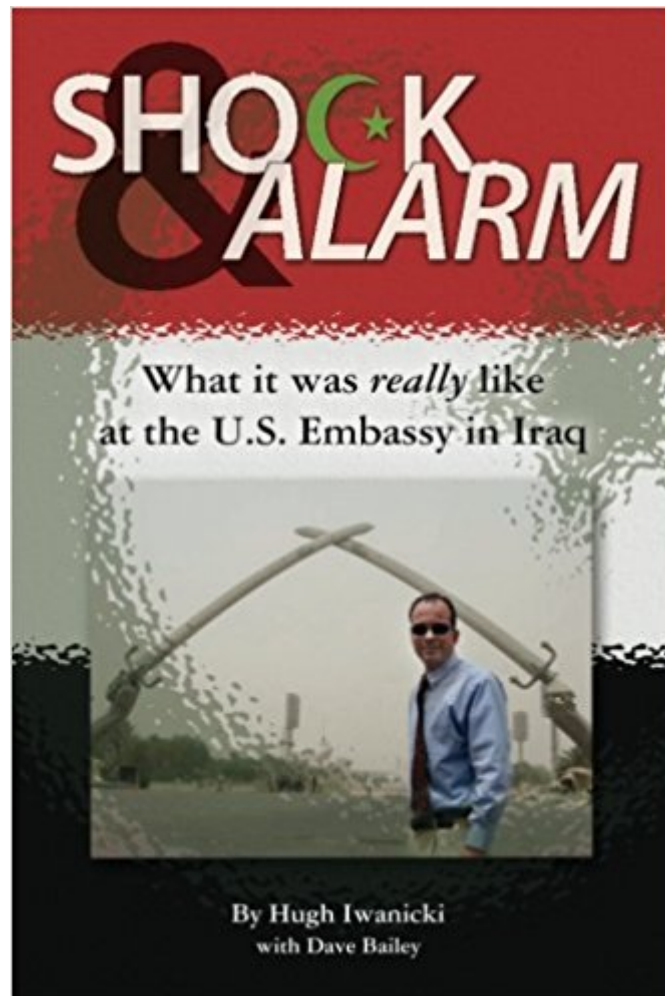




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# Shock And Alarm: What It Was Really Like At The U.S. Embassy In Iraq



## Synopsis

**Shock and Alarm:** What it was really like at the US Embassy in Iraq is a riveting behind-the-scenes exposé of daily life at the Baghdad Diplomatic Compound in 2009, providing an insightful look at the culture clash taking place between the Islamic world and the West. This is Hugh Iwanicki's personal story of the eleven months he served as a performance auditor for the Office of the Inspector General at the Embassy. His journal of unforgettable experiences juxtapose the mundane with the bizarre, moving from discussions of constitutional law with Sharia attorneys to several near-death experiences, as well as the strange bedfellow's tale of a regional embassy housed in a Shiite-owned "Temporary Marriage Honeymoon Hotel." For comic relief, there are also the misadventures of the Blackwater contractors, Marines, diplomats, and plumbers who inhabited the Green Zone and made the best of the Coalition embassy parties, where the women, though far outnumbered, were in full control of the men. And then there's the story of how the Embassy got an unlimited supply of free beer, thanks to a Sharia law against alcohol. Iwanicki's startling autobiographical account brings to light the human, the brutal, and the bewildering sides of life among the Iraqis, Jordanians, and Kuwaitis, as well as the mind-bending ironies and paradoxes encountered by the jumbled crew that lived within the confines known as the US Embassy in Iraq. **Shock and Alarm** pulls back the curtain on the bunker mentality of the prison, where a grinding monotony was pierced by near-daily rocket attacks and week-long sand-storms. It also reflects on Iwanicki's first-hand experiences of the Middle East's Islamic culture, framing disturbing questions about America's engagement in Iraq and with Islam itself. While readers of all backgrounds and interests will enjoy the fish-out-of-water humor of Iwanicki's early adventures in Iraq, little will prepare them for his climactic awakening to a horror hiding in plain sight. Iwanicki's story ends with a silent scream, as he discovers that the menace he thought he had escaped by returning to the US was awaiting him at home. **Shock and Alarm** is an urgent and heartfelt memoir that provides a much needed wake-up call to all Americans.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dave Bailey worked for many years at IBM, leaving in 1992 to start a non-profit called Education Transfer that organized events for schools similar to those he had arranged as a volunteer. By 2001 he was serving several schools on Long Island - schools with families that were devastated by the 9/11 attack. Bailey felt a compelling need to understand the ideology behind the attack and, after retiring in 2010, he devotes his time to helping others comprehend the forces within Islam that threaten the West.

Initiated in deception, executed with precision, mortgaged on our grandchildren's future, terminated in quiet shame, the second gulf war symbolizes a divorce of secular America from engagement in the world and with its own Christian heritage.[1] The legacy of this war that began in March 2003 lives on today in the drone war on terrorists, the growing sophistication of ISIS militants, and the flood of refugees into Europe. When the second gulf war ended in December 2011, no commentators argued that U.S. political objectives had been met in Iraq or anywhere else in the region. In the middle of this muddle, Hugh Iwanicki and Dave Bailey's book, *Shock and Alarm*, chronicles Hugh's experience as a contract certified public accountant (CPA) working as an auditor in the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad over the period from October 2008 through September 2009. This corresponds to the late Bush Administration and early Obama Administration when U.S. policy was clearly in motion from a focus on fighting terrorism to a focus on other "primarily domestic" concerns. This backdrop is important both in understanding the remoteness that Iwanicki felt living in the Embassy and the lack of official U.S. interest in the plight of Iraqis in general and Iraqi Christians in particular. Iwanicki and Bailey essentially written two books. The first book is a travel journal that describes Hugh's experience of life and death in a war-weary U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. The second book is an interpretation of Islam from the perspective of an American Christian. Let me turn to each topic in turn. Travel Journal. The purpose of a travel journal to give the reader a fly-on-wall view of life in a different time and place. In this parallel universe within the walls of the Green Zone, office training included defensive driving, how

to avoid kidnapping, learning to duck and cover, and basic firearms competency (3-6).

Hugh's raw materials for this portion of the book come from a logbook that he kept and dispatches that he wrote home from his assignment (i). For the uninitiated, a log book is a notebook with dates, times, who is in the room, and what gets said. For auditors, a logbook is an absolute necessity—the stakes are high; careers are on the line; details matter. A logbook may be the only record of important decisions when policies change, mistakes are made, and blame is being assigned. In this case, Hugh's logbook offered details for composing some interesting dispatches; lonely nights trapped in the embassy-cum-bunker with nothing better to do that offered him time to compose these accounts. But this is not a book for fellow CPAs to cherish and analyze. Hugh likes to travel, to have a good time, and to obsess over details—like any good CPA. Hugh's trip to the Dead Sea is a case in point. He writes: "The Dead Sea is famous for being one of the saltiest lakes on the planet. What makes it so salty is the fact that it lies at the lowest point on the Earth's surface, 1,388 below sea level. Water flows in through the Jordan River and other tributaries, but it doesn't flow out. All it can do is evaporate, leaving its dissolved salt and other minerals behind. Water from the Dead Sea has a salinity of 33%, about 8.6 times the saltiness of ocean water." (59) He advises visitors not to shave because the salt gets into your pores and creates the pain of "a swarm of angry bees." (59) Ouch! With that happy thought, let's turn to Hugh's experience of Islam. Interpretation of Islam. Hugh's experience in Baghdad could not have come at a lower point in U.S. relations with Iraq. While he was there, the U.S. presidency was in transition, America was tired of war, and the Embassy in Baghdad was being hit daily with insurgent mortar fire. Think you have had a bad day at the office? If he had then reported a warm and fuzzy experience with dealing with Iraqi Muslims, his credibility would be non-existent. Against this backdrop, Hugh's experience as a Christian working in a Muslim country highlights some daunting fault lines in Christian-Muslim relations. One of these fault lines has an ancient source: the holy book of Islam, the Quran. The Quran is confusing and its interpretation is often controversial—especially in verses where the Prophet Mohammed reverses (abrogates) himself. [2] Abrogation itself is a sensitive topic because in Jewish tradition (an influence on Islam) a prophet whose prophecy proves false is to be ignored. [3] Confusion about what the Quran says leads some to see Islam as a religion of peace and others to see Islam as inspiring terrorism—both interpretations that can be made from the Quran itself (156-161). Another fault line arises because increasing secularization of western nations has led to a secular/religious divide that has no counterpart in Islam. One example is that Western ideals of freedom of religion allow Muslims to practice their faith without interference in Western countries.

Meanwhile, Muslim countries adhere formerly (or informally) to Sharia law which does not allow Christians living in Islamic nations that same level of freedom. Christian evangelism, for example, is often a capital offense in Islamic countries. These differences in legal treatment often enjoy widespread and emotional support among individual Muslims (135-136). Secular leaders in the West eager to court Muslim favor and to gain access to resources, particularly oil, downplay these differences and work hard to keep such issues out of the media limelight. Another example is that secular incursions into the Middle East, such as the Iraq War, often translate directly into religious persecution of Christian minorities. In a worldview not distinguishing secular and religious realms, military defeat is felt as religious defeat. Not surprisingly, reactions often include shame and defensiveness so drawing attention to Christian persecution only intensifies the emotional response and the incentive to persecute further (167-171). Knowing the highly emotive character of this persecution, again, secular leaders in the West work hard to keep this issue out of mainstream media and often cloak it as "ethnic violence" when it does bubble up. Interestingly, these same leaders are quick to criticize Muslims openly when political correctness issues arise. Clearly, many fault lines arise in Christian-Muslim relations "too many to address in a short review. Hugh Iwanicki[4] and Dave Bailey's book, *Shock and Alarm*, reads well. As a former federal worker who had also worked abroad and contemplated joining the team in Baghdad during this period, I could feel my feet in his shoes as he recounted his work, daily activities, and social interactions. Other prospective contractors considering a Middle Eastern assignment and tourists contemplating a visit will find this book an interesting and helpful guide.[1] The United States fought two wars with Iraq under Saddam Hussein. The first war was named Operation Desert Storm (January 17 through February 28, 1991; (...)) where coalition forces liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation but stopped short of removing Saddam from power. The second war (March 20 through May 1, 2003; (...)) known mostly as the Iraq invasion involved an invasion of Iraq and removing Saddam Hussein from power. While these objectives were quickly met, little or no preparation for the post-invasion administration was done and, while the U.S. was setting up a de-facto government, political chaos and an insurgency war developed. A formal military withdrawal took place on December 18, 2011.[2] Recall the saga of Indian born novelist (Ahmad) Salman Rushdie (himself a Muslim) who wrote a book in 1988 called *The Satanic Verses*. His novel highlights verses appear in the Quran which the Prophet Mohammed later abrogated (reversed). Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a fatwa (death warrant) calling for Rushdie's assassination in 1989 and Rushdie went into hiding for a number of years (...).[3] "How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken? When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to

pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:21-22 ESV) While this verse may seem to speak clearly to abrogation, a biblical example of abrogation is found in 2 Samuel 7 when the Prophet Nathan reverses himself in giving guidance to King David about construction of the first temple in Jerusalem.[4] (...)

In **SHOCK AND ALARM**, author Hugh Iwanicki relates his experience as a civilian working as an auditor in the U.S. embassy in Iraq during the first Gulf War. Iwanicki and his co-author, David Bailey brought this story to life by weaving together, and expanding upon, correspondence and journal entries from the eleven months Iwanicki spent in Iraq. Obviously, life in a war zone can be dangerous, even if you aren't there as a soldier. Bailey and Iwanicki capture the action and relate many details that say quite a lot about the part of the world he was living in. For example, he reveals that anyone traveling through the Middle East with a passport that carries a stamp from Israel is virtually guaranteed to be singled out and inconvenienced, if not harassed, by the customs or security officials of Israel's neighbors. Readers also learn about the problems faced by Iraqi Christians and Iwanicki's encounters with his Christian brethren in Iraq. **SHOCK AND ALARM** is well-written, with descriptive language that brings you right into the action and the places Iwanicki visits. It's not a battlefield book, but there's plenty of action, humor and emotion in it to make **SHOCK AND ALARM** a satisfying read.

As I read this book, it took me to a dangerous yet wonderful place filled with history. The author takes you on a tour of parts of the middle east where danger lurks and rockets fly. The plight of the Christians in the middle east is disturbing and the links provided at the end of the book, not only shows you the extensive research, but allows you to explore sources and expand on information and situations that the author had found himself in. In all of the news stories since the beginning of the war, the situations our troops and civilian contractors found themselves in were sparsely reported. This book gives you insight into the true human element of being a civilian in a war zone. There are situations and characters mentioned in the book that makes you want to know more about their background and makes you say "where are they now"? In the end, I wanted more and felt that a follow up is possible to find out how the friends the author met while on his tour have fared since he left.

On the surface, **Shock and Alarm** provides an insider's view of life inside a US Embassy as well as

a U.S. tourist's view of several Middle Eastern countries. The book is written in such a way so that you feel that you are right beside the author, experiencing what he is experiencing and seeing the world from his perspective. If you've ever wondered what it would be like to travel to the Middle East, this book will give you an idea of what to expect. I got the impression that the author went to Iraq with an open mind, seeking to understand Muslim people and the Muslim world better. In his writing, his treatment of the individual Muslims that he met while overseas is respectful and fair. He shares his positive experiences as well as his negative ones. In the book, the author compares the cultural reality of his experiences with what moderate Muslims, academics and media in the U.S. have been telling us, that Islam is a religion of peace. The author did a lot of research by reading from the Quran daily and learning about how it is organized and how it is interpreted by Islamic scholars. At the end of the book, the author shares his conclusions on how he reconciled his experience in the Middle East with what the Quran says about how devout Muslims should live out their faith. If you have been trying to make sense of what you have been seeing on the news with what you have heard about the Quran, this book is a good starting point.

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