A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for the War in Iraq, edited by Thomas Cushman

Lisa A. Leitz
Chapman University, leitz@chapman.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/peace_articles
Part of the American Politics Commons, Military Studies Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for the War in Iraq, edited by Thomas Cushman

Comments
This article was originally published in *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, volume 34, issue 2, in 2006.

Copyright
Transaction Publishers

This book review is available at Chapman University Digital Commons: http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/peace_articles/8
“serious” diseases. Although he intends to explain political successes and its unintended consequences, Weissberg never shows any causal connection between AIDS activism and federal funding. Instead, he focuses on the political power of gay voters, the “liberal” media, and a handful of actions by activists, none of which directly impact allocation of federal funding. His description of Congressional hearings on AIDS, which are obviously linked to federal funding allocations, actually undermine his case: Since both Republican and Democratic Congresses behaved the same, and since Congress sets the agenda and invites the speakers for the hearings, it appears that activism was wholly irrelevant to the political success.

Finally, Weissberg’s politically charged rhetoric implies that his portrayal of AIDS activists is ideologically motivated. Weissberg frequently writes about “marathon drug-induced orgies” (220) and “bacchanalian gay sex” (264). No doubt that liberation from decades of repression contributed to the spread of AIDS, but emphasizing sexual deviance seems tangential. Despite his insistence to the contrary (286), he argues that activists seeking government largess actually caused more people to contract AIDS (261), an untestable historical counterfactual. Elsewhere, his evaluation of the “liberal” media (219-226) ignores all scholarly research on the “hostile media effect;” his description of the power of the gay electorate (235-244) seems dubious given today’s political climate; and his assertion that Massachusetts, Georgia, New York, Texas, and California are “key presidential election states, and our election system rewards geographical concentration” (236) is false.

Throughout the book, Weissberg’s apparent political motivations distract from his otherwise invaluable challenge to social scientists. Regardless, Weissberg’s theoretical argument should be appreciated and enacted.


Reviewed by Lisa Leitz

University of California, Santa Barbara

The Iraq War has generated intense debate, often reflecting a deep divide between liberals and conservatives. Cushman’s edited volume goes beyond political rhetoric to explore the complexity and diversity of opinions on the war within the left. Left-leaning academics, politicians, public intellectuals, and journalists argue from a humanist perspective that the Iraq War was necessary and could have a positive outcome. Dispelling the myth that the only liberal position on the war in Iraq is opposition, this volume provides a compelling case for military responses to human rights abuses and terrorism.
The first two sections of the book outline the humanitarian argument for war. The authors suggest that the Iraq War is justified on the basis of protecting the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein’s oppressive government and shielding the world from dangerous weapons in the hands of a tyrannous regime. Using the works of Kant and Rawls to argue for a “just war,” these authors argue that Iraq required intervention. These chapters are the book’s strongest academic contributions. Although many of these authors admit the war has not gone as hoped, their significance lies in the application of these theories to current international crises.

The following three sections critique the anti-war left in the United States and Europe for ignoring the plight of the Iraqi people under Hussein. These authors suggest that liberals have lost sight of a commitment to fighting oppression, particularly in the Middle East. Countering anti-war liberals’ claims that they were on the side of the Iraqi people, the authors describe Iraqi support for the initial invasion and toppling of Hussein. Several of the authors, including a Nobel Peace Prize winner, report tyrannous regimes in their own countries as their impetus for supporting regime change in Iraq.

The book concludes with a section on “Liberal Statesmanship” that includes two speeches by Prime Minister Blair that eloquently argue for a humanitarian war in Iraq. By including them in this volume, Cushman furthers the case that the Left should not focus exclusively on the failings of President Bush’s administration when considering Iraq.

While many may find it strange that there could be a humanitarian argument for war, this book makes a coherent case in favor of using military force to save lives and extend freedoms. The volume also offers an important liberal critique of the United Nations and other international bodies’ ability to effectively respond to human rights abuses. However, Cushman falls short of presenting a strong research-based argument for this particular war. None of the chapters present new research, and many use flawed research to support their arguments. Additionally, while many authors undoubtedly felt ostracized by the Left, their anger and defensiveness often overcomes their arguments.

One of the book’s greatest strengths is that it does not make excuses for U.S. failures in Iraq. However, this is also one of the book’s greatest faults because most authors fail to adequately address how the flawed implementation of a “humanitarian” war undermines their argument. Although the authors suggest that an imperfect government, such as the United States, could enact a positive war, the violent two years since the writing and publication of these chapters begs the question of whether these same authors would argue similarly today.

Cushman contributes to the debate around the Iraq War. The book may be useful for classes on Iraq and international policy, and it could be paired with Diamond’s Squandered Victory, which provides a well researched description of more contemporary events in Iraq. Similarly, this volume would be interesting
paired with Rosen’s edited volume *The Right War?*, which explores the variety of conservative opinions on international policy. As both the complexities of the Iraq War and the continued violence in Darfur demonstrate, academics and citizens can benefit from a more nuanced debate about international responses to human rights violations; Cushman’s volume contributes to this nuance.


Reviewed by Van Coufoudakis
*Intercollege, Nicosia, Cyprus*

The author should be congratulated for bringing us a fascinating book of interest to a diverse audience. Even though the book is a biography of George, 2nd Earl Jellicoe, it will appeal to readers interested in military history, in war and post-war Greece, in the operations of the British Foreign Office, and in the inner workings of Cabinet government in the U.K. during the Cold War.

This is Ms. Windmill’s second book. Her career includes service in the military and, later, in the voluntary sector, in Whitehall and in the European Commission in Brussels. She is the daughter of Major Jim Almonds, a founder of the SAS in WWII. The book is based on extensive archival research in Britain, including the private papers and diaries of George, 2nd Earl Jellicoe. The subject of this book recently celebrated his 88th birthday. He is still active on Greek issues. In 1986, he established a book prize under the aegis of the Anglo-Hellenic League. The prize was named after his tutor and friend Sir Steven Runciman. He is also active on social issues such as the problem of AIDS.

The reader may find strange the title *A British Achilles* for a biography. A reading of the book will show how accurate that title is. George, 2nd Earl Jellicoe, was the sixth and last child of Admiral Sir John Jellicoe of WWI fame. He became Earl at the age of 17 following the death of his father. From his parents he learned the appreciation of good things in life, an appetite for hard work, candor, humility, and an ease of making friends. Even though born to privilege, he has been a driving force for the underprivileged and for reform. He is one of the last of his generation to combine military talent and a willingness to sacrifice himself for causes he believed in on or off the battlefield. In politics he was not driven by personal ambition but more by a sense of public service. As a statesman he was courageous in supporting controversial issues. He supported the rise of women in public life. His Achilles heel, however, was his personal dealings with women, and thus the title of this book. Because of his involvement with women he resigned from the Foreign Office in 1957 and from the post of