



Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq

By Larry Diamond

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America's leading expert on democracy delivers the first insider's account of the U.S. occupation of Iraq—a sobering and critical assessment of America's effort to implant democracy

In 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 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 now that Saddam Hussein's regime had been overthrown. He also thought he could do some good by putting his academic expertise to work in the real world. So in January 2004 he went to Iraq, and the next three months proved to be more of an education than he bargained for.

Diamond found himself part of one of the most audacious undertakings of our time. In *Squandered Victory* he shows 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. He brings us inside the Green Zone, into a world where ideals were often trumped by power politics and where U.S. officials routinely issued edicts that later had to be squared (at great cost) with Iraqi realities. His provocative and vivid account makes clear that Iraq—and by extension, the United States—will spend many years climbing its way out of the hole that was dug during the fourteen months of the American occupation.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

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*

From Publishers Weekly

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.

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From [Booklist](#)

Diamond, a professor and consultant who has studied and assisted in democracy-building initiatives in 20 nations in the past two decades, got a call from Condoleezza Rice in the fall of 2003 to advise the American occupation authorities in Iraq. From January through April 2004, he witnessed the fumbling efforts of U.S. foreign policy, from underestimating the force of Iraqi nationalism, to disregarding cultural influences on

local politics, to the clumsy handover to an interim government. He provides an inside look at the forces within the U.S. government (including interagency turf battles), among Iraqi exiles, and inside Iraq itself that have sadly added up to missed opportunities. In his final chapters, Diamond examines what has gone wrong in the effort to stabilize Iraq and promote democracy and offers a thoughtful look at the internal politics and the U.S. policy that will determine whether Iraq is ever able to achieve the desire of its people to develop a democracy that fits its history and culture. *Vanessa Bush*

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