

Underestimating the Enemy

reviewed by MajGen Harry W. Jenkins, USMC(Ret)

Cobra II is clearly the best contemporary account to date regarding the planning and execution of the American invasion of Iraq. The authors have done a superb job in researching material for the book that includes documentation and extensive interviews with sources high in the Bush administration down through the military chain of command to the troops who faced combat in the air and on the ground. Based upon the report, "Iraqi Perspectives," by Joint Forces Command, Gordon and Trainor have been able to reconstruct some of the decisions by Saddam and his war council, to include Saddam's perceptions of the American war plan as well as the Iraqi dictator's deception regarding his weapons of mass destruction.

The accounts are fascinating and illustrate the gross misperceptions on the part of the senior American civilian and military leaders concerning Iraqi intentions and culture during the planning and actual invasion. The book is balanced and unemo-

structure. After directing that the original war plan, Gen Anthony C. Zinni's 1003-98 plan, be dropped, GEN Tommy Franks was ordered to start planning all over again.

The authors document the next 18 months where Central Command was bombarded with questions from Rumsfeld on why the command could not deploy more quickly and fight with fewer troops. Gordon and Trainor provide ample evidence of the arrogance and overwhelming ignorance regarding the Iraqi culture and infrastructure that prevailed among the civilian leaders in DoD about what could be realistically accomplished with the new war plan.

It is clear that the intelligence from the beginning regarding Iraq and its systems had been less than satisfactory. Nowhere is this more evident than in the telling of Saddam's concerns and how he and his generals planned for civil unrest as well as how they would wage the war. Access to the "Iraqi Perspectives" report has enabled the authors to dissect much of the avail-

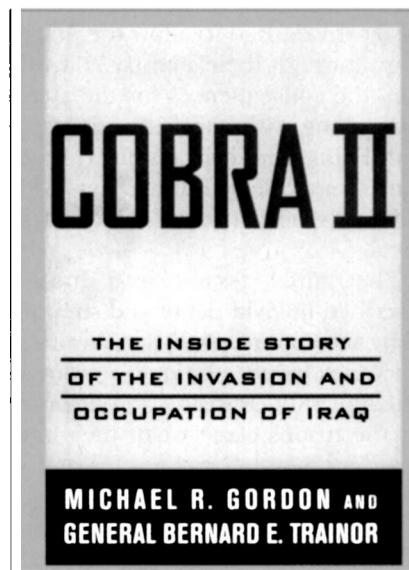
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tional. The facts as displayed in the text will speak for themselves.

A substantial portion of *Cobra II* concentrates on the planning process within the Department of Defense (DoD) for the actual invasion of Iraq. It starts with Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld's arrival at the Pentagon and his determination to remake the U.S. military into a leaner and more lethal force. Following 11 September 2001, and a subsequent, relatively easy success in Afghanistan, Rumsfeld, supported by the administration, was determined to go after the Iraqis with a relatively small but high-tech force

able information on some of the key fears that drove Saddam, much of which seems to have been missed by our intelligence community.

With the preservation of the regime as Saddam's top priority, it was the Shi'ites in the south who were seen as the most direct threat. Next came the Iranians and then the United States. To guard against the direct threat, the Iraqi leadership created the Ba'ath Emergency Plan to deal with uprisings, such as the one that occurred after Operation DESERT STORM. This plan led to the formulation and placement of the fedayeen and other militia in the towns and vil-



COBRA II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq. By Michael R. Gordon and Gen Bernard E. Trainor. Pantheon Books, NY, 2006, ISBN 0375422625, 640 pp., \$27.95. (Member \$25.16)

lages all over Iraq that would contain any uprising until the Republican Guard could arrive and put it down. It was the fedayeen, who we did not know was there, that provided most of the resistance to Army and Marine units in Nasiriyah, Samawah, Najaf, Kifl, and Baghdad. This oversight is a classic example of our overreliance on satellite and other forms of technical reconnaissance and the distinct lack of a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) human intelligence capability to ferret out guerrilla infrastructures within the population.

Gordon and Trainor provide excellent descriptions of the tactical plans to be executed by Army and Marine units in the invasion of Iraq. The key commanders in both the Army's V Corps and the I Marine Expeditionary Force are vividly portrayed as they prepare their plans for the attack. Descriptions of special operations forces and their employment plans for western Iraq and later in the north are excellent. The authors give considerable coverage to the planned deployment of the Army's 4th Infantry Division (4th ID) in the north on the so-called "second front." When

the Turks refused to allow the 4th ID to go through their country and into Iraq, the consequences for the attack plan, along with the frustrations for both Franks and his Combined Force Land Component Commander, GEN David McKiernan, are described in detail.

The initial assault into Iraq is described in vivid detail and supported by accurate maps. While there was not much doubt about the eventual outcome of the invasion, the surprises for the troops came when they were

center of gravity was the entire Sunni Triangle, as well as the Iraqi people themselves. While the war planning went on for 18 months, the postwar planning began only a couple of months before the invasion. President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Franks spent most of their time planning for the defeat of the already weakened Iraqi forces, and they spent the least amount of time on security and rehabilitation of infrastructure for post-war Iraq.

The authors complete the book with an excellent analysis of what they call the President's team and its five grievous errors.

not greeted as liberators—as they had been assured by the CIA they would be—and when they were attacked by armed feyadeen in lieu of the Republican Guard or regular Iraqi Army units. Aggressive commanders of both the 3d ID and the 1st Marine Division maneuvered their units north against resistance that had not been wargamed, but the generals adjusted to the circumstances on the ground and continued the attack to Baghdad. The authors point out that while the tactical units adjusted to the threat they were fighting, both Franks and Rumsfeld remained wedded to the prewar analysis regarding Iraq even after the enemy was showing his ability for guerrilla tactics in urban settings. While failing to understand the enemy, they also did not understand the actual structure of political power in Iraq that would grow to haunt them later.

The authors zero in on the Bush administration's aversion to nation building and the impact of that philosophy on the planning for Iraq after the invasion. In a classic statement in the book, the authors declare that "there is a direct link between the way the Iraq War was planned and the bitter insurgency the American-led coalition subsequently confronted." Gordon and Trainor contend that both Rumsfeld and Franks believed that victory would be sealed with the seizure of Baghdad, which had been identified as Iraq's center of gravity. In reality, the authors state that the

Through interviews conducted with commanders after the war, the authors indicate that there was general agreement that there had been a window of opportunity for some stabilization in the country in the weeks that followed the fall of Baghdad. However, the lack of "boots on the ground" to provide the necessary security against the wholesale destruction of the Iraqi infrastructure by Iraqis, our ignorance of the dilapidated state of Iraqi services, and the collapse of the political system all contributed to the demise of any opportunity for any set of normal stabilization. This situation, combined with the arrival of L. Paul Bremer and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Baghdad, only exacerbated the problem. Bremer, in a move to demonstrate his authority and control, disbanded the Iraqi Army and in effect put close to 300,000 armed men on the streets with no jobs. In addition, Bremer canceled some local Iraqi elections because he had concerns about the candidates. Finally, a new U.S. military headquarters was established in Baghdad with inexperienced leadership that quickly became at odds with the CPA. The perceived window of opportunity was now gone.

The authors complete the book with an excellent analysis of what they call the President's team and its five grievous errors. In short, the errors are misreading the foe, overreliance on technological advancement, failure

to adapt to the battlefield, dysfunction of American military structures, and the administration's disdain for nation building. It will be some time before the history will be written on what will finally come to fruition in Iraq. In the meantime, *Cobra II* is the best account of what occurred in the plan to bring a democracy of sorts to Iraq to include some of the rationale for where we are now.

For any thinking person who desires to know how we arrived at where we are in Iraq today this book is a must-read. For the current generation of military officers who will be the senior leaders in the future, *Cobra II* should be studied carefully for the lessons learned. In fact it should be required reading in most of the Service schools.



>MajGen Jenkins recently retired and formed his own consulting firm, Soaring Eagle Consulting, LLC. He lives in Gainesville, VA.

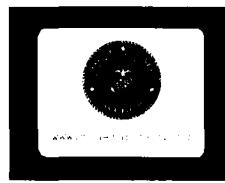
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