WLA Contributing Editor **BRIAN HANLEY** surveys
three books that bear on the current war

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The Iraq War

by John Keegan
New York: Knopf, 2004

JOHN KEEGAN'S *IRAQ WAR* has received more than its share of unfavorable reviews. The chief complaints are as follows. First, Keegan tried to write the history of a war that was, many months after the book was published in March 2004, still being fought—a fact that supposedly undermines the credibility of his conclusions. A second criticism is that the material in *The Iraq War* is largely unoriginal, being drawn either from existing histories or, in the case of the battle commentary, from Keegan's own journalism published at regular intervals in *The Daily Telegraph*. These judgments are not without merit—Keegan should have anticipated such criticisms and neutralized them in a prefatory note—but they cannot be allowed to stand as the last word on what really is a fine book.

To begin with, *The Iraq War* is a traditional military history; Keegan's focus is on operational warfare placed in a suitable historical and political context. The first half of the book discusses Iraqi history and also offers a biographical survey of Saddam Hussein. The information here is essential to understanding the nature of the recent war as well as the reasons why it needed to be fought in the first place. Iraq—or, more accurately, the place currently named so—is possessed of an ancient past, in fact it is the cradle of civilization. But as Keegan demonstrates modernity has not been altogether kind to the country, rich though it may be in oil reserves and blessed with a strategically significant location.

Political turmoil has afflicted Iraq at least since the beginning of the twentieth century. Had Saddam Hussein never been born the various cultural and political influences of the last fifty years would almost certainly have brought forth

someone just like him. "Saddam Hussein, a poor and uneducated provincial youth," Keegan observes, "came to exercise absolute power in Iraq by a mixture of violence and political intrigue." Keegan goes on to argue that Hussein's "rise followed a novel and unusual path," but students of European history will see parallels between Hussein's biography and those of Adolph Hitler and Josef Stalin—emotionally cold men, satanically egotistical, who were skilled at exploiting conventional pieties and political arrangements to serve their boundless ambition. In fact, Keegan correctly points out that Saddam Hussein is far more a product of European history—he admired Hitler and emulated Stalin—than he is of Arabian culture. War between the United States and a despot bent on becoming a regional strongman was thus inevitable.

In the second half of the book Keegan concerns himself with major combat operations—and rightly so. There would be little point in waiting for Iraq to mature, politically and economically, before writing a history of the war that deposed Saddam—just as it would have been foolish to refrain from writing histories of the Korean conflict until the armistice was replaced by a settled peace. Keegan's narration of operational warfare is first-rate. Writing in the tradition of the best historians, Keegan has mastered the art of synthesis. One could comb through his journalistic pieces in *The Daily Telegraph* and not draw out the underlying themes that are given full treatment in *The Iraq War*.

An example of Keegan's ability to convey a great deal in a brief space can be found in his description of the battle for Nasiriyah.

> Careful planning failed, in circumstances fortunately unique during the Iraq War, to deliver the desired result. There was to be an unforeseen battle for Nasiriyah and it was to take a messy and costly form, seized on gleefully by anti-American elements in the Western media to demonstrate that the war was not going the coalition's way.

Here Keegan does justice not only to the coalition forces but also to the academic discipline of history. That no plan ever survives first contact with the enemy is a cliché that was probably well-worn before von Moltke set it to paper in his history of the Franco-Prussian War (1890), but apparently few journalists nowadays are familiar with the idea. As Keegan suggests here, the chaos that accompanied the battle for Nasiriyah was a rare thing. Combat operations in Iraq were carried out with unprecedented efficiency and resourcefulness—a tribute to the warfighters certainly but also to the planners as well. Perhaps more importantly, this passage illustrates that Keegan in *The Iraq War* has done future historians a big favor.

When writing about a campaign from the past, scholars look at a variety of sources—amongst the more valuable are official war records, memoirs, and contemporary news reports. Skepticism is in order as one examines these kinds of documents: official records written at the time may be incomplete, first-hand accounts are by their nature shaped by partiality or narrowness of perspective, and as Keegan points out journalism in our time—though noble exceptions can be found—is warped by ignorance of history and a thinly veiled contempt for aggressive employment of American military power. The historian writing fifty years from now who reads Keegan will gain a balanced and reasonably complete picture of *Operation Iraqi Freedom* that no other contemporary source is likely to offer.

Keegan's book is valuable also for its commentary on the political situation in Europe. Keegan persuasively argues that the anti-war posturing in Europe can be tied to the misbegotten belief that the balance of power among states can be maintained without armies—and that the unilateral use of force is disreputable. Member states of the European Union—nations formerly part of the Soviet Union excepted—have come to believe that international disputes can be managed by supranational regulations and treaties. Force is no longer needed, so the current political wisdom in Europe would have us believe. Organizations such as the European Union, the Hague Tribunal, and the European Court of Human Rights aim to "influence and eventually control the behaviour of states not by traditional means of resorting to force as a last resort," Keegan asserts, "but by supplanting force by rational procedures, exercised through supranational bureaucracy and supranational legal systems and institutions." The trouble with this point of view, as Keegan's book proves, is that it encourages and rewards tyranny.

The Iraq War is, in truth, not quite as good as many of Keegan's other books: *The Face of Battle, A History of Warfare*, and *Six Armies at Normandy* come immediately to mind. Even so, *The Iraq War* is a solid piece of scholarship when measured against traditional standards of impartiality, perceptiveness, and lucidity. That Keegan managed to finish this book within a few months after major combat operations ceased is an apt testament to his gifts as a military historian and as an astute observer of contemporary politics and strategy.

BRIAN HANLEY

Our Oldest Enemy: A History of America's Disastrous Relationship with France

by John J. Miller & Mark Molesky

New York: Doubleday, 2004

NEWS COVERAGE OF THE IRAQ WAR often remarks on the unprecedented antagonism between the United States and France. Take for instance the following analysis by reporter Craig W. Smith in a story published in *The New York Times*, 18 November 2004. "French-American relations, rarely easy, have lingered near historic lows since Mr. Chirac's government fought bitterly last year to avert the war," Smith declares in his report on President Chirac's recent claim that the Iraq War has worsened the threat of terrorism. Mr. Chirac's "unwillingness to reach out to the United States as the Bush administration heads into a second term is certain to keep those relations at a low ebb for now." The assumption here and in much of the recent reporting on diplomatic relations between the United States and France is that the two countries have always enjoyed an essentially amicable relationship—until President George W. Bush threw it all away by ordering the invasion of Iraq.

John J. Miller and Mark Molesky thoroughly and engagingly discredit this point of view. *Our Oldest Enemy* argues that the French have always viewed the United States either as an impediment to empire or as a potential stooge in their centuries-long rivalry with England. In fact, disagreements between President Bush and President Chirac over the Iraq War—far from marking an "historical low" in Franco-American relations—are actually mild and of minor significance when compared with earlier disputes.

The book is organized by historical period and covers the colonial years through the immediate aftermath of the Iraq War. There are no surprises in the chapters that deal with current issues. French diplomatic objections to American policy in Iraq were based not on philosophical reservations about war, or blind faith in the United Nations, but on a national self-interest that identified the United States as an economic and political obstruction to French geo-political ambitions.

One myth exploded in *Our Oldest Enemy* is that France came to the aid of the American colonists on behalf of high-minded motives: devotion to liberty, eagerness to see America become a nation so as to further a mutually profitable trade relation, and so on. Miller and Molesky show that France was an enemy long before it became an ally. France began several aggressive wars against British colonists during the first half of the eighteenth century, the aim being to diminish British influence in North America. These conflicts did not feature set-piece battles fought by regular forces and governed by chivalric codes of conduct. Quite the opposite. Partisan Indian tribes cooperated with the French in perpetrating one massacre of American colonists after another. In February 1704, for example, nearly two hundred settlers at Deerfield, Massachusetts, were murdered and nearly as many carried away—to be used later, if they survived a forced march to Canada (few did), as barter for French prisoners held by the British. Miller and Molesky rightly argue that incidents of this kind engendered a distinct American identity more than fifty years before the passage of the Stamp Act. Fighting a common enemy who preferred terror to negotiation or peaceful co-existence went much further to carve out differences between the American and the British experience than any taxation rate, or arguments about political philosophy, ever could.

Our Oldest Enemy also offers a fresh perspective on the reasons why France allied itself with the colonists in the Revolutionary War. The French cared not a wit for ideals of liberty or America's aspirations for nationhood—much as they might have wanted the Americans and posterity to believe otherwise. What the French saw in American discontent was a way to injure the British: economically, morally, and politically. French foreign minister Charles Vegennes "remained focused on finding ways to stymie the British," Miller and Molesky point out, "and if that meant temporarily aiding an upstart little republic, then so be it." Even so, the French would not intervene until the Americans proved that they could defeat the British, and such help as they provided was of varying quality. While French aid "was a tremendous help to the rebellious colonists, especially at Yorktown, much of it was also grudging, sporadic, and undercut by the incompetence and vanity of French commanders."

For a century after the Revolutionary War French diplomacy toward the United States was every bit as devious and self-serving as its dealings with colonial America might have foretold. France had no use at all for American professions of

neutrality. Much of French diplomacy was aimed at cajoling, tricking, or coercing the United States into becoming a French ally in that country's wars for European supremacy. In 1793 the French—once again at war with the British—hoped to use North America as a naval staging base. The French minister to the United States, Edmond-Charles Genet, did not scruple to "arm privateers and encourage U.S. citizens to join French expeditions against British shipping"—a subversive action that in itself might have justified a war between the United States and France. During the American Civil War, France supported the Confederacy—short of provoking a war with Washington, D.C.—as part of a grand strategy. By weakening the Union and by installing a French puppet government in Mexico, Napoleon III hoped to restrict American influence south of the Rio Grande and thus establish an imperialistic foothold in the western hemisphere.

Contrary to what one is likely to read in current news reports, the diplomatic wrangling surrounding the Iraq War does not reflect a worrisome departure from what is falsely assumed to be America's long-standing friendship with France. Rather, such jousting is merely the newest limb from a very old tree, as *Our Oldest Enemy* illustrates so well.

BRIAN HANLEY

The West & the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat

by Roger Scruton

Delaware: ISI, 2002

THIS BOOK DESERVES TO BE PLACED on professional reading lists under the category, "Understanding the Enemy." Scruton's work joins Bernard Lewis's recent volume, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*, and *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience*, by John Lewis Gaddis, as indispensable sources for strategic planners, specialists in information operations, and Eagle Scout students of political science. Scruton looks at the underlying political and cultural antagonism between Islamic and Western societies and explains what needs to be done to counter the spread of radical Islamism and the terrorism it breeds.

Scruton begins with a discussion of the political philosophy that obtains in the West and which is exemplified by the United States: ordered liberty based on individual rights, free trade, and laws that are binding upon all members of the state. This social contract restrains state power so as to leave society—which is a citizenry united by a common language, territory, historical memory, customs, and a collective responsibility for self-defense—unmolested by political pressures. Scruton rightly calls attention to the debt we owe ancient Rome—the laws of which were "secular, unconcerned with the individual's religious well-being," and devised to govern people "regardless of their credal differences; and its decisions were not validated by tracing them to some sacred source, but by autonomous principles of judicial reasoning and explicit statement of law." The legacy of Roman law was its

emphasis on membership in a secular community that was separate from, but not hostile toward, the private loyalties to family, creed, and so on.

The West & the Rest also illuminates the vital contribution of Christianity to Western political and social culture. The rise of Christendom instilled in European culture an element of conciliation that, even today, distinguishes Western politics from its Islamic counterpart. One "must recognize that the idea of forgiveness, symbolized in the Cross, distinguishes the Christian from the Muslim inheritance," Scruton asserts. "There is no coherent reading of the Christian message that does not make forgiveness of enemies into a central item of the creed." Christianity, moreover, makes provision for self-defense even as it expels vengeance as an acceptable means of effecting justice. "Christ suffered the most violent death, not in order to recommend defenselessness, but in order to redeem mankind," Scruton declares.

> The right of defense stems from your obligations to others. You are obliged to protect those whom destiny has placed in your care. A political leader who turns not his own cheek but ours makes himself party to the next attack. Too often this has happened. But by pursuing the attacker and bringing him, however violently, to justice, the politician serves the cause of peace, and also that of forgiveness, of which justice is the instrument.

The moral outlook discussed here justifies violence only in the service of a moral good: maintaining a just peace. But this frame of mind is alien to the Muslim political understanding; and certainly it is the polar opposite of the strain of Islamic thought that endorses the annihilation of non-believers.

In the book's third chapter, "Holy Law," Scruton avers that Islam derives its appeal from the clarity, comprehensiveness, and relative simplicity of the Koran—which puts it at odds with the ascendancy of Western political, economic, legal, religious, and social norms. Unlike Western legal and social systems, Islamic society is largely devoid of influences outside of the Koran. Little is said in the Koran about political institutions; theology dominates every aspect of life—complementary or distinct loyalties, such as thrive in the West, are not tolerated. Law "is the will of God, and sovereignty is legitimate only in so far as it upholds God's will and is authorized through it." The upshot of this is that Muslim cultures lack the kind of political sophistication that has fostered the material progress, social freedom, and international influence of the West, and herein lies the sources of Islamic hatred, of which terrorism is the most prominent expression.

The globalization of Western culture generates resentment most especially amongst Islamic immigrants in the West, who emigrate to Europe and the United States seeking the benefits of modernity even as they despise the society that generates them. The animosity of Muslims in the West festers and metastasizes because the nations in which they reside don't expect them to assimilate into the dominant culture. In fact, the institutions that once transformed immigrants into citizens—schools, legal and civil courts, governmental departments, the entertainment and artistic communities—positively discourage assimilation. The source of this cultural self-loathing is a point of view commonly referred to as "political correctness." Political correctness is nothing more than a secular creed, the central premise of which is a virulent contempt for the West. Political correctness is characterized by an aversion to recognizing, let alone celebrating, the cultural achievements of the West and a corresponding eagerness to dwell on, exaggerate, and fabricate its failings.

Making matters worse are the bureaucratic agencies whose success must come at the expense of the nation-state. The idea of the nation-state is gradually but inevitably yielding to supranational organizations—the European Union, the World Trade Organization, transnational corporations, the International Criminal Court—a development that undermines the obligations, as well as the rights, that attend national citizenship. The Islamic immigrant is thus under no pressure to embrace Western culture—though every day he is surrounded by a way of life that is defiantly, aggressively contemptuous of the piety he sees as necessary to eternal salvation.

> The attacks on America were a response to the world's most successful attempt at nation-building, which projects its power, its freedom, and its detritus so effectively around the globe. All the principal actors in the atrocities of September 11 had resided in Europe, and received there both training and indoctrination through local cells of al-Qa'eda. The plot to attack America was not hatched in any Muslim country, but on the continent where the West began.

Radical Islamists are not strangers to Western ways. Many—Mohammed Atta is an example—were educated in Western universities, while others became wealthy from the sale of the oil that feeds Western prosperity.

Scruton doesn't mention the Global War on Terror, though there is nothing in his book suggesting that he does not endorse military action. What Scruton calls for is a revival of traditional Western culture as the most effective means of extirpating the philosophical underpinnings that inspire the Islamic terrorist. Western policies

on immigration, multi-cultural education, unbridled free trade, and a handful of others are in immediate need of re-evaluation. Subduing the Islamic fanatic by force of arms is vitally important, but to defeat him in a decisive way "requires a credible alternative to the absolutes with which he conjures." Scruton concludes that only a substantive reassertion of Western self-respect can bring about victory over Islamic terrorism.