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Book Guide

War of Necessity, War of Choice

In this book, CFR President Richard N. Haass contrasts the decisions that shaped the conduct of two wars between the United States and Iraq, and writes an authoritative, personal account of how U.S. foreign policy is made. Teaching notes by the author.

Summary

When should the United States go to war? It is arguably the most important foreign policy question facing any president, and Richard N. Haass—a member of the National Security Council staff for President George H.W. Bush and the director of policy planning in the State Department for President George W. Bush—is in a unique position to address it. Dr. Haass is one of just a handful of individuals—along with Colin Powell, Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, and Robert Gates—involved at a senior level of U.S. government decision-making for both the Gulf War of 1990–91 and the Iraq War launched in 2003. This book, a combination of history, analysis, and personal account, explains not only what happened but why.

At first blush, the two Iraq wars are similar. Both involved a President George Bush and the United States in conflicts with Saddam Hussein and Iraq. There, however, the resemblance ends. This book argues that the first war, following Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, was a war of necessity. Wars of necessity involve vital U.S. interests and, more importantly, a lack of viable alternatives to the use of force that could protect these interests. The first war was limited in ambition, well executed, and carried out with unprecedented international support.

By contrast, the second Iraq war was one of choice. The book contends that this ambitious war was unwarranted, as the United States had other viable policy options. It was also poorly implemented and fought with considerably more international opposition than backing.

Finally, the book goes beyond Iraq to examine the means and ends of U.S. foreign policy: how it should be made, what it should seek to accomplish, and how it should be pursued. *War of Necessity, War of Choice* provides a compass for how the United States can apply the lessons learned from the two Iraq conflicts so that it is better positioned to put into practice what worked and avoid repeating what did not.

This book is suitable for courses on U.S. foreign policy, public policy, ethics and international affairs, and Middle East history. These teaching notes discuss questions and suggestions for further projects, including mock National Security Council meetings and writing assignments, which may be useful for students in any of the courses above.

Discussion and Essay Questions

Courses on U.S. Foreign Policy

1. Was the George H.W. Bush administration right to go to war in 1990–91 to drive Saddam Hussein's forces out of Kuwait? Do you believe that this was a war of necessity for the United States?

2. Was the George W. Bush administration right to invade Iraq in 2003? Do you believe that this was a war of choice for the United States?
3. What should be the role of democracy promotion and attempts to change the nature of societies in U.S. foreign policy? Are such objectives ever a worthy basis for going to war?
4. Are wars of choice ever warranted? If so, under what circumstances?
5. What were the costs and benefits of the first Iraq war? What were and are the costs and benefits of the second? In general, how should an assessment of probable costs and benefits affect consideration of whether to undertake a war of choice?
6. What are the lessons of the two Iraq wars for what the United States seeks to accomplish in the world? How can these lessons be applied to current or future situations in which the United States is using or might consider using force (e.g., Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, North Korea, or Darfur)?
7. How do the two Iraq wars represent competing schools of thought in American foreign policy? How do the outcomes of the wars challenge or support the tenets of these schools? What should be the principal purpose of American foreign policy?
8. What are other examples of wars of necessity and wars of choice that the United States or other countries have fought? How are they similar and how do they differ from the two Iraq wars?

Courses on Public Policy

1. What should government officials do when they disagree with policies being put in place? What factors should influence their thinking on how to handle their disagreement (e.g., the importance of the issue, strength of the individual's objections, opportunities for their arguments to receive a fair hearing)?
2. Under what circumstances should government officials resign? How should they evaluate the trade-off between, on one hand, staying in government and trying to influence a policy they disagree with and, on the other, making a statement by resigning but losing their direct influence?
3. Based on his argument in the book, should Richard Haass have resigned when the 2003 Iraq war was launched? Should Colin Powell have done so?
4. What actions other than resignation are appropriate for officials to make their disagreements known? Is leaking information or undermining a policy ever justified?
5. Compare the decision-making approaches of the two Presidents Bush. How do they differ in their levels of formality, inclusiveness, and other characteristics? What are the merits and drawbacks of each approach?

Courses on Ethics and International Affairs

1. Was the first Iraq war a "just war?" Was the second?
2. Can wars of choice ever be just?
3. Can any war be just if it lacks broad support among the American public? In Congress? In international public opinion?
4. Is just war thinking an adequate framework for deciding whether to undertake a war today? What are the benefits and limits of this thinking?
5. What should be the criteria for determining whether a conflict is a war of necessity? What should be the criteria for deciding whether to begin a war of choice?
6. Under what circumstances is it advisable or justifiable to talk to objectionable regimes, such as that of Saddam Hussein? Under what circumstances should contact with such regimes be cut off?
7. Did the United States respond appropriately to Saddam's crackdowns on the Kurdish and Shia uprisings in the aftermath of the Gulf War?

Courses on Middle East History

1. Do you agree with the George H.W. Bush administration's attempts to maintain a relationship with Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the 1980s? What, if anything, could the United States have done to head off the threat that Saddam came to pose to the region and to U.S. interests?
2. Was the George H.W. Bush administration right to limit U.S. goals to evicting Saddam's forces from Kuwait and to refrain from "going to Baghdad" to oust Saddam's regime? Was it right to stay aloof from the Kurdish and Shia

intifadas?

3. Was the second Iraq war the wrong choice? Was it the right choice poorly implemented?
4. What were the consequences of the first Iraq war for the region? What were and are the consequences of the second?
5. What would have been the consequences had the United States not used force to liberate Kuwait in 1990–91 or to oust Saddam in 2003?

Supplementary Materials

Atkinson, Rick, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

Bush, George, and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

Gordon, Michael R. and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1995).

Gordon, Michael R. and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon, 2006).

Haass, Richard N., *The Bureaucratic Entrepreneur: How To Be Effective in Any Unruly Organization* (Washington: Brookings Press, 1999).

Haass, Richard N., *Intervention: The Use of American Military Force in the Post-Cold War World* (Washington: Brookings Press, 1999).

Neustadt, Richard E. and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

Packer, George, *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005).

Ricks, Thomas E., *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

Walzer, Michael, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

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