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## A Time of Our Choosing: America's War in Iraq

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War, we should make preparations to “turn out the lights” in Brussels. Today, as we find ourselves involved in a global war on terrorism, the United States is faced with a similar quandary. Does NATO have the capacity, flexibility, and will to engage the international terrorist movement? Do our European allies view the threat of terrorism as we do, allowing for unity of action and willingness to use force? Do adversaries such as al-Qa’ida allow the alliance to consider the entire globe its ultimate area of responsibility? Can NATO, as Madeleine Albright asked, move to a more expansive concept of collective security? These questions may also require a decade to resolve, but Kaufman previews the kind of difficulties the alliance is likely to encounter en route and sheds some light on the ultimate answers.

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Purdum, Todd S. *A Time of Our Choosing: America's War in Iraq*. New York: Times Books, 2003. 319pp. \$25

The late *Washington Post* publisher Philip Graham once said that journalism is the first draft of history. Todd S. Purdum's *A Time of Our Choosing: America's War in Iraq*, is the first draft of the history of the U.S. occupation of Iraq. Months before the Department of Defense made the controversial decision to embed reporters within U.S. units, Purdum was in Iraq reporting the war.

The military's major criticism of the practice is that those assigned to the same unit throughout the campaign

would only have a “soda straw” view of the war and would thus miss the big picture. Others (primarily the media) were concerned that reporters would lose their objectivity once the shooting started. However, Purdum's professional work puts that argument to bed.

Early on, Purdum states that his task was to “draw the work of my colleagues into a single narrative.” In other words his job was to bring those “soda straws” together into a comprehensive and concise chronicle of the war. He certainly has the necessary credentials for the task—he has worked for the *New York Times* for over twenty-five years and is a former White House and diplomatic correspondent.

Although Purdum's narrative style is appealing, it is his ability to bring together all the different material that makes this book hard to put down. One reads of the Bush administration's intensive efforts to convince a skeptical world of its case for invasion and of the debate over UN Security Council Resolution 1441. Divisions deepened as Secretary of State Colin Powell and France's charismatic foreign minister Dominique de Villepin both courted the United Nations and public opinion. Meanwhile, military planning proceeded at the Pentagon and U.S. Central Command. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, expecting the Iraq army to implode, deployed a force much smaller than that of the nearly 550,000 troops in Operation DESERT STORM. Their plan was a test of a new American style of warfare that engaged large numbers of special operations forces and used highly accurate precision weapons and new technology in the form of unmanned aerial vehicles.

The book's primary focus is the relentless twenty-one-day fight to Baghdad by the Marines on the right flank and the Army on the left flank. Purdum excels in tying together all the resulting reporting. What emerges is a factual and very human account of the intense ground campaign. Included are events of 23 March, which saw the ambush of the 507th Maintenance Company and the devastating losses suffered by the 11th Attack Helicopter Regiment. The brief campaign also saw some excellent soldiering, such as the feint and race for the Karbala Gap and the "Thunder Run" armored thrusts into central Baghdad. Ever the concise chronicler, Purdum also discusses the northern front that was opened by the airdrop of a thousand paratroopers, and the operations conducted by the British in and around Basra. Purdum weaves all this together in such a way as to make this work an excellent read for military professionals and armchair strategists alike. It is a bit thin on the air and naval aspects of the war, due to the lack of threat posed by the Iraqi air force and navy and because the bulk of the embedded reporters accompanied ground units.

One of the successes of the program, however, was how the reporting brought out the human side of the war. Purdum discusses numerous examples of how the war directly affected such individuals as the U.S. Army officer who, after witnessing the results of an air strike, commented, "It's a helluva thing watching people die," or how an Iraqi man, his hands swollen from recent beatings by Iraqi security forces, emotionally thanked the Americans for saving him.

The book's main strength—its immediacy in telling the whole story of the

conflict—is also a major drawback. Toward his conclusion, Purdum recounts the events of July 2003 surrounding the deaths of Saddam Hussein's infamous sons, Uday and Qusay. One of the vexing questions remaining was the whereabouts of Saddam Hussein. The coalition would wonder about the fate of the former Iraqi leader for another five months. The book concludes before Saddam's capture in December.

Future historians and scholars will no doubt revisit this war and debate endlessly on the merits of preemptive self-defense, the effectiveness of the coalition of the willing, and whether the outcome achieved was the one desired. For now, however, Todd Purdum's *A Time of Our Choosing* will more than suffice as the first draft of history.

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Bush, Richard C. *At Cross Purposes: U.S.-Taiwan Relations since 1942*. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004. 320pp. \$27.95

For years, "one China" has meant two completely different Chinas masquerading as one country—the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan (a.k.a. the Republic of China [ROC]). The PRC is huge, with a population of 1.3 billion, while Taiwan has only twenty-two million people in comparison. There are other differences as well: Taiwan is rich, with a per capita income in 2003 of over \$23,000, versus the PRC's per capita \$5,000; Taiwan's 5 percent unemployment rate is half, its 1 percent poverty rate is a tenth, and its seventy-seven-year life expectancy is