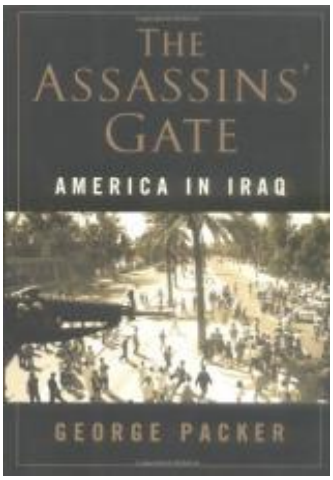
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The Assassin's Gate: America in Iraq

by George Packer



About the Book

Providing unprecedented insight into America's most controversial foreign-policy decision since Vietnam, **The Assassins' Gate** recounts how the Bush administration set about changing the history of the Middle East and became mired in brutal guerrilla warfare in Iraq. During four tours on assignment for*The New Yorker*,award-winning reporter George Packer observed firsthand the complex struggles of soldiers and civilians from myriad backgrounds. Bringing to life the people, ideas, and history that led America to the Assassins' Gate --- the main point of entry into the American zone in Baghdad --- Packer reveals the gritty realities of nation-building and insurgency in a war that followed none of the preconceived scripts. The result is a masterwork of journalism, providing answers on a subject seldom addressed with clarity while raising important new questions about the future.

Discussion Guide

1. What wisdom is revealed in the book's epigraph, written by a Syrian diplomat and poet?

2. The book's prologue describes the crowds that gather at the Assassins' Gate and gives the history of the gate itself (built by Saddam Hussein as an imitation of antiquity). In what way is the gate a metaphor for the current situation in Iraq, and America's role in the world?

3. George Packer offers a history not only of the creation of Iraq but also of American foreign policy in the twentieth century, including portraits of the original neoconservatives. Which aspects of this history were most surprising to you? What should world leaders have learned from this history?

4. Discuss the men who advocated invading Iraq early on, such as Robert Kagan and Paul Wolfowitz. Is there a common denominator (idealism about democracy, flexing a military muscle) in their rationales? According to Packer'saccount, why was George W. Bush so determined to topple Saddam's regime?

5. Chapter three begins with Kanan Makiya's decision not to participate in the State Department's Future of Iraq Project. Were his views about the war misguided? What does his story say about the opinions of exiles?

6. What did you discover about the Coalition Provisional Authority by reading about administrators such as Andrew P. N. Erdmann, whose story opens chapter four? What drives Drew, Meghan O'Sullivan, and the numerous other men and women like them who hoped to build representative government in Iraq?

7. Chapter six describes the transition of authority from Jay Garner to Paul Bremer, who soon issued the uncompromising Debaathification Order. Do you believe that the flourishing insurgency is the result of Paul Bremer's inexperience, or would the situation have decayed just as much under Jay Garner?

8. How does the rebuilding of Iraq compare to the rebuilding of Japan, Germany, Bosnia, and other postwar scenarios in history? To what degree should the current turmoil in Iraq be attributed to the era of T. E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia") and British colonialism? What did you make of the Iraqis who told George Packer they thought the British were better than Americans at being occupiers?

9. Packer observes the problem of unproven accusations, paired with a thirst for vengeance, permeating many of Iraq's factions. What does it take to overcome such deep-seated cultural attitudes?

10. Are looting, sabotage, and the general chaos of Iraq purely a result of too few American troops being sent to move the country from Phase III to Phase IV (combat to stability operations)?

11. Chapter eight introduces Aseel, a progressive Iraqi woman who asks, "Do you think my dreams will come true?" How would you respond to her question?

12. The Assassins' Gateprovides considerable insight into Iraqi attitudes toward sexuality. What accounts for the obsession with the virginity tests for women? In what way do these attitudes exemplify other aspects of Iraqi culture? Will these attitudes ultimately undermine any hope for peace or human rights in the region?

13. Discuss the experience of journalists as described in The Assassins' Gate. What did you discover about the process by which Packer gathered his facts, and the variety of backgrounds among his translators? How has the prevalence of journalists from around the globe, combined with technologies that allow soldiers and civilians to e-mail personal observations to their friends back home, changed the face of war? How has coverage of this war, in which journalists have become targets, compared to the Gulf War, and to Vietnam?

14. In what way does the story of Private Kurt Frosheiser speak to the schism between those who support and those who decry the war? What did you make of the vast differences between the way Kurt's mother and father reacted to his death?

15. In the long run, what will the social repercussions of the invasion be, for both Americans and Iraqis? What might the various figures mentioned in the book say if Packer were to interview them again in twenty years?

16. Do you think American troops will ever leave Iraq altogether? If so, when and how?

Author Bio

George Packer is an award-winning author and staff writer at *The Atlantic*. His books include THE UNWINDING: An Inner History of the New America (winner of the National Book Award), THE ASSASSINS' GATE: America in Iraq, and OUR MAN: Richard Holbrooke and the End of the American Century (winner of the Hitchens Prize and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for biography). He is also the author of two novels and a play, and the editor of a two-volume edition of the essays of George Orwell.

Critical Praise

"Absorbing . . . Packer provides page after page of vivid description of the haphazard, poorly planned and almost criminally executed occupation of Iraq."

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