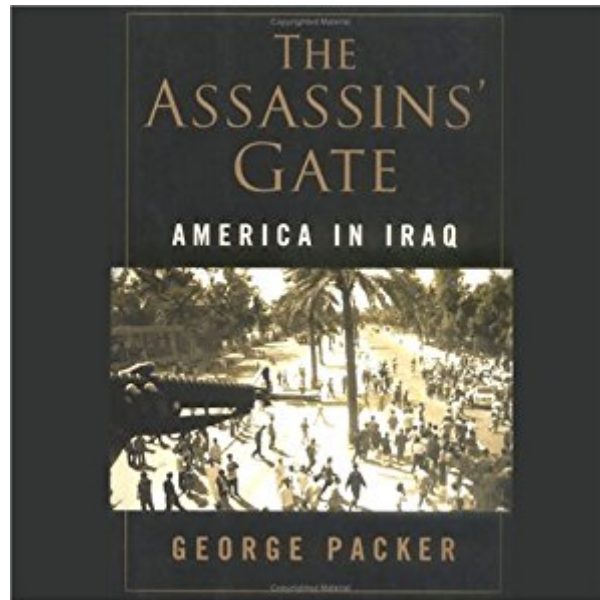




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# **The Assassins' Gate: America In Iraq**



## Synopsis

Named one of the Best Books of 2005 by The New York Times, The Washington Post Book World, The Boston Globe, The Chicago Tribune, The San Francisco Chronicle Book Review, The Los Angeles Times Book Review, The New York Times Book Review, USA Today, Time, and New York magazine. *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* recounts how the United States set about changing the history of the Middle East and became ensnared in a guerrilla war in Iraq. It brings to life the people and ideas that created the Bush administration's war policy and led America to the Assassins' Gate—the main point of entry into the American zone in Baghdad. *The Assassins' Gate* also describes the place of the war in American life: the ideological battles in Washington that led to chaos in Iraq, the ordeal of a fallen soldier's family, and the political culture of a country too bitterly polarized to realize such a vast and morally complex undertaking. George Packer's best-selling first-person narrative combines the scope of an epic history with the depth and intimacy of a novel, creating a masterful account of America's most controversial foreign venture since Vietnam. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Packer is one of those writers that, if I see his name on anything printed, I'll stop to read his thoughts. This book, which does a great job at taking the reader through all the stages that lead to the Iraq War and then through the mismanagement of this great achievement (to topple Saddam with very little bloodshed on both sides) did something very meaningful for me. I didn't support the

war when it took place and was dismayed to see what has happened to Iraq under, during, and after the American involvement. But I was fairly ignorant of the who and why and for what. If you'd have asked me in real time I would have most likely said that the war is (only) about oil and that president Bush is, to quote Packer, "not very curious about the world". Now I know better, the war was (also) about oil, but also about big ideas and the future of the world and simple faith that America can make great and positive things happen in our complex and bogged down world. I'm not sure much of that faith will be around in the next decades. In a very bleak and ashen way this book makes the reader believe once more that big ideas do actually matter, perhaps because of the time given in it to Kanan Makiya. Who remains a powerful figure throughout the years this book covers.

This is one of the better books on America's incursion into Iraq. It is also another in a string of books that are, as a whole, depressing in their analysis and conclusions. Whether one reads Rory Stewart's book, "Prince of the Marshes" (focusing on Iraq outside of Baghdad) or others that look specifically at the war from a Baghdad perspective (think, for example, of Rajiv Chandrasekaran's "Imperial Life in the Emerald City"), one gets a queasy feeling that this venture into Iraq was fated not to work out well. The title of the book is based on a gate in Baghdad, named by American troops as "The Assassins' Gate." It represented one entry point into the Green Zone, with people lining up there to seek jobs or protest or whatever. The book discusses the run up to the war, including the roles of people such as Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, Paul Wolfowitz, the Vice President, and so on. The story includes the role of exiles. Among the more well known, of course, is Ahmad Chalabi. The book also introduces us to another important exile who made the case for invasion--Kanan Makiya. Packer discusses, among other issues, planning for war. He concludes in a lugubrious assessment (page 147): "Like the President. Cheney maintained an almost mystical confidence in American military power and an utter incuriosity about the details of its human consequences." Postwar planning? As Packer summarizes the view of the Administration (page 147): ". . .there was no need to worry." Perhaps the song, "Don't worry, be happy" best describes this heinous lack of thinking things through. The narrative proceeds by exploring how the invasion became an occupation. One line tends to capture the descending trajectory after the invasion (Page 295): "By the end [of the attempted suppression of Muqtada al-Sadr], much of what the occupation had been trying to achieve in Iraq lay in ruins." Then, the insurgencies (in the plural) began, again not anticipated by the American leaders. The fact that insurgency (page 298) "caught the U. S. military by surprise" is a scandal. Many had projected that insurgency was inevitable. That the United States had not planned thoroughly for this is almost criminal negligence. The unwillingness of the

Administration to consider views counter to their own, in Packer's view, is a symptom of a very dangerous problem in decision-making--"groupthink." Here, people tend to agree with one another and not critically examine issues. He defines it as (page 319) "the uniform mind set that takes hold of any hermetic, hierarchical institution with strong leaders and a sense of common mission, where bad news is unwelcome and no one wants to be the one to ask the truly unsettling questions." In the end, Packer concludes that (page 448) "those in positions of highest responsibility showed a carelessness about human life that amounted to criminal negligence." This book, then, is one among a number of well researched and reported volumes that must make us question the competence of the American government and its leadership. It will be interesting to see how the history books judge this adventure in Iraq.

Serious look into Iraq...with particularly great insight into culture and conflict. Highly recommended

Here's how we got sold a war. Here's how we'll be sold the next one and why we are assailed by US haters who previously had no interest in fighting us.

This is a good book that does an excellent job explaining the history behind the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the intellectual underpinnings of that effort, and the combination of bad decisions and poor coordination that hampered the U.S. and its coalition throughout the first years of the occupation. It covers a great deal of material in a fairly readable style, although some of the early chapters on intellectual theory and history may discourage some readers. The book ends on somewhat of a negative note in early 2005 with an Afterword covering the start of the 2007 surge. I would be interested in Mr. Packer's assessment of the current situation in Iraq, which he would probably characterize as a limited success.

George Packer is a wonderful writer--very clear and concise in his story-telling. Really enjoyed the book. I loved his other book *The Unwinding*, equally as well, for a comprehensive report on what is happening to American society in the 21st century.

Intelligent, well researched, lively written, a masterpiece of contemporary history. A must read in order to understand the arrogance, ignorance and moral corruption of the Bush government (including Rumsfeld of course and a certain Bremer). This trio managed to make the world a very dangerous place for generations to come

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