

Revolution Day – The Human Story of the Battle for Iraq by Rageh Omaar.
Viking Penguin 2004.

If you believe, as I do, that the invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein is one of the events that will define the 21st century, or even if you do not but followed the story with interest, Revolution Day is an essential book.

Rageh Omaar, the BBC's Somali-born Africa correspondent, was the first BBC journalist allowed back into Iraq in 1997, the Corporation having been banned from the country for the previous 5 years. He covered Iraq until 2003, seeing events through those momentous years of weapons inspections, international sanctions and final invasion and the overthrow of the regime.

What makes Revolution Day so special, and so thought-provoking, is not the events with which we are all relatively familiar, though they are fascinating enough, but the human dimension which is clearly the story that Omaar was the most keen to tell.

During his years in Iraq, Rageh Omaar got to know some Iraqis very well, members of the Saddam regime, ordinary Iraqi citizens, interpreters and official security service 'minders'. As a journalist, and an Arabic speaker, he was often able to subvert the grip of the regime on journalists and discover the impact of conditions on ordinary Iraqis. He writes movingly of the people he knew, their decency, honour and hospitality, and searingly of the impact of international sanctions, the actions of the regime, and the arrival of US forces in Baghdad.

Many more books will be written about Iraq, before during and after Saddam, but this one, because of its honesty, the quality of its writing, and the very human story that it tells, is one that every one interested in the Middle East must read.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh