: symbolic, routine, and policy. He studies their use during divided government, scandals (Watergate and Lewinsky), and a president’s last year in office, and compares the orders issued in election and non-election years. Contrary to some other studies, he finds that “there has not been a significant expansion of power across the modern presidency regarding the chief executive’s authority to issue executive orders” (p. 2), and that presidents “have not dramatically expanded their power with this unilateral tool” (p. 128).

A reader may draw the erroneous conclusion that the significance of executive orders is not growing. Looking at total numbers, there has been no significant increase, but executive orders are being used more frequently for policy purposes. From the administration of Franklin Roosevelt to that of John Kennedy, the percentage of policy executive orders ranged from 22.2 percent to 38.8 percent, or an average of 25.7 percent. That percentage increased to 42.8 percent from the administration of Lyndon Johnson to that of Gerald Ford, and climbed still further, to 65.6 percent from the administration of Jimmy Carter to that of Bill Clinton (p. 39). Also, Warber makes clear that presidents are at liberty to issue executive orders with little fear of legislative or judicial checks. Without pushback from other branches, executive orders remain a potent weapon.

In several places, Warber seems to equate executive orders with public laws, as in “Since executive orders are law … ” (p. 15) and “The US political system accords executive orders the same legal status as legislation passed by Congress” (p. 31). Executive orders do have legal effect, but they are not