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Of Course the Iraq War Would End in Iran's Empowerment

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Hawks like Jennifer Rubin are blaming President Obama for increasing Iran's geopolitical influence, but they ought to blame themselves

On Jennifer Rubin's page at The Washington Post, the Iraq war supporter wrote [a post](#) today that she [teased on Twitter](#) by writing, "WHO KNEW Iran would be emboldened and allies freaked on US withdrawal from Iraq? Oh, everyone on the right..." Her item proceeds to argue that "Secretary of State Hillary Clinton can issue idle threats, warning Iran not to 'miscalculate' our devotion to the region, but perhaps it is the Obama team that has once again miscalculated. This was precisely the reaction that critics of the complete troop withdrawal anticipated."

If only these "critics of withdrawal" had anticipated the inevitability of Iran's ascendance before they called for the invasion of Iraq. As Malou Innocent [patiently explains](#), "No amount of prewar planning or 'boots on the ground' could have prevented the Islamic Republic's political push into a neighboring country with a 60 percent Shiite majority. The removal of Saddam Hussein as the principal strategic counterweight to Iran paved the way for the expansion of Iranian influence in Iraq, and has enabled Tehran to back, with far greater impunity, its political allies in Baghdad. Even before 9/11, Iran possessed a budding nuclear program, the region's largest population, an expansive ballistic-missile arsenal, and significant influence over the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah. By adding to that list enhanced political influence in Iraq, Iran can be somewhat more assertive geopolitically in the region, further limiting US policy options."

The Cato white paper [The Iraq War and Iranian Power](#) goes into greater detail about the actual predictive ability of neoconservative Iraq war proponents. "Prior to the Iraq War, traditional balance-of-power realists predicted that Iran would act to undermine America's position in occupied Iraq and be the principal geo-strategic beneficiary from Iraq's removal as a regional counterweight," it states. "Neo-conservatives predicted the Iranian regime would probably collapse and, even if it did not, Tehran would have no choice but to accept US dominance. But as a result of Washington's policy blunders, Iran is now a substantially strengthened actor."

It continues:

Bush administration officials, and neo-conservative scholars outside the administration, were so focused on removing Saddam Hussein from power that they largely overlooked the wider geopolitical ramifications of his removal. Not only did they under-appreciate

the influence of Iran, they also believed Tehran would acquiesce to American dominance in the region. Days prior to the invasion of Iraq, William Kristol, editor of the Weekly Standard, argued that the mere threat of war was rousing speculation of political reform within neighbouring Iran, and American Enterprise Institute scholar Michael Ledeen proposed that the United States help Iranian citizens by freeing them from the repression of Tehran's tyrannical regime.

Neo-conservatives were confident that America's overwhelming military prowess and liberal-democratic ethos would compel Iran's leaders to cower. It was a critical miscalculation. A handful of prescient experts warned that Iran would fill the void left by the overthrow of Iraq's Ba'athist regime. Middle East historian Phebe Marr argued that 'such a collapse of authority could trigger interference from neighbors. Turkey could intervene ... [and] Iran ... could follow suit.' Michael O'Hanlon, a scholar at the Brookings Institution who reluctantly supported the war, nevertheless believed 'such chaos [following Saddam's ouster] could entice Iran into pursuing territorial gains in Iraq's oil-rich and Shi'ite south'. And Texas A&M University Professor Christopher Layne argued that Iran would possibly become irredentist: 'Iran will seek predominant political influence (if not outright annexation) of southern Iraq'. But by late 2002, the alleged threat of Iraq's nuclear-, biological- and chemical-weapons programmes was so conflated with national-security considerations that dissenting viewpoints were marginalised. The U.S. was always going to leave Iraq eventually, and Iran was always going to exert more influence on the region as a result. What writers like Rubin fail to understand is that, if the war you advocate requires for its success the indefinite deployment of U.S. troops, you've advocated a failed war. The American people have never and will never agree to a perpetual war of choice that costs billions of dollars each year and results in the ongoing death of American troops -- especially if its proponents suggest before it begins that it will be a cakewalk costing \$50 to \$60 billion. That's hardly a difficult lesson, but neoconservatives still haven't learned it.