

The Academy of Political Science

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POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 120 · Number 1 · Spring 2005

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Political Science Quarterly

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What We Owe Iraq: War and the Ethics of Nation Building by Noah Feldman. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2004. 200 pp. \$19.95.

A classically failed state is characterized by brutal competition over power and resources. When it became clear in 2003 that the American occupying forces had no plan for either pacification or statecraft, and that they were determined, willy-nilly, to create a political vacuum within which the three central constituencies of the old Ottoman and British colonial state would be compelled to contend for primacy, an internal war erupted. Had the Sunni, ex-Baath, faction believed that it would be treated fairly, even plausibly well, in post-Saddam Iraq, the continuing bloodbath might have been forestalled, even avoided. Instead, as Noah Feldman astutely notes, the hapless, Arabic-illiterate American overlords soon failed the test of legitimacy (Feldman would say “ethical authority”). That enabled Ayatollah Ali Sistani, leader of the Najaf hawza and presumptive lead Shi’i cleric, cannily to promote the Shi’i cause by asserting his own moral claims to national and situational legitimacy. Once that legitimacy had been established, he demanded early elections of a kind that would favor Shi’a and leading clerics like himself. Devoid of moral authority because of their failed occupation and the lack of any international sanction for the original war, the coalition provisional authority was compelled to cede primacy to Sistani and his cohorts. Sunni legions naturally became alarmed. Conflict followed inexorably.

Feldman puts the Iraqi imbroglio into a framework of ethical responsibility. He also wants to view the failed occupation as a self-protective effort to nation build out of, or up from, failure. The self-protective nature of that nation building reflects enhanced security for the United States in an era of terror. Feldman seems willing, on ethical grounds, to justify the war and the occupation if, in fact, a passably liberal democratic state emerges from the rubble of post-Saddam weakness and chaos. The attempt to place the Iraqi adventure within such a carefully argued philosophical construct succeeds less well, however, than Feldman’s sensible analysis of the dynamics of rivalry within 2003–2004 Iraq.

Early on, Feldman concludes, appropriately, that “the Iraqi war must be counted as the most misbegotten and self-contradictory foreign policy blunder in at least a generation.” Saddam’s strong state has been replaced by a weak state vulnerable to terrorist pressures. “The primary explanation,” writes Feldman, “for U. S. pursuit of the extraordinarily difficult – not to say quixotic – task of creating in Iraq a multiparty, federal democracy . . . is that the United States sought to produce an Iraq that will not contribute to increased global insecurity” (p. 18).

The primary explanation for U.S. folly is more likely to have been oedipal and domestically electoral. Once mired in the quicksand of Iraq, too, the resulting paradox of a well-intended policy going awry is the rise of lasting global insecurity, the loss of U.S. soft power and world legitimacy, and the creation in Iraq of a failed state with ambitious nonstate actors.

By the time that this review is printed, Iraq will or will not have held an election under conditions of marked insecurity. But even if a poll has occurred, in at least some sectors of the Sunni heartland, any Shi'i majority or plurality will have become a source of renewed combat, hardly of stability. As Feldman rightly asserts, elections are a beginning, not an end point, in nation building. They incite competition, not conciliation, among contending parties. Because, in this case, they do not presage the burgeoning of a liberal democracy, or even stability, they may merely serve as an ethically unwarranted justification for a desperate American exit.

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The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq by Derek Gregory. Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishers, 2004. 367 pp. Cloth, \$59.95; paper, \$27.95.

Geopolitics returns to geography, dialectically. During a phase now largely past, North American geographers strove to make their discipline a sort of applied economics, with central place theory its organizing principle. The next round of work reacted strongly to the model-building realism of its predecessor, plunging into epistemological doubt, and reaching for culturally grounded depictions of place as the context for social action while examining formal representations of space as tools of power. That was the antithesis. With Derek Gregory's analysis of Western interventions in the Middle East, we get a new sort of geographic synthesis, in which the violent visions of conquerors reshape political relations and life experiences on the ground. Gregory speaks of the "colonial present" rather than using the currently fashionable term "empire." He does so to focus readers' attention on continuities between older and newer colonial interventions in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq, then to infer a more general analysis of the United States's changing relation to the rest of the world. In that he largely succeeds. Using 11 September 2001 as a pivot and the U.S.-led war on terror as an object of explanation, Gregory traces successive Western efforts to control the Middle East, with special reference to the three regions. Edward Said's idea of "imaginative geographies" serves Gregory repeatedly to represent the expression of naked interest by means of territorial designs. But those designs do not simply camouflage evil intentions, argues Gregory; they alter geopolitical realities. They facilitate *locating* (reducing humanly occupied sites to points in a grid), *opposing* (dividing the world starkly into us and them), and *casting out* (excluding everyone but us from the benefits of modern humanity). They thereby transform the lives of the designers, the victims of their designs, and links between the two. Gregory makes his case with embellished analytical narratives of recent history in Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq. The narratives qualify as embellished through their unceasing references to literary treatments of their subject and their repeated reliance on telling quotations. They qualify