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Squandered Victory: The American Occupation And The Bungled Effort To Bring Democracy To Iraq



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Synopsis

"ChillingÃ¢â ¬â ¢and often scathingÃ¢â ¬â ¢detail . . . Should be read by anyone interested in understanding why the United States' quick military victory has given way to an increasingly virulent insurgency."Ã¢â ¬â ¢The New York TimesIn the fall of 2003, Stanford professor Larry Diamond received a call from Condoleezza Rice, asking if he would spend several months in Baghdad as an adviser to the American occupation authorities. Diamond had not been a supporter of the war in Iraq, but he felt that the task of building a viable democracy was a worthy goal. But when he went to Iraq, his experiences proved to be more of an education than he bargained for.Squandered Victory is Diamond's provocative and vivid account of how the American effort to establish democracy in Iraq was hampered not only by insurgents and terrorists but also by a long chain of miscalculations, missed opportunities, and acts of ideological blindness that helped assure that the transition to independence would be neither peaceful nor entirely democratic. And in a new Afterword for the paperback edition, Diamond shows how the ongoing instability in Iraq is a direct result of the shortsighted choices made during the fourteen months of the American occupation and the subsequent Iraqi interim government."A forceful and detailed critique of the invasion's aftermath. . . . A searing indictment." Ã¢â ¬â ¢The Wall Street Journal"Larry Diamond has a flair for making incisive points at the right moment. . . . [Squandered Victory] explodes with the frustrations he felt working for the U.S. occupation." Ã¢â ¬â ¢The New Republic

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Customer Reviews

In late 2003, Stanford University professor and democracy expert Larry Diamond was personally

asked by his former colleague Condoleezza Rice to serve as an advisor to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, a position he accepted with equal parts "hesitation and conviction." He opposed the initial invasion of Iraq, but "supported building the peace," and felt the U.S. had a moral imperative to reconstruct Iraq as a democratic and prosperous nation. Before going to Iraq he had serious doubts about whether the U.S. could actually do this--an opinion that was solidified after spending three months working with the CPA. Squandered Victory is his insider's examination of what went wrong in Iraq after the initial invasion. Diamond details a long list of preventable blunders and missed opportunities, from President Bush's decision to give the Pentagon the lead responsibility for the management of postwar Iraq to the CPA's inability to work with Iraqi leaders such as Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Diamond expresses admiration for CPA Administrator L. Paul Bremer, whom he believes was sincere about wanting to bring democracy to Iraq, yet points out that he was wholly unprepared and unrealistic about the task, resulting in "one of the major overseas blunders in U.S. history." In his descriptions of confrontations with Bremer, Diamond shows him as unwilling to diverge from paths that were obviously failing. As an academic with an expertise in democracy building, Diamond sometimes seems more comfortable with theories than practical solutions, but he did experience the process in Iraq from the inside and provides a useful background on the various ethnic and religious groups vying for power there. He claims that he remains hopeful, but his optimism lies more with the abilities of the Iraqi people than with the U.S. government, since the difficult process of democratization will likely take much more time and effort than the U.S. can afford to spend. --Shawn Carkonen --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

When Diamond got a call from his former Stanford colleague Condoleezza Rice asking if he would go to Baghdad to advise Iraqi authorities on drafting and implementing a democratic constitution, the political scientist, who had "opposed going to war but supported building the peace," was able to overcome his concerns about the region's instability. What he saw in Iraq during the first four months of 2004, however, left him extremely pessimistic about the prospects of success (although he admits all is not necessarily lost). Diamond sees a refusal to deal honestly with deteriorating conditions, particularly the rise of violent insurgency, and characterizes it as one of America's worst blunders ever; indeed, he calls that refusal "criminal negligence." Diamond's mounting personal frustration becomes apparent especially in direct confrontations with then Ambassador Paul Bremer. Though much of the story is given over to wonkish details of power brokering among Iraq's various political, ethnic and religious factions, there are also vibrant particulars of life inside the American

compound, where even going out for pizza could be a life-threatening event. Such eye-witness experience bolsters this vivid critique of the current administration's foreign policy cornerstone. Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Larry DiamondÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœSquandered VictoryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢, portraying his take on the war in Iraq, and while I was taking a moment to reflect on what I had learned from reading his experience, I found, quite by coincidence, that I can draw similar lessons from the two other recently finished reads.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœThe Best and the BrightestÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ and the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœColdest WinterÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢, both by David Halberstam, about our involvement in the Vietnam war and in the Korean wars, which I had submerged in the months prior to turning the pages in ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœSquandered VictoryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ they are all about decision makersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ hubris and arrogance and their deficiencies in historic perspectives. In ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœThe Best and the BrightestÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢, an overly confident statistician from Ford, an insolent egoist from Harvard, an un-elected, unassured president, had teamed up in setting up the most dreadful and the most humiliating blunder of AmericanÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s foreign conflict in its history. In the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã ËœColdest WinterÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢, another self-aggrandizer egomaniac, Douglas Macarthur, told his soldiers that theyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ll be home for the 1950 Xmas before plunging in the coldest, bitterest, carnage that took 35 thousand American lives and close to a million North Koreans and Chinese lives before settling on the same 38th geographic parallel as before the conflict ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â œ it gives me the chill with our current administration, lacking, even worse, in historic perspective and their oversized egos, managing the world during the most delicate timing of its political and climatic state, and leading us calamitously forward.

Larry Diamond's Squandered Victory is interesting but also somewhat disappointing.Diamond was among those Americans who went to Iraq after the invasion to try to support democratization. One of the sadder aspects of this book is the author's confidence that his forays into the Iraqi community to lead discussions on democracy had any chance of success. As one reads the volume, the optimism seems to have been misplaced (especially given our knowledge of what has happened over time) that it leads me to think of the author as somewhat naive (believing that meetings with small groups of Iraqis could make much of a difference, based on the larger context in Iraq; and I am familiar with and respect his other work on democracy).Nonetheless, there are useful insights in

this volume. On a number of occasions, he notes the likelihood that the key figures in the Administration’s Iraqi policy group were caught up in "groupthink," where they lost their ability to be self-critical. On page 205, he observes that "But by now I had become accustomed to this kind of internal spin and groupthink." A similar reflection occurs on page 291.Poignant was Condoleezza Rice’s alleged nonresponse to his feedback to her on his assignment. This was his attempt to pass on to her the lessons that he saw as a result of his experiences in Iraq.All in all, another volume on Iraq that helps to provide context; it adds a useful component to the full set of books on Iraq. The title, "Squandered Victory," however, suggests that the American adventure was winnable from the get go. Given the poor after war planning and the inherent religious and cultural fissures in Iraq itself, this is debatable. Nonetheless, a good addition to one’s Iraq library. . . .

Larry Diamond is an internationally recognized expert on the processes, concepts and development of democracies. Thus it made perfect sense for Condoleza Rice to ask him to go into post-war Iraq and assist with the transition of Iraq to a democracy. This book details his experiences in Iraq from which he draws his conclusions about the many errors the United States made in regard to Iraq. The first nine chapters cover his experiences in Iraq. The tenth chapter summarizes the mistakes he thinks were made by the United States. The eleventh and final chapter covers his future predictions as to how Iraq will now evolve and whether democracy is possible under the conditions he observed while serving his nation in Iraq.There were mistakes made in regard to the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. The war itself will probably be seen by future generations as the major mistake made, however management of the occupation was a tragedy. There was a plan to quickly win the war but no plan how to secure the peace and maintain the victory. Neo-conservatives had been lead to believe unrealistic scenarios fabricated by Iraqi expatriates such as Ahmed and Salem Chalabi. The US only provided support to the Oil Ministry building in Baghdad and all other buildings were ransacked. The US War College oddly enough had fully predicted much of the chaos that would occur if insufficient troops were used to secure the victory. A major tragedy was that there were not enough quality supplies and materials available to the US servicemen and women post invasion. It was as if no planning what-so-ever had occurred as to how to secure the victory. The lives of these young men and women who died because the $400,000 canvas-top covered Hummers offered no real protection lies at the feet of Secretary Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz, the Vice President and the President.Diamond would point out that the lack of post-war planning prior to the invasion would have to rank as one of the greatest mistakes made, one which had many unintended negative consequences for the Iraqi people and for the image of the United

States. The neo-conservatives were dismissive of the UN yet needed the UN to offer the US coverage after the invasion. The British were insistent upon a larger role for the UN since it gave the invasion more legitimacy. The US wanted the UN to cover the US in regard to world opinion but never interfere in the occupational decisions.Another major mistake documented by Diamond is the disbanding of the entire Iraqi army of 700,000 soldiers as well as disbanding the civil infrastructure of teachers, librarians, college professors, civil servants, etc., al of which numbered around 400,000 persons. Thus the very forces that might help hold the country together were disbanded. Diamond indicates that one negative consequence of disbanding the military is that the borders were no longer secure, which allowed terrorists, spies, and other forces that wished to stimulate insurgency ready access to Iraq. Iran took immediate advantage of this major mistake and began to fill the power vacuum by ensuring that Shiite Iraqis sympathetic to and under Iran's influence received funds, weapons, and support to foster insurgency.A third major mistake was misunderstanding the cultures of Iraqi's major ethnic and religious groups. Diamond reports that young inexperienced Americans with inability to speak Arabic or with no background knowledge of the region were given vast responsibilities which they carried out in insensitive manners, frequently making matters worse rather than better.This is especially true in regard to Ayatollah Sistani, the leading religious influence and leader of the Shiites. Sistani had the ability to undermine every US effort and yet he was never engaged in a respectful manner and when he was eventually engaged by the US, much harm in relationships had occurred. This is a critical point because whereas the US wished Iraq to become a democracy with federalist attributes to protect the rights and resources of the Kurds, the Shiites recognized that with 60% of the population they could establish a democracy and yet maintain control of the entire country due to their numbers. Thus the Shiites wished for early elections, quick removal of the US, and then domination of the new government. Sistani was key to slowing down this rush to power which could stimulate a civil war and yet since he was never engaged properly he continued to support elections, starting with elections to determine who would write the new constitution. After months of work writing a new temporary constitution with appointed Iraqis, the Shiites walked out and refused to sign. This could have been avoided had Sistani been included more often in a meaningful way. In addition, whereas Iran has a theocracy where laws are reviewed and approved by religious leaders before enactment, Sistani was more liberal in his interpretation of the role of Islam in a democratic society. He was a potential ally. Whereas there are Shiite factions that receive support, funds, training and information from Iran; Sistani has not lined up with these forces and remains an Iraqi nationalists, resistant to undue influence from Iran. Sistani was also highly suspicious of the US efforts to divest the oil interests into private hands as quickly as

possible.A fourth major mistake was the assumption of the neo-conservatives in the highest leadership positions in the Pentagon that the Iraqis would accept us with open arms as liberators and that the movement toward democracy would be speedy. The fostering of the democratic process requires multiple structural supports and cultural precursors. The neo-conservatives continued to have a negative influence on all decisions made after the invasion. They did this by vetting decisions made by the new Iraqi provisional council through Bremmer. Bremmer would negotiate a deal only to have it undermined by the neo-conservatives in Washington.Many of these mistakes lead to the two front insurgencies that occurred. The rise of al-Sadr and his Mahdi army was a highly negative force, disrupting much of the southern sections of Iraq where the Shiite majority resides. The Mahdi army created makeshift Sharia courts and tried and executed Iraqis for violation of Islamic law. Entire gypsy villages were destroyed due to the conflict between gypsy culture and Islamic law.The insurgency has many faces and origins now, resulting from multiple nationalistic, ethnic, cultural, and criminal influences. Unfortunately the unemployment of 700,000 soldiers provided ample manpower for the various factions. In addition, poor control of conventional Iraqi weapons meant they quickly fell into the hands of the insurgency, making life much more risky for US armed forces. Further incompetence lead to US funded weapons for police services also being diverted to the various insurgencies.Diamond and his colleagues worked hard to educate the people of Iraq about Federalism, a political conception that would allow for the Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds to move toward democracy, form a central government, share power and resources, and maintain minority rights. They worked hard to create a transitional government and transitional constitution that would guide the way toward democracy. Yet they lacked resources. Not only did they need hard cars to travel safely around the country, there were insufficient educational and media campaign resources and materials. The democracy education process was vastly under resourced, as were resources needed just for personal safety of US citizens working in Iraq.Diamond, upon leaving Iraq, writes Condoleza Rice a detailed assessment outlining his fear of the high potential for civil war in Iraq. There were pitfalls in holding elections too soon and pitfalls in holding them too late.What does the future hold? Diamond pointed out that tremendous resources were being used to build military bases in Iraq. The case seems clear that the US sees that it must be in Iraq for an additional ten to twenty years to ensure a stable Iraq that can counter the force and influence of Iran. These bases help protect and support our four major clients in the region: Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.Diamond suggests that the US consider allowing an agency such as USAID to specialize in post conflict reconstruction. He suggests that Sistani was correct that local elections for mayors should have begun early so as to build the capacity to understand

democracy at a local level and then move to regional and then national levels. Diamond's final chapter would indicate that the forces toward democracy are many and sometimes they seem counter-intuitive. Despite the mistakes there is still hope.

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