

COBRA II

THE INSIDE STORY
OF THE INVASION AND
OCCUPATION OF IRAQ

MICHAEL R. GORDON AND
GENERAL BERNARD E. TRAINOR

Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq

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Written by the chief military correspondent of the *New York Times* and a prominent retired Marine general, this is the definitive account of the invasion of Iraq. A stunning work of investigative journalism, *Cobra II* describes in riveting detail how the American rush to Baghdad provided the opportunity for the virulent insurgency that followed. As Gordon and Trainor show, the brutal aftermath was not inevitable and was a surprise to the generals on both sides. Based on access to unseen documents and exclusive interviews with the men and women at the heart of the war, *Cobra II* provides firsthand accounts of the fighting on the ground and the high-level planning behind the scenes. Now with a new afterword that addresses what transpired after the fateful events of the summer of 2003, this is a peerless re-creation and analysis of the central event of our times.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq Details

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From Reader Review Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq for online ebook

Brian says

This is the very disturbing story of how a handful of politicos can lead a nation into a war in which the rationale for going to war was completely flawed. The same people who were so gung ho for going to war also gave almost no thought to what was going to happen after the goal of toppling Saddam Hussein was achieved. This should be a cautionary tale, but our American leaders never seem to learn from past mistakes.

This should be required reading for all presidential administrations on how NOT to go war. This truly is a tale of how absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Robert Snow says

This is a good book on the lead up and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It speaks to the mechanics, the personalities and the politics of war in the 21st Century. Today as we look back to the invasion of Iraq almost everyone holds the opinion that there were no WMD in Iraq or that Saddam had dismantled his WMD programs years earlier. But, 2003 was a very different time with the loss of almost 3000 civilians on 9/11 still fresh in the minds of Washington both political parties were going to protect the Homeland from real or imaginary threats. With that mind set the slippery slope into war was paved and aided by poor human intelligence on the ground in Iraq, along with a cast of characters mainly former Iraqis who would tell American intelligence anything to help overthrow Saddam. So, the stage was set for Cobra II the invasion of Iraq and with it the fog of war. It would be nice to point to one or two reasons what went wrong with the Iraq invasion, but it wasn't just two things, it was a host of things and what I see first is the mind set or maybe group think. I hold the opinion that Donald Rumsfeld is the smartest man in any room... unfortunately so does he! When building a winning team it is important to build it around a good leader who knows that he or she needs smarter people than themselves to create the winning team. Rumsfeld is an ideas man looking for; faster, better and more mobile striking forces, he is a great peacetime SecDef, not a war SecDef. Generals if left to their own will buy every military weapons system possible to protect the nation, they need to be reined in and constantly reminded that there is only so much money. In war SecDef needs to be surrounded by the very best Generals giving the advice not receiving it as these Generals did from Rumsfeld. From reading this book it is plain to me that the Generals were almost constantly browbeat or prodded by someone (Rumsfeld) who only wanted to hear his strategy for victory. This was the big problem and all others cascaded from this, but there was also another big problem that could have nipped this whole problem in the bud... America's intelligence agency's. Human intel and eye's on the ground are almost non-existent or when there is, it is unreliable. America depends too much on satellites and not enough on eye's on the ground. We listened to too many Iraqi nationals from different factions who would say anything to oust Saddam.

This book is a good primer on the Iraq War and points out its failures, but one must always remember the mindset in 2003 just months after 9/11. The idea of an WMD was all too real in Saddam's hands, all today's politicians will tell you they were either fooled or questioned Saddam's potential when it came to WMD. That's all crap! They all lined up and fell into rank and file and voted to go to war. Today they are some of this nations greatest Monday morning Quarterbacks when it comes to Iraq. The one line that kept going through my head as I read Cobra II and it was mentioned... "If you break it you own it" the famous quote by Colin Powell. Well, we broke it all right and we just walked away, this walk away has and will cause us more heartache and headache in the future than we can imagine. Cobra II good book but the last chapter on

Iraq has yet to be written... for we are in a generational war, something we have never faced nor understand.

Adam Cox says

A very in-depth look at the Iraq War invasion. Looks at it from all sides; political, military, social. My only qualms is it's a really long book and I was more interested in the battles not the psychology of the main characters in the US and Iraq army.

Gabe Boenecke says

Finished as a part of Command and Staff

Joshua Bowen says

Via audiobook.

And incredible analysis with such detail, and an amazing story! It is written with a noticeable bias, but it is hard to argue or even disagree with.

The story covers macro and micro, spanning all 3 levels of war. It makes for a complete analysis and recount, but sometimes hard to keep track of everything going on.

Loved this book. Highly recommend to understand US in Iraq.

Will says

remarkable indictment of high-level Bush admin officials who planned poorly and reacted slowly, compounding the invasion's inevitable insurgency. particularly critical of Rumsfeld, Franks and the CIA.

Outoftunetoo says

Outdated now, but also very informative if you weren't paying attention the first time.

Kenny says

Cobra II illustrates the many failings of the military campaign in Iraq, and reveals that they could possibly have been avoided with just a little more planning. Who'd have thought? It's an excellent read though if you want all the specifics on just how things went wrong, and how badly.

Steve says

First and last several chapters cover politics and planning -- the latter mostly lacking unless supplied by Don Rumsfeld. In between is an extended account of the conflict and US forces moved north to Baghdad and beyond.

Pages 82-83 and 501: Had there been any WMD, Rumsfeld's plan to make war with a light mobile force would have resulted in the most feared counter-measure: the spread of WMD to terrorists before enough troops could find and control the WMD and prevent it falling into the hands of Osama. In this respect, the plan didn't make any sense!

Pages 138-139: The Zinni postwar plan is buried by Rumsfeld.

Page 144: Postwar planning office is so underfunded that the planners beg and raid a trade fair for office supplies.

Page 159: Rumsfeld rejects expertise of State Department types regarding postwar planning, arguing that "fresh ideas and new blood were needed."

Page 441: "The Iraqis [taken prisoner:] had a hard time understanding something," Williams recalled. "Shoshana is Panamanian. Edgar is Hispanic. Joe is Philippine, and Patrick (Miller) is from Kansas. The Iraqis could not conceive how we could all have been in the same army and not fight one another. One Iraqi said to me, 'You no fighting each other? Why?'"

Page 461: "Rumsfeld just ground Franks down. . . The nature of Rumsfeld is that you just get tired of arguing with him." – Tom White, Secretary of the Army

Pages 462-463: "On April 24, troops from the 82nd Airborne took up positions in a schoolhouse in Fallujah, the first time that U.S. forces had installed themselves in the Sunni city. . . . On a wall outside the mayor's building next to the Army's makeshift compound protesters hung a sign in English that proclaimed, 'U.S. killers, we'll kick you out.'" . . . Two days later, Bush flew to the deck of the Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier. Standing before a banner announcing 'Mission Accomplished,' the president said that the major combat phase of the war had been completed . . . but events on the ground were sending the opposite message."

Page 463: "The Pentagon was determined to avoid open-ended military commitments like those in Bosnia and Kosovo, and to withdraw the vast majority of the American forces in three to four months. The State Department had mismanaged the postwar efforts in the Balkans, and Afghanistan was headed the same way. With the Defense Department now in charge of Iraq after the fall of Saddam things would run more smoothly."

Page 475: "Bremer was not an expert on the Middle East and in his years as a diplomat had never been posted in the region, but in Rumsfeld's Pentagon that was considered a plus."

Page 477: Nation-building was an area Bremer had not been involved in during his earlier career as a diplomat. The message of the RAND study was that large peacekeeping forces were better than small ones. Not only did small forces encourage adversaries to think they could challenge the peacekeepers but they also led the occupation force to rely more on firepower to make up for their limited numbers. That raised the risk

of civilian casualties and increased disaffection among the population. ‘The highest levels of casualties have occurred in the operations with the lowest levels of U.S. troops, suggesting an inverse ratio between force levels and the level of risk,’ the RAND study noted.”

Page 483: Rumsfeld instructs Bremer to establish the “New Iraqi Corps . . . For all the talk of building Iraqi pride, the name of the new force betrayed a certain cultural insensitivity: NIC, which pronounced, sounded very much like ‘fuck’ in Arabic.”

Page 495: “The United States mission in Iraq . . . was made all the more difficult by the administration’s aversion to nation-building and its determination not to study the lessons of its predecessors. It was an ideology they came in with and an overreaction to the Clinton administration. The Bush administration looked at the Bosnia/Kosovo model and decided that it was fundamentally flawed. They concluded that it encouraged an artificial dependency on the part of the host country by committing a larger footprint of U.S. troops. They preferred a small presence to force the host country to do its own nation-building. . . . this is desirable only if there is security. Without security, the model breaks down quickly, which was the case in Iraq.”

Page 501: “The failure to read the early signs of the insurgency and to adapt accordingly was all the more surprising given the Bush administration’s assertions that Saddam’s regime was allied with Osama bin Laden and terrorist organizations like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s and given confirmed intelligence reports that jihadists had infiltrated from Syria. Had the administration taken its own counsel to heart, it would have been planning to wage a counterinsurgency and conduct antiterrorist operations as soon as Baghdad fell.”

Page 506: “The cost to the administration’s foreign policy was considerable: instead of sending a cautioning message of American strength to Iran and North Korea, the United States was bogged down in a conflict that absorbed its military efforts. Instead of demonstrating the liberating power of democratic rule, the United States had inadvertently sent a message that the transition to a representative government was fraught with peril. Instead of demonstrating the sort of success that would have attracted allies to send forces to share the burden of occupation, American and British forces found themselves virtually alone.”

S. says

starts a little slow with pages filled with acronyms and then becomes flowing military history with true 'Bradley Fighting Vehicle's eye view' of the combat onslaught of US forces into Iraq. contains both air and land military activities and information about the political situation surrounding the invasion and subsequent occupation. thoughtful quotations and clear benefit from the teamwork between the New York Times editor and the Marine general, and the Marines' slightly less coverage compared to the Army compensated for by this text.

a 4 but not a 5. the better military writers have a quality of synthesis and urgency that was to some degree only here in parts in this work. a better writer could have step-by-step shown the balance of forces rather than sort of tied everything together somewhat haphazardly--this book was published in March 2006 so it was fairly clearly a reader market-grabber production, but it is professional and it is organized. doesn't drop to the 3/5.

a clear Iraq War reference work.

Charlie Johnson says

In depth and brutally honest. A must read on par with works by Ryan.

Brimley says

No matter what you think about the war-you should read this book. It is riveting and made me think. It has been described as one of the best books ever written on the modern military, and I can see why.

There is a good amount of military-speak, but the authors have a glossary that helps you through.

If you know anyone in the military, or are concerned about what the hell is going on over there, read this book.

Jesse Levinson says

This is a superb read for anyone who wants to understand how United States ended up in the Iraq war with forces that were so woefully unprepared for the task. The authors are sympathetic to the effective and purposeful use of U.S. military power, which makes their detailed indictment of what actually happened all the more damning.

Ugo Marsolais says

This is a detailed and thorough account of the military aspects of the 2003 Iraq invasion. It spans from just after September 2001, going through the steps of building the operational plans for the invasion, to the summer of 2003 not long after the end of "major military operations" after the collapse of the Iraqi regime.

Today, like most people, I consider the invasion a disastrous mistake since the official reasons why the U.S. invaded Iraq were ultimately found wrong: there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and the Saddam regime did not partake in the September 2001 terrorist attacks with al Qaeda.

But what this book does very well explain is how much the actual plan of invasion, which did enable a lightning quick military victory over the Iraqi regime, turned out to be also the source of the failure of the occupation and pacifying of Iraq post-invasion.

There are 2 key elements explaining this failure: the new doctrine pushed by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld which held the view that the development of new battlefield technology rendered large armies obsolete and overly costly; and the almost obsessive fear of getting sucked into "nation building" after

invasion. When looked independently of each other, making full use of technology and preventing the lengthy and uncertain undertaking of nation-building are reasonable propositions. But in the context of a Middle east invasion and in a country like Iraq, they are delusional.

This is because the doctrine of a small invasion force equipped with force-multiplying technology can make you win a war, but it will not make you win the peace. Technology is no replacement for a large security footprint to manage most societies where the government has collapsed after military defeat. This is especially true in Iraq, which is culturally, religiously and ethnically very diverse, and prone to internecine conflicts.

As a consequence, the US forces were not in a position to successfully stabilize Iraq post-conflict and help Iraqi society build a democratic, multi-ethnic and multi-religious state. It is no accident that things turn out that way, they are the direct consequence of misguided and delusional policy forcefully implemented, and compounded by serious judgment errors (the drastic deBaathization, which released on the streets frustrated and humiliated soldiers and officers, being the most egregious error). The Bush administration did not want to have a large force in Iraq, and it did not want to do "nation building" as it smacked of Bill Clinton's policy in the Balkans. The consequence of this was ultimately a nation wasted, plunged into civil conflict, and a breeding ground of future terrorist groups such as ISIS.

Joseph Stieb says

This is a deeply in-depth and interesting account of the prewar military planning, the invasion itself, and the immediate postwar aftermath. It is clearly and engagingly written and comprehensive. G and T have a balanced but incisive critique of the Bush administration and military's strategy for Iraq. They praise the military in several respects, including its proficiency in joint warfare, its rapid victory, and its avoidance of civilian casualties during the invasion. However, they find several faults worth noting. First, the military anticipated a showdown with the Republican Guard and other conventional units, but they ended up mostly fighting irregular Fedayeen, who did a pretty good job harassing and slowing down US forces. Franks was slow to react to this threat, and criticized commanders on the ground who were trying to consolidate ground against the Fedayeen as opposed to sprinting towards Baghdad. Second, Rumsfeld was so fixed against doing nation-building, that he and others did only the bare minimum of postwar planning. I had heard this before about 10 times, but Gordon adds key details and an interesting interpretation. He argues that the decision not to plan for the postwar reconstruction was a deliberate decision by the Rumsfeld administration, who believed the US should not be involved in such tasks, rather than a negligent omission. Third, the US was far too confident in the ability of technology, or the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs, to clear away the fog of war and lead the US to an easy victory. Not only did the fog of war remain during the invasion, our lack of planning and knowledge about Iraq meant that the fog of war lingered heavily in the postwar period. We didn't know much about the power brokers of society, the views of Iraqi civilians, or the slowly forming insurgency. The ignorance of people like Rumsfeld, Franks, and Bremer led us to crucial early mistakes, including de-Baathification, the dissolution of the entire Iraqi army and police forces, the canceling of local elections, the failure to restore basic services, and the failure to stop the looting. The Rumsfeld crew believed that you wouldn't need more troops to lock the country down than to invade it, so they "off-ramped" units as much as possible in the early going, units that could have played key roles in stabilizing the country. In other words, Rumsfeld and Franks conceived of the war as a strictly military affair, when all wars are political at their cores, especially ones that involve occupying, reforming, and rebuilding an entire society.

G and T also give readers a fascinating inside look at Saddam Hussein's political and military strategy based on classified interviews with regime members. Shortly before the war, SH actually got a group of Iraqi leaders together and told them that he had no more WMD. I have often wondered why if this was the case he didn't just come totally clean with the UN and avoid being invaded. The reason G and T give is that SH needed the appearance of having WMD in order to keep the Kurds and Shiites from challenging his role. If he spilled the beans to the external enemy (US), he would be putting himself at risk to the internal enemies, which he always feared more. The US was fortunate that SH was such a paranoid bungler and that most of his conventional forces just bailed on him. It could have been a lot worse if he had been a competent and inspirational leader.

I haven't read a more thorough and generally engaging book on the history of the invasion and the immediate aftermath since Fiasco. I still recommend Fiasco to most readers because it covers a broader span of time and includes a broader range of topics. My only complaint is that G and T could have done a better job orienting lay readers during the more tactical and operational sections of the book. I got a bit lost in regards to where different unit movements were happening on the maps, which were all front loaded at the start of the book. Still, this is an outstanding complement to Ricks and a key piece of figuring out the Iraq War.

Danica says

Somebody remind me why on Earth we were in Iraq...? *Reads book* Oh, right, it was a scam start to finish and our troops were basically set up to fail out there.

Terence says

If you're looking for a narrative of the second US-Iraq War then this is the book for you (told, of course, entirely from the American point of view but then we haven't left much of a publishing industry in Iraq, have we).

If you're looking for an analysis of consequences, you're not going to find it here. (Consider that Gordon is the second fiddle to the NYT's Judith Miller's pre-war WMD puff pieces.)

Pie Resting-Place says

Some parts at the start and end were very interesting. They explain the political buildup to war and the bungling of the occupation. In the middle there is a long part that involves tanks, helicopters, Humvees, and soldiers fighting. This part felt too detailed and without enough context, it was rather uninteresting.

Jerome says

This was a very interesting book. The authors certainly aren't experts on special operations, though... Also, Douglas Feith, Rumsfeld's undersecretary for policy has authored a book entitled War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism, which lays out a reasonable defense of the policies

that the authors criticize. I personally agree with Gordon and Bernard, but definitely check out Feith's book as well.

I can't find the document "Team Tank: Armor in Support of Special Operations", published in "Veritas:Journal of Army Special Operations History" (Winter 2005) anywhere.

The Iraqi Perspectives Report was the main source for their account of how Saddam planned and executed his military actions. It was recently declassified and CHOCK-FULL of interesting information, most of which is not even in the book. Definitely check it out.

[Click here for the report](#)

UppityWorm says

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