

Cock-up, conspiracy, or both?

**Israel and the Clash of Civilisations
Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East**

Jonathan Cook

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Was the invasion of Iraq a disastrous cock-up by the Americans and British, and by the Pentagon in particular? There certainly is a long line of people from within or close to the British and American states asserting this in various forms in the ongoing blame game. To give just a few examples: *The Daily Telegraph* carried a piece by Sean Rayment, its Defence Correspondent, describing and quoting from a 'leaked' Army report ('leaked' as in handed over at lunch, probably) which, says Rayment in his opening paragraph,

'has delivered an unprecedented attack on the planning and execution of the war in Iraq..... The evidence shows that too little planning was done for Operation Telic [the codename for the war in Iraq] particularly on the non-military side, and that too few resources, both human and financial were allocated to the post-war situation..... [the report] also says that assessments by British commanders on the success of their reconstruction efforts were "hopelessly optimistic". The secrecy surrounding the operation, the report claims, meant that government departments were unable to plan for the post-war phase until December 2002 - just three months before the start of the invasion.'¹

In *The Guardian*, in extracts from his new book, Jonathan Steele reported:

'The government's top foreign policy advisers were as inept as their US counterparts in failing to see that removing Saddam Hussein in 2003 was likely to lead to a nationalist insurgency by Sunnis and Shias and an Islamist government in Baghdad, run by allies of Iran, the Guardian has learned. None of Whitehall's "Arabists" warned Tony Blair of the difficulties which have

plagued the occupation. The revelation under-mines the British claim that it was US myopia which was to blame for the failure to foresee what would happen in post-war Iraq.²

Steele quotes Douglas Hurd, former Foreign Secretary:

'Blair and his colleagues sent British troops to kill and be killed in Iraq without proper planning..... An inquiry is certainly needed to make sure this cannot happen again.'

But immediately under this Steele reports that 'recently retired officials who now feel freer to talk about the crucial pre-invasion period' have told him that:

'Contrary to the conventional view that the occupation's problems stem mainly from failure to plan for post-war Iraq, they say there was plenty of planning, from how to react to mass refugee flows and a humanitarian crisis to the fallout from a sharp rise in the world price of oil. The real failure, they concede, was one of political analysis. Officials did not study how Iraqis would react to an occupation and what political forces would emerge on top once Saddam was removed.'

In 'Blair was warned of looming disaster in Iraq', in *The Daily Telegraph*, John Ware trailed his BBC TV programmes on the subject and his opening sentence included this: 'the former prime minister [Blair] was told repeatedly about America's lack of planning for peace and did nothing.'³

On 2 February 2008 *The New York Times* reported in 'Army Buried Study Faulting Iraq Planning' that the Pentagon has tried and failed to suppress a critique by the Rand Corporation of the US government and military's handling of the invasion.

And so on and so on. The major theme is that it was a disastrous fuck-up in which the yahoos and Cowboys in the Pentagon overrode the advice (and planning) of those sensible Yankees in the CIA and the State Department.⁴ For the junior British half of the story it was a disastrous fuck-up in which either the Foreign Office failed to warn Blair, or did warn Blair who took no notice; or in which the Army and Foreign Office didn't plan, or did plan (but not enough and in the wrong areas).⁵

Against this enormous tide of leaks and briefings, on and off the

record, in this very striking book Jonathan Cook argues that, *au contraire*, the chaos and the ensuing civil war in Iraq is *deliberate*, that the Iraq invasion is part of a larger American-Israeli scheme to dismantle the (comparatively recent) nation states of the Middle East into their earlier ethnic and religious components. Subsidised and armed by America, Israel will then be the dominant power and America's proxy in the region. (This, in turn, is a contemporary variation on an older Middle East theme, that the West wants to keep the Middle Eastern countries backward and undeveloped, the better to exploit the region's oil.)

If Cook's thesis is true, a deception on this scale, concealed by a massively damaging story of military and political incompetence, displays a kind of genius. But is it true? It is possible that the Americans and Israelis are trying to do this. Cook produces many interesting accounts of neo-con American and Israeli propagandists in the last few years who have *advocated* this, and much detailed analysis of events in the region in the last decade which shows that sections of American and Israeli policy-making are unconcerned if this is the outcome.

What he has *not* produced is official paper advocating this (not that we would expect any, of course) nor official whistle-blowers from opposing groups within the Israeli-American foreign policy process, to substantiate his case. And it is the latter point which makes me wonder if Cook's theory is true. The absence of leaks from the bureaucratic and political rivals of the neo-cons and the Pentagon about this alleged Israeli-American deception is striking. Still, this a very interesting read in all kinds of other areas – as good a short account of the recent politics of Israel, America and the Middle East as I have read; and even if Cook's apocalyptic prediction does not come to pass, his discussion of those who are contemplating it – and who would welcome it – is absolutely chilling. As with all detailed accounts of the thinking of the American and Israeli Right, the reader is left with only one conclusion: these people are crazy and dangerous.

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2 Jonathan Steele, 'Britain "as inept as US" in failing to foresee post-war Iraq insurgency', *The Guardian*, 21 January, 2008

3 <www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2007/10/28/nrblair128.xml>

4 This is one of the central themes of the collection of essays *The World Crisis: the way forward after Iraq*, edited by Robert Harvey (London: Constable, 2008), in which a cavalcade of yesterday's men from both sides of the Atlantic – Carter, Kissinger, Nunn, Brezezinski, Schultz, Howe, Carlucci, David Howell – bemoan the mess made by the current administrations in Washington and London. In the 'List of contributors' Sir Mark Allen is described as a 'a retired member of HM Diplomatic Service', the current euphemism for SIS. If you google <Mark Allen + MI6> you get thousands of hits. So why persist with the euphemism?

5 One day there may be enough material available to work out which of these versions is true.

