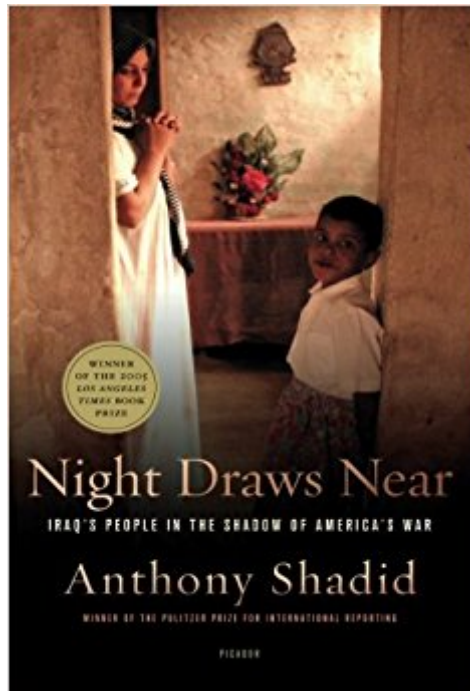


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Night Draws Near: Iraq's People In The Shadow Of America's War



Synopsis

Winner of the 2005 Los Angeles Times Book PrizeA Washington Post Book World Top Five Nonfiction Book of the YearA Seattle Times Top Ten Best Book of the YearA New York Times Notable Book of the YearIn 2003, The Washington Post's Anthony Shadid went to war in Iraq, but not as an embedded journalist. Born and raised in Oklahoma, of Lebanese descent, Shadid, a fluent Arabic speaker, has spent the last three years dividing his time between Washington, D.C., and Baghdad. The only journalist to win a Pulitzer Prize for his extraordinary coverage of Iraq, Shadid is also the only writer to describe the human story of ordinary Iraqis weathering the unexpected impact of America's invasion and occupation. Through the moving stories of individual Iraqis, Shadid shows how Saddam's downfall paved the way not just for hopes of democracy but also for the importation of jihad and the rise of a bloody insurgency. "A superb reporter's book," wrote Seymour Hersh; *Night Draws Near* is, according to Mark Danner, "essential."

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Customer Reviews

Most of the accounts of the Iraq War so far have been, to use the term the war made famous, embedded in one way or another: many officially so with American troops, most others limited--by mobility, interest, or understanding--to the American experience of the conflict. In *Night Draws Near*, Washington Post reporter Anthony Shadid writes about a side of the war that Americans have heard little about. His beat, for which he won a Pulitzer Prize in 2004, is the territory outside the barricaded, air-conditioned Green Zone: the Iraqi streets and, more often, the apartments and houses, darkened by blackouts and shaken by explosions, where most Iraqis wait out Saddam, the

invasion, and three nearly unbroken decades of war. Shadid is Lebanese American, born in Oklahoma, and he has a fluency in Arabic and an understanding of Arab culture that give him a rare access to and a great empathy for the people whose stories he tells. Beginning in the days leading up to the American invasion and closing with an epilogue on the January 2005 elections, he talks with Iraqis from a wide range of stations, from educated Baghdad professionals who look back on the country's golden days in the 1970s to a sullen, terrified group of Iraqi policemen in the Sunni Triangle, shunned as collaborators for taking jobs with the Americans to feed their families. (Perhaps his most telling and characteristic moment is when he trails behind an American patrol, recording the often hostile Iraqi comments that the soldiers themselves can't understand.) He takes the ground view and gives his witnesses the particularity they deserve, but the various voices share an exhaustion with a country that has seen nothing but war for 30 years and a frustration with a liberator that has not fulfilled its promises of prosperity and order. It's a despairing but eye-opening account, told with an understanding of the Iraqi people--hospitable, proud, and often desperate--that, were it more common, might have led to a different outcome than the one he describes. --Tom Nissley

Questions for Anthony Shadid Anthony Shadid won a 2004 Pulitzer Prize for his reporting on the lives of ordinary Iraqis during wartime. His new book, *Night Draws Near*, tells the story of the runup to the war, the invasion, and its uncertain aftermath through the Iraqi eyes. He took a few moments from a busy week reporting on the Sharm el-Sheik bombings to answer some questions about his book.

.com: Where are you now? What sort of mobility do you have when you are in Baghdad? Have you been able to get back in contact with the people you follow in the book?

Anthony Shadid: I'm in Cairo right now and heading for Beirut, where The Washington Post has its Middle East bureau. From there, I'll head back to Baghdad. Getting around that city has become the most difficult aspect of reporting there. In 2003, after the U.S. invasion, reporters had almost unlimited access. We traveled to the Syrian border, Falluja, Samarra, Mosul, all places that are extremely difficult, maybe impossible, to visit now. I do still visit the people that I wrote about in *Night Draws Near*. At this point, many of them have become friends. I'm reluctant to visit too often, for fear of bringing unwanted attention. But I manage to keep up with their lives and how they're doing, particularly Karima's family.

.com: You are a Lebanese American, born in Oklahoma, fluent in Arabic, and well-versed in Arab culture. What has that background allowed you to see and understand? To what extent do Iraqis whom you meet see you as American or as Arab?

Shadid: In Iraq, I think I was seen as a little of both. I was always a foreigner, but maybe a foreigner who shared a sense of history, a common background. When references to history were made, to culture and traditions, it was expected that I would understand what was being said. Sometimes it

was subtle, but I think my background probably helped foster a degree of trust that's so important to reporting. .com: What have Americans, both in Iraq and back home in the U.S., most misunderstood about Iraqis and the situation in their country? Shadid: My sense is that the biggest misunderstanding was perhaps a lack of appreciation for what preceded the invasion. I think some in the United States saw Iraq as a tabula rasa, a blank slate on which a new country would be built, a democracy that would serve as an example to a region mired in stagnation and authoritarianism. But a lot of what we saw after Saddam's fall was the consequence of what Iraq had already gone through. Not only Saddam, either. There was the war with Iran, one of the longest of the 20th century. There was a decade of sanctions, whose impact I think has always been underappreciated. There was a militarization of the society that made the culture of the gun and the logic of violence dominant in many regions of Iraq. The country that the United States inherited was brutalized, and the aftermath of that decades-long experience will probably define it far more than Saddam's fall, the insurgency, and the hardship that has followed. I guess I'm struck over the past years at how much Iraqis simply yearn for an ordinary life. Little has been ordinary in that country for the past 30 years. I always had the sense in conversations, especially in Baghdad, that people felt they were spectators to a play. They watched as actors read their lines, as the drama unfolded. There's still a sense of being in the audience today. .com: What do Iraqis most misunderstand about Americans? Shadid: I think it's less misunderstanding and more perspective. The sense of distrust of the United States is often powerful, and it colors much of what the Americans do in Iraq. As in much of the Arab world, the United States has inherited a reputation from past decades. Support for Israel, for authoritarian Arab regimes, for Saddam himself during the war with Iran in the 1980s has made many in Iraq and elsewhere suspicious of U.S. intentions. The refrain you hear so often is that the Americans are in Iraq for their own interests, and those interests include domination of the region, Iraq's oil, furthering Israel's interests, and so on. At another level, there's the very question of the U.S. presence. To some, the United States was a liberator. To others, it was an occupier. But to nearly all, it was the strongest actor in the country. That strength automatically creates a relationship of more powerful to less powerful. With a history of colonialism and repression, there was an acute sensitivity to that. American slights were seen as disrespectful, misunderstandings were seen as arrogance, and often, they both were read as the indignity of living under a power that is both alien and foreign. .com: Your book closes with an epilogue on the January 2005 elections. What did that moment represent from the Iraqi point of view? Have the hopes of that time persisted at all through the violence that has followed? Shadid: What struck me most during the election was the sense people in Baghdad had of staking a claim to their own destiny. On that day, Iraqis--not their

overlords, not foreigners--were the agents of change; they themselves were deciding their fate. Watching those streets that day, I realized that it was the first time since I had been in Iraq, through dictatorship, war, and occupation, that Iraqis themselves were claiming the right to make their voices heard. It spoke to the trait that I think perhaps best defines Iraq: a stubborn, sometimes breathtaking resilience that drives life forward. To be honest, I think the moment was somewhat short-lived. Since the fall of Saddam, Iraq has been locked in a cycle of moments of optimism, followed by long, depressing months of brutality and dejection. There have been turning points, and Iraqis have often greeted them with hope and optimism. Disillusionment has typically followed. Resilience persists, but not always hope, and it goes back to the idea I mentioned earlier: a sense of watching a play unfold, in which most Iraqis find themselves spectators to forces beyond their control. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Born in Oklahoma and fluent in Arabic, journalist Shadid (Legacy of the Prophet) has the gift of a caricature artist, capturing personality in a few deft lines. In this set of reportage-based profiles from Baghdad pre- and post-March 2003, we meet Amal, a 14-year-old girl who moves from faith to fear to gallows humor in her diary; a long-married couple who bicker affectionately (the husband says George Bush is his hero; the wife wants to talk only about the lack of electricity); a Muslim cleric in Sadr City who has "the kind of swagger that a pistol on each hip brings." The portraits are intimate, often set in people's homes, and are rendered with such kindness they fall just short of sentimentality. Yet Shadid does not shy from the ugliness of violence, rendering the swollen corpse of a child left in the sun and the disarray of a bombed house, its front gate "peeled back like a can." The book, which moves among scenes and characters like a picaresque novel, is not only a pleasure to read but a welcome source of information. Shadid offers just enough history and context to orient the reader, and he includes the kinds of details--adages, prayers, lyrics from pop songs--that make a place come alive. In the end, Baghdad is the character he mourns most. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book is a fascinating tour de force of the lives of ordinary Iraqis before and after the disastrous invasion. The author was fluent in Arabic and lived in Baghdad where he closely followed the lives of a well-chosen swath of Iraqis before and after the 2003 Iraq war. Most of the stories are highly personal and heartbreaking. However reliving, moment by moment, the failure of the occupation

from the perspective of Iraqis was fascinating. If you want to learn how to mismanage an occupation and unleash carnage across the middle east, read this book, which should be required reading in any military college.

This book is powerful--and distressing. The Arab-American author had spent time as a journalist in Iraq before and after the invasion by Americans and British. His fluency in the people's own language allowed him to speak with people and get first-hand experience of what Iraqis were thinking. The primary lesson seems to be: The United States had a shot at making the successful overthrow of Saddam work, but could not pull it off. Lack of understanding of the Iraqi cultures, inability to get electricity back on line, committing acts against the Iraqis that inflamed passion against the troops all contributed to a deteriorating situation. Today, the United States is desperate for an exit strategy, partially as a result of a near complete misunderstanding of Iraq and its people. What makes this book unique in comparison with others that have explored what is happening "on the ground" (e.g., *Cobra II*, *Squandered Victory*, and *The Assassins' Gate*) is the intimate portrait of everyday Iraqis by an author fluent in their language and conversant with their culture. If only the American government had had the sense to bother trying to understand that culture beforehand rather than assuming that "shock and awe" would lead to being greeted as "liberators". . . .

Anthony Shahid, is a brilliant interviewer and writer. His Lebanese, Arabic background gives him the tools, the knowledge of Arabic language and customs. He also has researched the back ground of Iraq's history in detail. His books shows the horrors of this war from the people's side...and the mistakes which have been made by not understanding the differences in religion and culture. In short a war which could not be won after it turned out to be an occupation not a liberation. We learn how fast and furious Religious differences erupt in bloodshed and civil wars. For the first time one gets to know the native men and women in their home, educated, civilized one, or just humble everyday humanity, all caught in a nightmare of unexpected and undeserved violence. Shahid's conversations with them are most interesting...at the end a bit redundant. The book is thought provoking. Very worth reading

This is easily the best book I can recommend to anyone on the Iraq war. Anthony Shadid, a third generation Arab American, who speaks fluent Arabic was on the ground before the Iraq war and lived through its phases all the way to the full blown insurgency. Shadid demonstrates an excellent understanding of the people and the culture, this understanding makes his analysis very valuable

indeed. A very important point that Shadid makes is the desire of the people for justice over democracy. Shadid's understanding of Iraqi society makes his analysis on the insurgency, its roots and its nature very convincing. The analysis of the power structure with the Shiite religious leadership and the diverging loyalties as well as the Iranian versus Arab orientation of the leadership is very well explained. It is remarkable how ill informed much of the media in the US referring to the Mahdi Army, the Sader militia, as Iranian influenced when Shadid explains clearly their roots being as populist & nationalist counter movement to the Iranian dominated Shiite religion leadership. Through countless daily interactions with Iraqis from all classes, all sects and all political views Shadid offers tremendous insight on the factors that shaped the views of the Iraqis and how these changed over time as the country sunk deeper into a depressing war. Shadid equally well covered the American troops, their perception of their role and of the Iraqis around them. Can't say enough about this book except I wish it becomes mandatory reading for political and military readers. Shadid's Pulitzer Prize for his reporting of the war is very well deserved!

Parts of this book featured in the Washington Post during Shadid's coverage in Baghdad in March/April 2003. I enjoyed reading them back then inasmuch as I enjoy reading them in his book now. Shadid is no doubt a talented writer who captures the mood of the Iraqi population before, during and after the American war in 2003. Shadid has a keen eye for detail and turns every bit of his coverage into a real life image. Whether it is a woman who decided to cope with the war by sending letters to her friends and then using these drafts as a chronicle or whether it is a doctor who advises the US to do the job fast in Iraq or otherwise the popular mood will shift against it, the book is full of accounts that tell the story of a population who saw the Iraqi tyrant fall while the nation plunged into an unknown fate. Those who are familiar with books from reporters of the Middle East might see resemblance between this book and Tom Friedman's classic *From Beirut to Jerusalem*. However, I would say that Shadid tends to present more stories from the people and less intelligentia talk and analysis if compared to Friedman's. Buy this book, it's certainly money well spent.

Dry book

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