

Tough Sell: Fighting the Media War in Iraq

Tom Basile

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Potomac Books (May 1, 2017)

Hardcover \$32.95 (320pp)

978-1-61234-900-8

This book masterfully blends military history with politics and media studies.

Tom Basile's *Tough Sell* is an ode to the many men and women who worked for the Coalition Provisional Authority during the early days of the Iraq War. The book also offers a critique of media and of the ways the George W. Bush administration failed to communicate its positions.

Throughout *Tough Sell*, Basile consistently portrays himself as an American everyman—a New Yorker and a Catholic. However, Basile also reminds readers of his exceptional position. From attending a meeting of the Economic Club (which Basile underplays as “one of the oldest and most venerable institutions for the wealthy and successful”) to discussing his previous position as a member of the EPA, Basile is clearly a Washington insider.

However privileged Basile may have been, his heartbreak and frustration come through clearly. *Tough Sell* chronicles the heady days between the spring of 2003 and the winter of 2004, when Baghdad's Green Zone became dangerous and the mission to rebuild Iraq went sideways. Basile, along with his fellow civilians ensconced in Baghdad, routinely faced mortar and rocket attacks and kidnapping threats.

From Basile's perspective, the threat posed by American media was even worse. *Tough Sell* is replete with unflattering portrayals of media figures and networks. In Basile's rendering, most journalists either couldn't be bothered to leave Baghdad or refused to believe any story that did not conform to their political (see: liberal, antiwar) worldviews.

It is important to recognize that Basile was a true believer—a man who supported Bush, the Iraq War, and “furthering democratic reforms” in order to bridge the “freedom deficiency” in the Middle East.

Basile's politics are sure to turn off some readers. That being said, *Tough Sell* provides not only an excellent discussion about the nature of media during wartime, but also information about the war that is often ignored. The building of new schools, an active press, infrastructure, a pluralistic government, and a thriving private economy that dwarfed the Saddam-era equivalent were all accomplished by the CPA in 2003.

Tough Sell is an excellent addition to the growing corpus of literature on the Iraq War. This book masterfully blends military history with politics and media studies, thus representing the truly multifaceted nature of warfare in the twenty-first century.

BENJAMIN WELTON (May/June 2017)

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