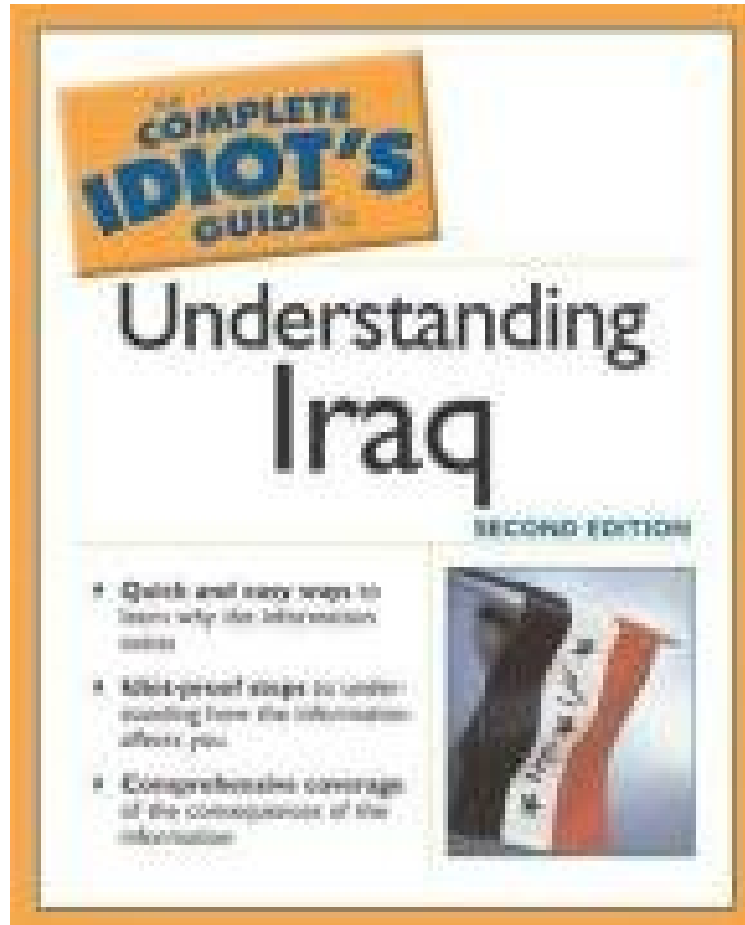


The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Iraq, 2nd Edition

Joseph Tragert

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Joseph Tragert : The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Iraq, 2nd Edition before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Iraq, 2nd Edition:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Dated, but with some solid HistoryBy Herbert L CalhounNot updated since the latest Gulf War, (this edition went to press in 2003), this version of the "Idiot's Guide" lacks a clear analysis of the more recent Cheney/Bush intervention into Iraq. Its main benefit is as a compact review of overall Iraqi history and its more recent political history up to the second Gulf war.The approach, repeated in other "Idiot's Guides," is a fail-proof one. It repeats the same materials three times: first in outline form, then in sketchy overview detail form, and then in full blown "flesh-out" detail. By the third round, the reader begins to think he really "gets it."The only concern I had throughout the various -- more and more progressive iterations of Iraqi history -- is that a great deal of the "history" turns out to be the "history of various religious faiths," which is known to be a careless mixture of fact, fiction and religious mythology. At the very least, these authors should have warned us whenever the narrative was

about to slip more into religious fantasy than historically based fact. Sorting this all out of course was immensely difficult and thus should not have been left as an exercise for the reader. Understandably, there were many periods when no other alternatives existed. Nevertheless, even in those cases, a warning about the "softness" of the facts would have been very helpful. This is especially important due to the fact that religions, more often than not were changing with each of the many conquering regimes. Of special importance to me was the true nature of the Shia/Sunni split, which occurred during the 7th Century over who was to be considered the proper heir or designated religious authority to Mohammad. The Shia, which are only 10% of the Moslem religion (but a majority in both Iraq and Iran) believe that Ali, Mohammad's brother, to be Mohammad's proper heir. Sunnis, on the other hand, believe it to be, the caliph. An important factoid packed with revealing history is that Saladin was a Kurd, hailing from Saddam Hussein's own hometown of Tikrit. It was Saladin, the reader may recall, who routed the Christians (led by Richard the Lion-Hearted) and took over Jerusalem during the Third Crusade. In addition to routing the Christians, Saladin is best known for the compassion he showed the "defeated Christians." History gives just the opposite picture when the Christians had earlier ejected the Moslems. By all accounts during the Christian rout of Moslems, one chronicler has it that "blood was knee-deep in the streets of Jerusalem," as the Christians were best known for killing everything that moved: men women, children and animals. Iraq has a long arc of history: from the beginning of civilization to the current Gulf War. From pre-history up to about 600ce, it was the Sumarians who ruled the land and culture of Mesopotamia, the acknowledged "cradle of civilization." It was the Akkadians who seized the region from the Sumerians, and in the centuries before Christ, the Greeks and Persians invaded the region. There was considerable "back-and-forth" between them before the Persians emerged as the winner and Baghdad and the Arabs emerged around the 7th century as the predominate power. With the Arabs defeat of the Persians, Baghdad emerged as the preeminent cultural city of the region, the one we we have come to recognize today. Second in size and cultural influence only to Constantinople, the period of Arab rule of Baghdad was a flowering of culture, as the Arabs were the reigning scholars: introduced libraries and bureaucratic administration, Algebra, civil engineering, teaching hospitals, etc. Internecine conflict was to be the undoing of the brief period of flourishing of Arab culture. In 1258, the Mongol hordes swept down from the North, followed by the Turks. Until the modern era, when the Brits took over, Iraq had become a battleground between the Turks and the Persians. After WW-I, things moved fairly rapidly with the discovery of oil, the establishment of the state of Israel, and continued conflict between Sunni and Shia. After WW-II, British callousness and continued diplomatic duplicity along with the establishment of Israel were responsible for the rise of pan-Arabism. Antagonism towards Israel has also been responsible for the shape of present antagonism and the current animosity Arabs have towards the West in the Middle East. Most Arabs perceive the U.S. to be Israel's chief benefactor and the underwriter of Israel's military might. If you buy the authors' outline, then the story is loosely coherent. However, at the end, I had the haunting feeling that a lot was missing. Three stars. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent! I Now Understand Iraq Better! By Lynn Ellingwood This book is a very comprehensive description of Iraq. Iraq shouldn't be a country and probably will never be from my current understanding. The British formed the country for their own convenience and to control the Middle East so they could keep oil flowing. When they lost strength, the United States jumped in, again to keep oil flowing. The Americans have copied just about every mistake the British ever made, we just haven't pulled out yet. What a mess and I don't think anyone can get around the fact that the Kurds need a country. Very interesting book and it gave me room to understand and think! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great for the total beginner By not a fan I read the 2002 edition from the library which was obviously before the invasion and subsequent capture of Saddam Hussein. I found this a great book for a total novice. It explains the progress of events in Iraq in very simple terms and takes time to repeat the main points of interest many times, which I found useful in such a complex topic. Just because it presents the concepts in a simple manner does not mean it is simplistic - scholars of the subject might find it basic but I think even most well educated westerners would learn a lot from this text. The most important point for me was that it was very readable. My only criticism was that there were no way near enough maps and those that were in the book were pretty badly drawn and without detail. I would have liked many more maps, especially showing location of troops during the various battles, relationship of the arab states, location of shiite/sunni strongholds, arab/persian, kurdish strongholds. Overall well worth the effort of reading. I actually enjoyed the fact that this was written before the US invasion since it gave a great before the fact perspective on the situation and wasn't tainted by our the current sorry situation we all find ourselves in.

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About the Author Joseph Tragert is currently the principal and co-founder of the Massachusetts-based North Ridge Associates, an international consulting firm. Prior to this, he was a senior associate at KPMG Peat Marwick, where he specialized in Islamic relations and developed the company's body of knowledge on the politics, economics, and the history of Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries.