

Cobra II - The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq
by Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor.
Atlantic Books 2006.

Cobra II is, in my view, the best book about the disastrous US-British adventure in Iraq yet published. Michael Gordon, chief military correspondent with the New York Times, and his co-author Lieut. General Bernard Trainor, combine an almost unparalleled degree of military knowledge and expertise with unique levels of access to many of the major protagonists in the current Iraqi debacle.

Cobra II tells the story of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 from the very beginning, devoting the time that other such studies have to neo-conservative philosophy and its influence to a blow by blow account of the build up to the invasion in every aspect. All of the strengths, and the many weaknesses, of the Bush White House and the Rumsfeld Pentagon are on display, and the authors are adept at keeping their personal views to themselves until the very end of the book.

What is most deeply shocking is the demonstration of arrogance, particularly on the part of Donald Rumsfeld, combined with unforgivable ignorance about what precisely the invasion was going to achieve, how it was going to achieve it, and what it was going to do when it was successful. No amount of clever computer war games and projections can disguise the fact that the war was prosecuted on the back of deficient or non-existent intelligence, a complete lack of historical interest in the country and its peoples, and most particularly, an almost criminal lack of humanitarian planning for the aftermath of military activity and the coalition's responsibilities to the Iraqis under its control.

Cobra II demonstrates all too clearly not only why the invasion and occupation of Iraq have been a disaster on every level but indicate that the aftermath may well blight the future of the West for decades and possibly centuries to come, as well as being the last great action of imperial America.

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