

The Academy of Political Science

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POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 123 · Number 1 · Spring 2008

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Political Science Quarterly
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Book Reviews

Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover from an Iraqi Civil War by Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack. Washington DC, Brookings Institution Press, 2007, 239 pp. \$19.95.

Although officers and officials might be forgiven for hoping for the best when it comes to military strategy and diplomacy, they must plan for the worst. Some policymakers, however, have forgotten this simple idea behind prudent planning. It might be defeatist to base one's strategy on the worst-case contingency, but military strategists and diplomats alike should be prepared for some setbacks by not assuming that all the "breaks" will fall their way. Leaders who deliberately choose war probably underestimate its costs and risks, but realists understand that optimistic political rhetoric will fade once battle is joined.

Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack should thus be commended for considering the nature and consequences of a full-scale civil war in Iraq. Although supporters and critics of the George W. Bush administration might find it hard to imagine a further deterioration of the situation in that war-torn country, Byman and Pollack lay out a doomsday scenario that could embroil the entire Middle East in war. *Things Fall Apart* does not predict that a full-blown civil war will erupt in Iraq, but by surveying conflicts in Yugoslavia, Somalia, Lebanon, Congo, and Afghanistan, it identifies policies that have tended to exacerbate past conflicts.

The authors do not hold out much hope for quickly quelling a major civil war. Instead, they are more concerned about containing the conflict to prevent "spillover," a process whereby regional powers, or ethnic, ideological, and religious groups in neighboring countries become involved in a conflict. Motivations for outside intervention vary. Conflict can spread as states attempt to stop refugee flows. The radicalization of neighboring populations, economic disruption, or the simple effort to support one faction as a means to end a civil war also lead to outside intervention. By employing overwhelming force, outside powers can end civil wars quickly, but decisive intervention is rare because outsiders lack the resources or motivation to take this type of action. Intervention tends to be incremental, which sustains civil wars.

Given these realities, Byman and Pollack recommend a containment policy to deal with Iraq's decent into chaos. They suggest that refugees be held in "sinks" along the border to prevent them from overwhelming or destabilizing

neighbors. They also warn that the West should prepare to deal with short-term disruptions of oil markets and to undertake sustained efforts to improve the economic vitality and political health of states in the Middle East so that they can withstand the strains that will be produced by a civil war in Iraq. The authors suggest that the United States should identify red lines to deter Iranian intervention in an Iraqi civil war, and prepare to back up those deterrent threats with decisive military action.

Byman and Pollack acknowledge that it will be politically difficult for any administration to carry out their policies, which essentially require U.S. forces to stand by as local contestants fight to exhaustion. Critics would charge that their policy inevitably would favor one side or the other in Iraq's civil war and that it fails to offer a viable solution to the conflict, because it makes little mention of how the United States might improve conditions in the country. These critics would be correct, but they also would miss the point. *Things Fall Apart* is not about creating a better future for Iraq or even preventing the eruption of civil war in the country. It is about containing losses, not maximizing potential gains. To be specific, it is about preventing a civil war in Iraq from turning into a regional conflict or potentially a global war. In that sense, the book might have been more aptly entitled *Things Could Get Worse*.

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The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace by Ali A. Allawi. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2007. 544 pp. \$28.00.

Ali Allawi delivers a superb book that explains why the invasion and occupation of Iraq, conceived in the minds of ideologues and promoted by partisan experts, was destined for tragic failure. An inside participant in Iraq's tumultuous transformation from dictatorship to civil war, the author takes the reader through the milestones that brought about Shiite ascendancy, Sunni insurgency, and sectarian killings. Allawi's perspective is marked by enduring insights, historical depth, and nuanced understanding of the factions struggling to take control of Iraq's future. It is also a realistic—even pessimistic—assessment of the prospect of communal and national reconciliation in the foreseeable future.

Allawi begins by reminding us of Robert Merton's theses on the factors that may blind people to the unintended consequences of their actions. These include ignorance of conditions on the ground, primacy of immediate interests over long-term goals, and the ideological imperatives that color their view of the world. In Iraq, the force of unintended consequences struck back with a vengeance, argues Allawi. Policies were formulated by Washington and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) with scant consideration of Iraq's fragmented social order, absence of a common identity, and social exhaustion produced by decades of wars, sanctions, and dictatorship.