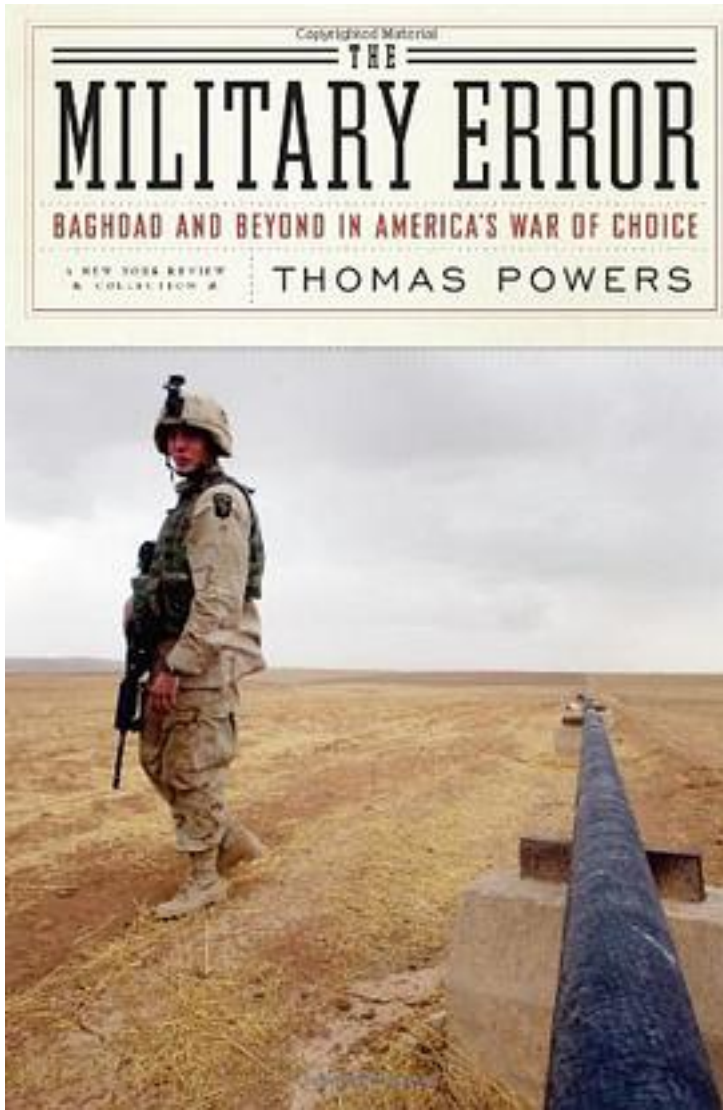


The Military Error



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Why did George W. Bush invade Iraq? What were the real motives, the overarching policy decisions that drove events from September 11 until the war began? To a large extent, we still don't know. But by now we do know in some detail, as Thomas Powers carefully explains in the essays collected here, how the administration made its case for war, using faulty intelligence to argue that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and posed a mounting threat to the Middle East. Once Iraq was occupied and the weapons turned out not to exist, the case for war seemed to disappear as well. Bit by bit the evidence—the documents suggesting that Iraq was trying to buy yellowcake uranium in Niger, the aluminum tubes that the United States claimed were meant for uranium enrichment, the Iraqi defector code-named Curveball who claimed Saddam had mobile biological weapons labs—has been exposed as unreliable, misinterpreted, “cherry-picked,” exaggerated, or just fake. But as faulty as the intelligence was, it was always only a pretext, a way of persuading Congress, America, and the world to support a war that President Bush had already decided to wage. The real question remains: Why did Bush insist on a war of choice, refusing to accept any solution short of an American occupation of Iraq? The answers Powers proposes to that question, which assess the Iraq invasion as an insistence on responding to political and cultural conflicts with military action, suggest an overarching failure of American policy in the region that, as long as it remains insufficiently understood and publicly debated, will make it difficult for any president to change course. No one is better prepared than Powers to evaluate the way the Bush administration used intelligence to make its case for war, used the CIA for political ends, and used arguments of secrecy to advance both its geopolitical agenda and its claims for executive power. But beyond the now-familiar stories of nonexistent WMDs, *The Military Error* proposes a new, deeper analysis of the error of using military force, which has succeeded primarily in generating opposition and increasing resistance to American aims. America went into Iraq full of bright hopes and confident ideas, but Powers argues that those ideas, based on the ability of force to solve problems, defeat opponents, and make friends, were largely illusions. Such illusions, as we learned at great cost in Vietnam, die hard, but we can make decisions about our future role in Iraq only by understanding the errors that got us embroiled there in the first place.

作者介绍:

目录:

[The Military Error_下载链接1](#)

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评论

[The Military Error_ 下载链接1](#)

书评

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