

The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq

George Packer

We took it on faith that there was a Plan A... maybe even a Plan B

Many of us thought there was a case to be made for putting a big, heavy foot down in the Middle East. Iraq, Iran and Syria overtly sponsored terrorism. Other states did so covertly. The combination of totalitarian governments, repressive religion and unearned oil revenue created an environment hostile to job creation. Growing populations of purposeless young men would find that purpose in fanaticism. And, besides, Saddam had spit in Superman's face so often that we were losing credibility.

We took it on faith that our leadership had thought the war through. Naturally they couldn't share their plans with us. Given Congress' propensity to leak, and the unrelenting hostility to Bush since the 2000 election, it would have made sense to keep the details within the Pentagon. But Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney, Powell, Rice, Wolfowitz, Feith et. al should have had a plan.

They didn't. One started to suspect the lack of a plan when the looting began in Baghdad. When there were no civil affairs troops. When the insurrections arose.

It is a tragedy errors and of American hubris. Errors, because the Democrats were so intent on taking down Bush that they failed in their role as the loyal opposition. Hubris, in that the neocons ignored input from their own side, notably that of Powell and Shinseki, with regard to the real levels of planning, troops and money required to do the job. It reflects as well on the American people. We elect presidents who show well on TV and respond well to polls. We need leaders.

That's my diatribe. Packer does a wonderful job of documenting the lack of planning, the infighting, and the neocon chutzpah that got us into the war. He documents well the fact that we have no idea how we get out. Wish he had some suggestions.