

Media inquiries: Véronique Rodman
202.862.4871 (vrodman@aei.org)
Orders: 800.343.4499
www.aei.org/book782

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Operation Iraqi Freedom: A Strategic Assessment By Thomas Donnelly

Why did the United States go to war in Iraq—and what does it seek to accomplish there?

In *Operation Iraqi Freedom: A Strategic Assessment* (July 23, 2004; AEI Press) Thomas Donnelly draws on firsthand research he conducted in postwar Iraq and analyzes the conventional and counterinsurgency campaigns waged by the U.S. military in the region, as well as their significance for the broader war on terrorism. Looking beyond the prewar debate in the UN Security Council and postwar recriminations over weapons of mass destruction, Donnelly traces the origins of the Iraq war to more than twenty-five years of unraveling political order in the Middle East and to President George W. Bush's strategic insight—in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks—that America will not be safe until the Middle East is free.

Among Donnelly's observations are:

- The Iraq campaign to topple Saddam Hussein, and the counterinsurgency to provide security for the political reconstruction of Iraq, are parts of the “war on terrorism.” Properly understood, this war is a struggle to build a decent, more democratic, less violent order throughout the “greater Middle East.”
- Military planning did not fully reflect the president's new strategy. The Pentagon's desire to fight a quick war ultimately undercut its ability to fight a decisive war. “The Bush administration has charted the correct strategy in Iraq,” Donnelly explains, “but has failed to match its military means to its political ends. . . . President Bush asked for a campaign to achieve regime change, but what he got was a campaign of regime removal.”
- The difficulties of the counterinsurgency campaign are directly related to the conduct of the invasion: the just-in-time plan magnified minor problems such as delays because of weather and the resistance by the Saddam *fedayeen* in the south of Iraq. Turkey's failure to permit a northern invasion of Iraq contributed to the challenge of projecting force beyond Baghdad and to the creation of the nefarious “Sunni Triangle.”
- Despite these problems, Donnelly believes that the counterinsurgency has been “remarkably successful.” The insurgency has only succeeded in driving lesser members of the coalition out of Iraq, and the United Nations has returned to contribute to the country's reconstruction. In addition, U.S. and Iraqi public opinion are holding firm.

Thomas Donnelly is a resident fellow specializing in defense and security policy at AEI. He has served as policy group director for the Committee on National Security (now the Committee on Armed Services) in the U.S. House of Representatives and has also been editor of *Army Times* and deputy editor of *Defense News*. He is the author of AEI's monthly *National Security Outlook*.

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1150 Seventeenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 202/862 5800