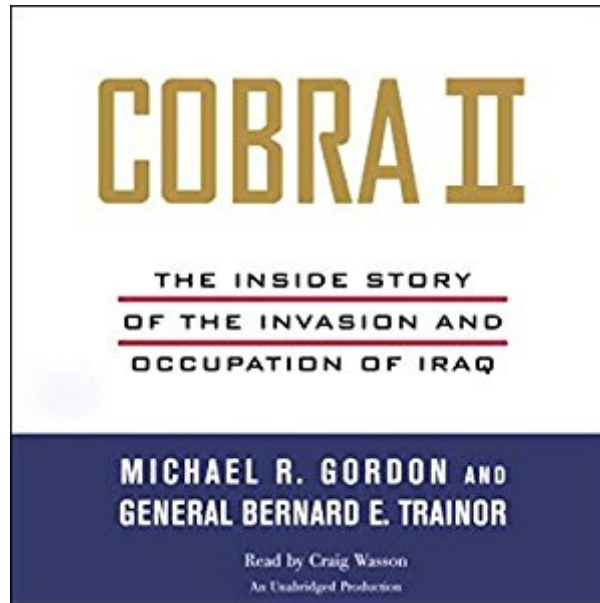


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Cobra II: The Inside Story Of The Invasion And Occupation Of Iraq



Synopsis

Informed by unparalleled access to still-secret documents, interviews with top field commanders, and a review of the military's own internal after-action reports, *Cobra II* is the definitive chronicle of America's invasion and occupation of Iraq, a conflict that could not be lost but one that the United States failed to win decisively. From the Pentagon to the White House to the American command centers in the field, the book reveals the inside story of how the war was actually planned and fought. Drawing on classified United States government intelligence, it also provides a unique account of how Saddam Hussein and his high command developed and prosecuted their war strategy. Written by Michael R. Gordon, the chief military correspondent for The New York Times, who spent the war with the Allied land command, and Bernard E. Trainor, a retired Marine Corps lieutenant general and former director of the National Security Program at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, *Cobra II* traces the interactions among the generals, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and President George W. Bush. It dramatically reconstructs the principal battles from interviews with those who fought them, providing reliable accounts of the clashes waged by conventional and Special Operations forces. It documents with precision the failures of American intelligence and the mistakes in administering postwar Iraq. Unimpeachably sourced, *Cobra II* describes how the American rush to Baghdad provided the opportunity for the virulent insurgency that followed. The brutal aftermath in Iraq was not inevitable and was a surprise to the generals on both sides; *Cobra II* provides the first authoritative account as to why. It is an book of enduring importance and incisive analysis, a comprehensive account of the most reported yet least understood war in American history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I must say that having almost completed Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq that I'm relieved by the fairness of the book. While it does point up an abundant list of mistakes in judgement by those at the highest levels of the command structure, it also makes clear that war is a foggy business at best. It is my opinion only that Cobra II avoids the pitfalls and traps by staying as impartial as possible. I found no axe being ground for either the right or the left. I am also impressed by the degree of access to materials that Gordon must have had access to. I know that the prepub releases mentioned that Gordon had unprecedented access to both reports and personnel in researching this book. That is even more apparent as you read through the content. Gordon, who is chief military correspondent for the New York Times does a masterful job of telling the story of the Iraq War. Retired General Trainor, a Marines Marine, lends his insight and expertise and I'm sure made sure that Gordon stayed on task. All together, Cobra II is a masterful book, written by two experienced individuals....experts in their respective fields. I think you will feel informed in a way that perhaps you haven't felt in the past after reading this book. You'll want to read this one.

When it comes to writing a book about the inner workings of the war plan in Iraq and its execution, one can hardly think of a better suited team than Michael Gordon, the chief military correspondent for the NY Times and General Bernard Trainor, formerly of the Marines and now a noted academic. This teams first work, a history of the first Gulf War, is the definitive work on the subject. With unparalleled sources and careful analysis, these two men bring the readers a front seat view of the Iraq War. What they find, to put it bluntly, is not pretty. Far from a well coordinated strategy, their work paints a portrait of a war plan almost entirely driven by twin ideological beliefs, the first being that a military victory could be won by a small agile army of fewer than 100,000 men and the second that there would be no need for a long term American presence. The reason for the last belief, so tragically mistaken in retrospect, was the idea that the Iraqis would quickly and peacefully form a civil society and, to the degree it was needed the international community would pick up the slack. The holders of these two beliefs? Vice President Dick Cheney and Sec. Def. Rumsfeld, to whom President Bush gave full authority to run the war as they saw fit. As this work demonstrates with a shocking degree of detail, all those who opposed this world view found themselves sidelined in the lead up and the execution of the war. Gordon and Trainor offer examples such as the State

Department and Sec. Powell who warned the President, the VP, and the Sec. Def of the near certainty of a break down of civil society following the conflict. They were ignored. Military officers with experience in Bosnia and Haiti made raised similar warnings. They too were ignored. Indeed, when military commanders on the ground in the race for Baghdad began to understand that the US faced a well planned and coordinated gorilla insurgency and requested the manpower and time to quell it, they were threatened with being pulled from command. Reading this work, one finds General Franks in well over his head, lacking the background to deal with the chaos that followed the war's end, nor willing to confront his bosses with problems on the ground. While these authors do an impressive job keeping their analysis free of ideology, the work allows the reader only one conclusion, that the current gorilla war in Iraq was perhaps avoidable and certainly could have been less violent if the civilian leadership had taken the right steps at the beginning. These were not cases of hindsight being 20/20, but events predictable by experienced professionals that the President, the VP and the Sec Def chose to ignore. All of this begs at least one important question, which is why Don Rumsfeld still has a desk at the Pentagon.

"Cobra II" provides a detailed accounting of the planning and execution of the Iraq War. The heroism and bravery of American troops under fire was well-documented and moving; unfortunately, there was also much to report about many at the top - how their incompetence and arrogance bungled the handling of post-war Iraq, has thrown the entire outcome into chaos, and has cost innumerable lives. Bush II, prior to his election, signaled that he wanted to overhaul the U.S. military - Gulf I had taken too long to plan and execute. Bush also did not see the need for lengthy peacekeeping and nation-building, such as the U.S. had undertaken in the Balkans. These viewpoints were presumably major factors in selecting Donald Rumsfeld, who shared them, as Secretary of Defense. From the very beginning military leaders recommended close to 500,000 troops for Iraq, especially for the post-war phase. Rumsfeld, showing irritation at the first presentation of such a plan, was asked by Chief of Staff "How many did he thought might be needed?" Rumsfeld's reply was 125,000, "and even that was probably too many." The military's plan reflected long-standing military principles about force levels needed to defeat Iraq, control a population greater than 24 million, and secure a nation that size of California, with porous borders. Rumsfeld's numbers, in contrast, seemed to be pulled out of thin air. Many planning iterations and about 1.5 years later, the U.S. attacked Iraq with the number of troops Rumsfeld initially fixed on. The U.S., however, was not alone in making major miscalculations. Saddam's top priority was internal threats and Iran - the U.S. was a distant third. According to Saddam, the Republican Guard

had stopped the U.S.-led forces at the Euphrates in Gulf I, and his plan was to do it again. Saddam also believed that it was the threat of chemical weapons that kept the U.S. from marching on Baghdad. Opponents dared not raise their hands. Shiite troops (the most disposable, to Saddam) were located on the front lines, far from Baghdad, where the risk of them revolting was minimal. Further, unit commanders were prohibited from talking to each other lest they plot a revolt. Leadership posts were assigned on the basis of loyalty - especially to relatives. Each village, town, and city would become a semi-independent citadel with Fedayeen units drawing on caches of light weapons guarded by Baathists. The stockpiling of weapons and ammunition was not detected by American spy satellites. General Tommy Franks, U.S. Commander, initially assumed that the State Department would handle post-war Iraq. Only just prior to hostilities was this clarified and given to DOD. Regardless, civilian leaders planned to emulate their successes in Afghanistan, despite Army leaders pointing out that Iraq was much more densely populated and therefore difficult to control. Other major (erroneous) assumptions were that many Iraqi units would surrender and switch sides - providing manpower with which to maintain order after the invasion, that the U.S. would be greeted with flowers, and that civilian institutions would readily resume their regular functions with but a few U.S. advisors. (Planners forgot that destroying communications - key to quickly taking over - would also greatly hinder post-war operation.) Initial planning was for \$1 billion/year for three years of reconstruction, aided by Iraqi oil revenues. DOD also balked at a planned \$38 million for post-war security (later revised to \$1 billion). As for the Iraqi police, the CIA assessment was that they were apolitical and well-trained (reality was they were largely poorly-trained, unreliable traffic cops, and hated by the populace). Finally, U.N. assistance was NOT welcome (they were incompetent); later events brought a reversal in this position, but by then word of problems was spreading around the world. Thus, the U.S. plan to leave within six months and have a British, Polish, and Muslim (largely led by Saudi-Arabia) division each, augmented by constabularies from numerous nations never got off the ground. Much of "Cobra II" is taken up with detailed descriptions of fighting at the small-unit level, with numerous stories of incredible bravery. Heavy bombing did provide relief for tactical operations, but failed to take out top Saddam leaders - the execution was always precise, but the intelligence flawed. Special Forces and CIA operatives were of little/no value in Iraq - they had not been in the country prior to the attack (such as in Afghanistan), and helicopters were often sidelined by dust. The main opposition came not from Republican Guards but fierce Fedayeen in civilian clothes, as well as foreign guerillas. One U.S. commander was almost relieved for remarking to the press that the opposition was not like what had been trained for. Side problems included keeping Kurds from taking over territory with their armed bands (likely to provoke a reaction in Turkey), and

Chalabi's army of unarmed 570 exiles (played no role). Between the poor pre-war state of Iraq's infrastructure, U.S. damage, and looting, society deteriorated after the invasion. Sewage, water, garbage, gasoline availability, telephones, and electricity all suffered. Iraqis could not believe that a nation that had sent a man to the moon could fail - it must be that we didn't care. Meanwhile, without either electricity or functioning TV facilities, the U.S. could not communicate with the Iraqis. The initial post-war occupation did not go well - lack of money, Iraqi staffing, or adequate U.S. troops resulted in massive looting and infrastructure problems. Gen. Garner was soon replaced by Paul Bremer - lacking Mid-East or reconstruction experience (considered assets by some). His first decree was a tough de-Baathification (decapitating much of the nation's skilled leadership), and his second was disbanding the Iraqi army - creating major dissension and failing to make use of their potential for stabilization. (Acerbated Rumsfeld's decision to short-staff U.S. military, which Bremer had protested.) Bottom-Line: The future of Iraq is in doubt; however, there can be no doubt as to the heroism of American forces and the incompetence of some of their leaders.

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