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***Choosing War:
The Decision to Invade Iraq and Its Aftermath***

The Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) announces the release of Occasional Paper 5: ***Choosing War: The Decision to Invade Iraq and Its Aftermath***, by Dr. Joseph J. Collins.

This study examines how the United States chose to go to war in Iraq, how its decisionmaking process functioned, and what can be done to improve that process. The central finding of this study is that U.S. efforts in Iraq were hobbled by a set of faulty assumptions, a flawed planning effort, and a continuing inability to create security conditions in Iraq that could have fostered meaningful advances in stabilization, reconstruction, and governance. With the best of intentions, the United States toppled a vile, dangerous regime but has been unable to replace it with a stable entity. Even allowing for progress under the Surge, the study insists that mistakes in the Iraq operation cry out in the mid- to long-term for improvements in the U.S. decisionmaking and policy execution systems.

The study recommends the development of a national planning charter, improving the qualifications of national security planners, streamlining policy execution in the field, improving military education, strengthening the Department of State and USAID, and reviewing the tangled legal authorities for complex contingencies. The study ends with a plea to improve alliance relations and to exercise caution in deciding to go to war.

The author of this study, Professor Joseph Collins, serves on the faculty of the National War College. A retired Army colonel, Dr. Collins served as the first Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability Operations from 2001 to 2004. He was active in the initial planning for the humanitarian aspects of Operation Iraqi Freedom and all phases of the war in Afghanistan. Dr. Collins' analysis is among the case studies contributing to the work of the Project on National Security Reform. The opinions and conclusions expressed in this study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any other agency of the U.S. government.

The National Defense University, home to both the War College and INSS, is the nation's premier center for joint professional military education. The University is an accredited graduate-level institution that provides an educational and research environment to prepare future leaders of the armed forces and other civilian agencies for high-level policy, command, and staff responsibilities. NDU organizes several major symposia each year focusing on regional or functional security issues. These symposia draw a diverse audience of scholars, practitioners, media, and the attentive public from the U.S. and abroad and are a major element of NDU's outreach activities.

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