

The unique character of such conflicts poses tough questions for force planners: Are these levels of knowledge and language skills reasonable expectations for general purpose forces and a poorly resourced State Department? Is large-scale, expeditionary-force counterinsurgency even do-able? (The last undisputed US success was in the Philippines in 1902.) Can large-scale expeditionary forces avoid the mistakes of Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan? Can forces focused on high-intensity combat rapidly transition to fighting a counterinsurgency or vice versa?

On counterinsurgency, it would seem wise to get in early and light with well-trained, area-educated forces. In this technique of COIN Lite, the advise-and-assist force should focus on developing the host nation forces and turning operations over to them as quickly as possible. All of this, of course, is more easily typed than accomplished.

It is difficult to be completely optimistic on prospects for success in Afghanistan. In the end, the future of Afghanistan will be in the hands of the Afghan government and its people. We can provide assistance and advice, but Afghans will have to win the Afghan war, if the “w” word even applies to wars in the Hindu Kush. While this challenge is daunting, it pales in comparison to what Taliban leaders will have to accomplish to have a successful outcome.

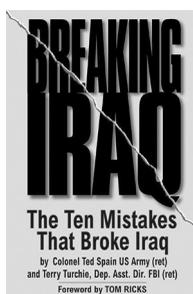
Lest he be accused of local-itis, the broad-minded Malkasian concludes that “thinking objectively about strategy demands a degree of attachment that the individual on the ground must foreswear—at least if he is to do his job. Emotional commitment, with all of its biases, is irreplaceable. Grand strategic calculations on costs and benefits are best left to far-off policy-makers” (page 274). Statesmen must figure out when, where, and on what scale to engage in this form of war among the people. No amount of skill in counterinsurgency techniques can remove the burden of strategic decisions from our nation’s leaders.

Breaking Iraq: The Ten Mistakes That Broke Iraq

By Ted Spain and Terry Turchie

Reviewed by LTC David G. Fivecoat, US Army, former Infantry Battalion Commander in Afghanistan, and veteran of three tours in Iraq

Since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, thousands of books have been published on the conflict. Regrettably, very few have been written by the hundreds of officers who led battalions and brigades in Mesopotamia for a year or more in combat. By my count, only six battalion commanders and one brigade commander—Chris Hughes of 2nd Battalion, 327 Infantry; Nate Sassman of 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry; Steve Russell of 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry; Pat Proctor of 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery; Jim Crider of 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry; Harry Tunnel of 1st Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment and Pete Mansoor of 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division—have written about their experiences. *Breaking Iraq: The Ten Mistakes That Broke Iraq*, by Colonel Ted Spain, US Army Retired, and Terry Turchie, adds to the short list by describing Colonel Spain’s experience leading the 18th Military Police (MP) Brigade in Baghdad, Iraq, from April 2003 to February 2004. Unlike other commander’s memoirs, *Breaking Iraq* attempts to go one step further by



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critiquing ten operational and strategic decisions that made the mission more challenging. Unfortunately, the book struggles to do both tasks well.

Utilizing the 18th MP Brigade's experience, the authors demonstrate the impact of ten operational and strategic decisions on the military policemen patrolling Baghdad's streets. Paraphrasing the authors, the ten mistakes were: the failure to deploy enough military police, to emphasize the establishment of law and order, and to rebuild the Iraqi police force; the lack of a clear definition on prisoners; the ill-defined roles between interrogators and military police; the decision to assign Brigadier General Janis Karpinski to run Abu Ghraib prison; the focus of General Ricardo Sanchez on combat operations; the ineffectiveness of the Coalition Provincial Authority; the unhelpful role of Bernie Kerik; and the utilization of allies who saw the mission differently than the United States. Ten years after the invasion, there is little debate that these decisions, and others, contributed to the insurgency's growth and additional challenges for all soldiers deployed there. While the strategic and operational critiques were conveyed better in James Fallows's *Blind Into Baghdad* or Tom Ricks's *Fiasco*, the authors' emphasis on military police and law and order is a new and insightful twist on the debate. Exploring the hypothetical, the authors contend that deploying more of the US Army's military police force might have prevented the rise of the insurgency. Had their book been published in 2005 rather than 2013, Spain and Turchie could have had a greater impact on the discussion of the factors responsible for the Iraqi insurgency's growth.

The year 2003 was a chaotic time in Iraq, as units did their best to understand the environment, learn counterinsurgency and nation-building skills, and craft an effective way ahead. The military's experiences in Panama, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan seemed to lack relevancy. Colonel Spain and the 18th MP Brigade's challenges of dealing with uncertainty, inadequate plans, the breakdown of Iraqi society, and reestablishing order will be familiar to any veteran who served in the early days of Iraq. The letters and after-action reviews from his officers and soldiers add to the narrative and are particularly insightful.

Colonel Spain pulls no punches as he shares his unique perspective and opinions on key leaders he encountered, especially Bernie Kerick, James Steele, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, Major General Geoffrey Miller, and then-Major General Martin Dempsey. The section on the Brigade's experience with Abu Ghraib prison and the turn over to Brigadier General Janis Karpinski provides another perspective on how the scourge of torture and prisoner abuse materialized inside the prison walls. Finally, the description of the events surrounding the death of Lieutenant Colonel Kim Orlando, Battalion Commander for the 716th MP Battalion, and one of the highest ranking soldiers killed in Iraq, sheds some light on the events of that confusing night in Karbala.

Regrettably, the book has several shortcomings: a need for an editor to clean up a reoccurring problem of words running "togetheronthepage," a lack of maps, and a requirement for better organization. A factual error involving Colonel Spain's encounter with the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) in 2003 (pages 70-71) raises questions about the accuracy of the memoirs. While the 2nd ACR was indeed in Iraq in 2003, it didn't field Stryker vehicles until 2005, and it didn't deploy

with Strykers until 2007. Also, the authors' additional research appears limited to a small number of senior leader memoirs and a few newspaper and magazine articles. Perhaps drawing from other works published in the intervening decade, like the US Army's excellent *On Point I* and *On Point II* or Mark DePue's *Patrolling Baghdad: A Military Police Company and the War in Iraq*, might have added more context to Spain's experience.

Throughout the book, the authors criticize every higher headquarters above the 18th Military Police Brigade, including Combined Joint Task Force-7, the Coalition Provincial Authority, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the President of the United States. Some of the criticism is warranted, but very few leaders in the chain of command seem to escape Colonel Spain's ire. Despite his rigid standards for others, there is little self-assessment of the successes or failures of the 18th MP Brigade. Spain's appraisal of the rebuilding of the Iraqi police force, the change in the security situation in Baghdad over the year, and the Brigade's role in the recovery of artifacts from the Baghdad museum, would have added to the book's impact. With ten years of perspective, some degree of introspection into the Brigade's accomplishments and shortcomings would have been welcomed.

Colonel Spain should be commended for possessing the courage to write *Breaking Iraq*, only the second memoir by a brigade commander who served in Iraq. It is a solid book for military policemen, individuals who served in Baghdad in 2003 and 2004, and future postwar planners. However, it adds little to the narrative on the poor operational and strategic choices that fueled the insurgency's growth in Iraq. Hopefully, Colonel Spain will write another book that tells the full story of the challenges he experienced leading the 18th MP Brigade.