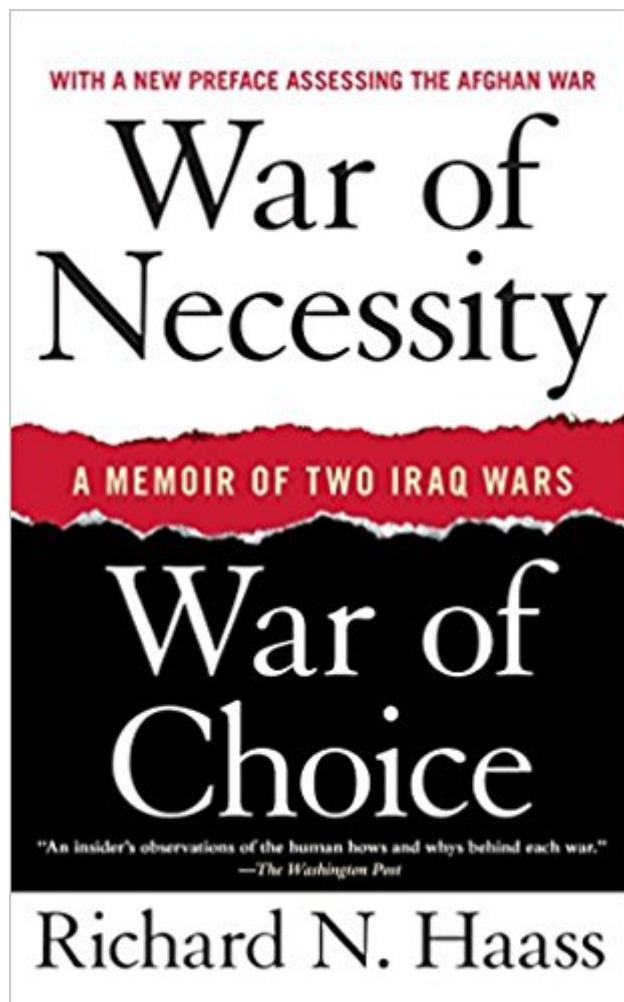


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War Of Necessity, War Of Choice: A Memoir Of Two Iraq Wars



Richard N. Haass



Synopsis

War of Necessity, War of Choiceâ "part history, part memoirâ "provides invaluable insight into some of the most important recent events in the world. It also provides a much needed compass for how the United States can apply the lessons learned from the two Iraq wars so that it is better positioned to put into practice what worked and to avoid repeating what so clearly did not. Indeed, in a new preface to this paperback edition, Haass argues that Afghanistan has become a war of choice. "Doing more militarily may not result in lasting improvements in the security situation that are commensurate with the costs."

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Customer Reviews

This is an important memoir of the two Iraq wars. Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations, was a member of the National Security Council advising President George H.W. Bush on Operation Desert Storm in 1990 and 1991. He was later a State Department adviser to Colin Powell on the second Iraq war in 2003. He viewed the first war as a "war of necessity" that we had to wage to evict Saddam Hussein from Kuwait; he viewed the second war as a "war of choice" where the objectives kept changing. In both roles, Haass sought to speak truth to power. In the second case, power didn't listen when he urged that we defer the invasion and give smart sanctions a chance to work. The book is a poignant personal memoir as well, as Haass ties his connection to powerful historic events with dramatic changes in his own life--marriage and career decision. All who lived through this cataclysmic period should read this highly readable and riveting book.

Richard Haass brings a unique perspective by having been involved directly in many aspects of the planning of the two gulf wars. During the first Bush administration he was more of an insider than in the second administration, but in both cases he was working directly with the likes of Powell, Rice, Bush I and II, etc. This is essentially a personal memoir pivoted around the two wars, which were the most important events in the author's career as a policy expert and diplomat. As such, the conclusions about the wars are pretty conventional, i.e. the first war was justified and necessary, while the second one was not. What is more interesting are the little details and stories about the various government meetings and diplomatic trips. Ultimately I found the book hard to read; it just did not draw me in. I like books that have illustrations, photos or charts, and chapters that are well organized by topic. This book was just an unbroken linear narrative, much of it filled with minute details of meetings between people whose names I didn't care to know. I would recommend this book only to die-hard foreign policy junkies. The rest of us may find it a little dry and boring, with little original insights into the wars.

Haass had high level policy positions dealing with the Middle East in both Bush I and Bush II administrations. He was thus well placed to understand the how and why of going to war against Iraq both times. He did NOT have any operational role, and was not involved in military planning or execution for either war. His book is highly readable, and adds the policy perspective to the plethora of books describing the more operational issues in both wars. Thus, this is a valuable addition to the rapidly growing library of books on the two Iraq wars. That said, the policy perspective has some inherent limitations. He honestly admits that he has no clue how the decision to go to war in Bush II was made. He was doing policy papers, and then all of a sudden, they were completely irrelevant, the decision having been made. He is also willing to criticize some very close friends (Rice does not come across well), but not the overall process. His bottom line, which is apparent from the title, is that the first war was right, the second wrong. Hardly a radical position these days. Whether you agree with him or not (which I do not), it is a book well worth reading for an understanding of how policy gets made (or should get made)--at least in the area of foreign affairs.

I became aware of this book when author Richard Haas made reference to it while being interviewed on Fox Network News with respect to the current situation in Iraq and Syria. What grabbed my attention was the book's title. Contrary to what the title implies the book is not a chronological and analytical, nor a comparative and contrasting history of the two Iraq wars; but a Washington insider's view of the political analysis, policy and strategy involved. As a

member of the National Security Council (NSC) for the 1st Iraq war and director of policy and planning under Secretary of State Colin Powell in the 2nd Iraq war the author presents a very detailed memoir of the origins, intelligence gathering, discussions and decision making and the results in both cases. One could also title this book "Correct Foreign Policy vs Incorrect foreign policy". With the Iraq invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 the U.S under President George H.W. Bush was presented with a foreign policy crisis; although Iraq under the rule of political despot Saddam Hussein presented no immediate threat to the U.S. the Bush administration determined that not only was the invasion a direct violation of the United Nations Charter, in addition this brutal invasion threatened to destabilize the entire middle east where most of the world's oil comes from, that already had a long history civil wars and political conflict. The book in very readable detail describes how President G.H. W. Bush put together an effective team under the NSC and other agencies, with the right credentials and background (Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, General Colin Powell to name a few) who forged an effective international coalition to drive the Iraqi Army out of Kuwait, disable it and contain Saddam Hussein in Iraq while preserving Iraqi political structure with Saddam Hussein still in power. An important quote in the book "You can break the pot, but now have a broken pot" (General Colin Powell) implied that it was important to liberate Kuwait but not occupy Iraq or change the regime under Saddam Hussein since the nation of Iraq was little more than an artificial state of 3 historically warring factions. This policy proved very effective and Iraq War 1 ended with relatively little cost and very few American casualties; with Saddam Hussein contained throughout the remainder of the G.H.W Bush administration and subsequent President Clinton administration. War of Choice, War of Necessity delineates in part two how the 9/11 terrorist attack, largely prorogated President George W Bush to decide, that because intelligence showed that the Saddam Hussein regime was hiding weapons of mass destruction and in the process of developing nuclear weapons, that regime change was necessary in Iraq in addition to changing Iraq into a republic more acceptable to the international community. Although President G.W Bush put together an experienced team of advisors and political analysts; with the exception of Richard Haass, this team simply told the president what he wanted to hear since the 9/11 attack irrevocably motivated the reactionary president to attack Iraq again and oust Saddam Hussein. The U.S. policy in Iraq War 2 proved untenable because it speculated with little analysis the U.S. invasion would be highly praised and welcome by the Iraqi people, had no plan to control the populace during the interregnum of regime change and there essentially was no actual alternative regime to change to. The intelligence that cited WMD and "We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud".

(Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice) were completely inaccurate. War of Necessity, War of Choice published in 2009 did not know the outcome, but correctly predicted the Iraq War 2 would fail to achieve sought objectives; and we now know in 2015 that American involvement would end in 2011 at a cost of nearly 1 trillion dollars, claim more than 6000 American lives and launch ISIS Å“ a far greater threat than Saddam Hussein ever was. War of Necessity, War of Choice is a good read for anyone interested in the behind the scenes making and planning of good versus bad foreign policy, a good selected read for a college level political science class. The book stresses that American people should not assume any decision to go to war is a correct one just because Washington politicians advocate it. My quote Å“ old Native American saying Å“Before you attack your enemy Å“ question your leadersÅ“.

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