

NEWS REVIEW



After the fall

The chaos was avoidable says
the top Brit in Baghdad, page

THE SUNDAY TIMES

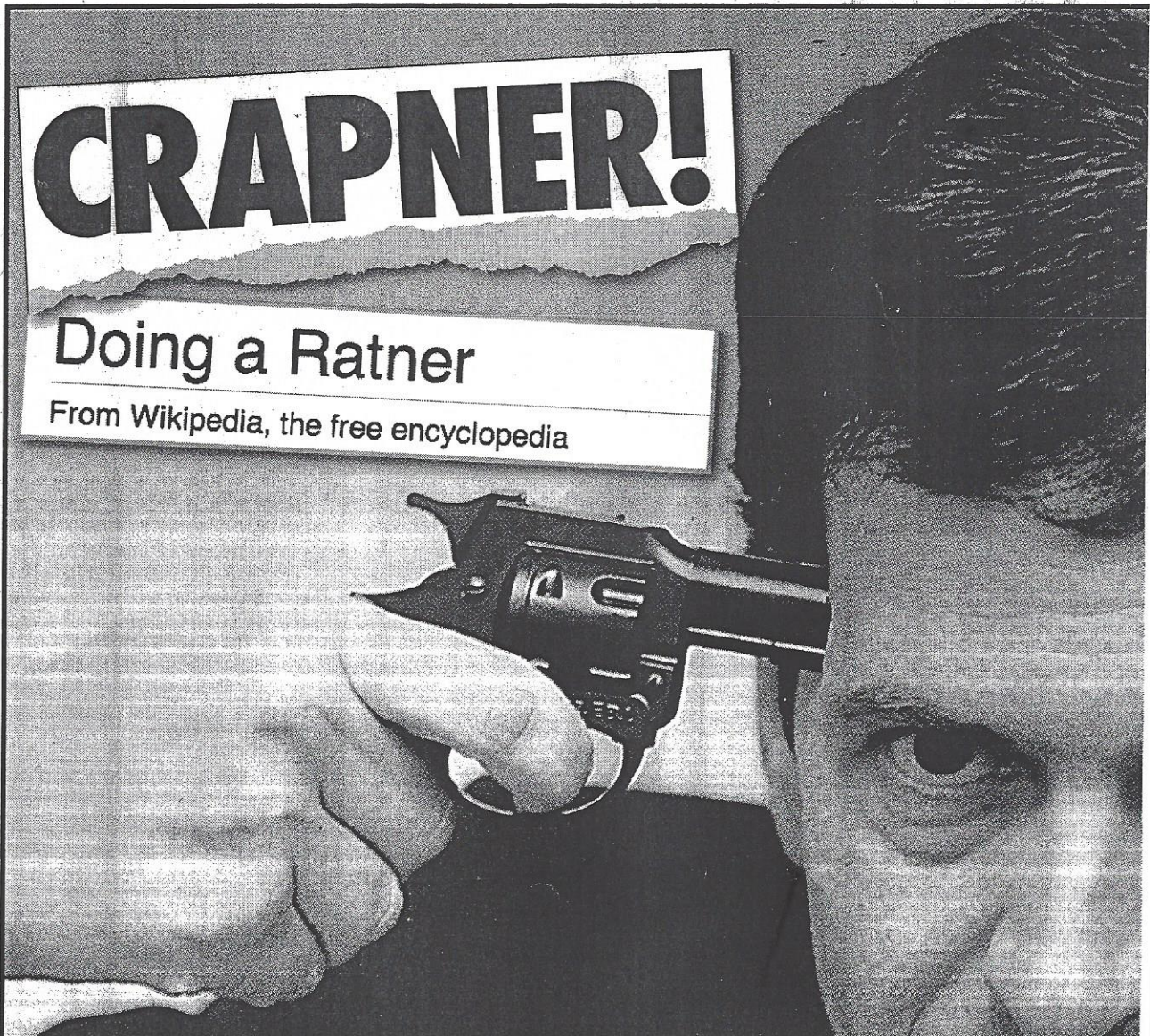
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October 21, 2007

CRAPNER!

Doing a Ratner

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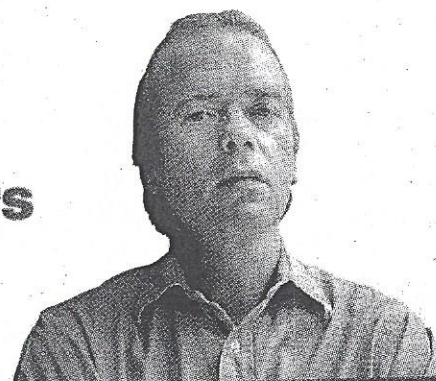


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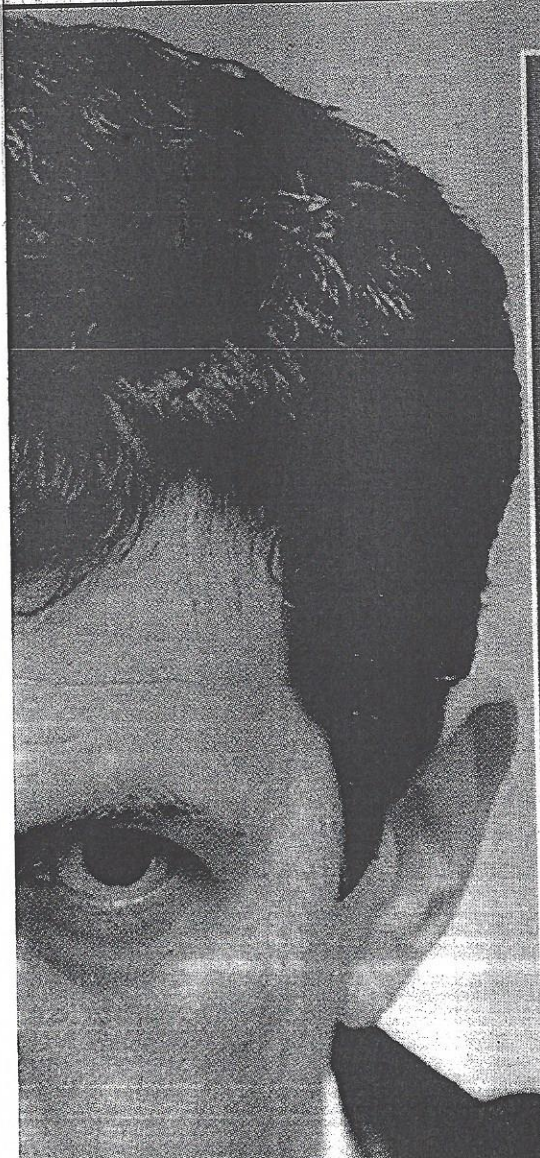
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New culture wars

Where do you stand on the big divisive issues? page 7



Simon Runtz



It still
hurts 16
years on.
Gerald
Ratner
reveals
the pain of
becoming

For the first time, the British general at the heart of post-war planning for Iraq tells **Heidi Kingstone** of the chaos in London and Washington

In early March 2003, as Britain and America prepared to invade Iraq, a casually dressed Tony Blair unexpectedly walked into the room at 10 Downing Street where Major General Tim Cross had just briefed Alastair Campbell, Blair's communications chief. Cross was Britain's point man in Washington on post-war planning and he was not getting a "warm feeling" about it. Campbell was clearly uneasy. For the next half-hour Cross briefed Blair.

The heart of the matter was simple: post-war planning was completely incoherent. "The plan was, we do not need a plan," said Cross last week.

"As we teased out the issues, Blair listened and questioned. None of it seemed to come as much of a surprise. Indeed, it seemed to reinforce what he was starting to pick up from elsewhere."

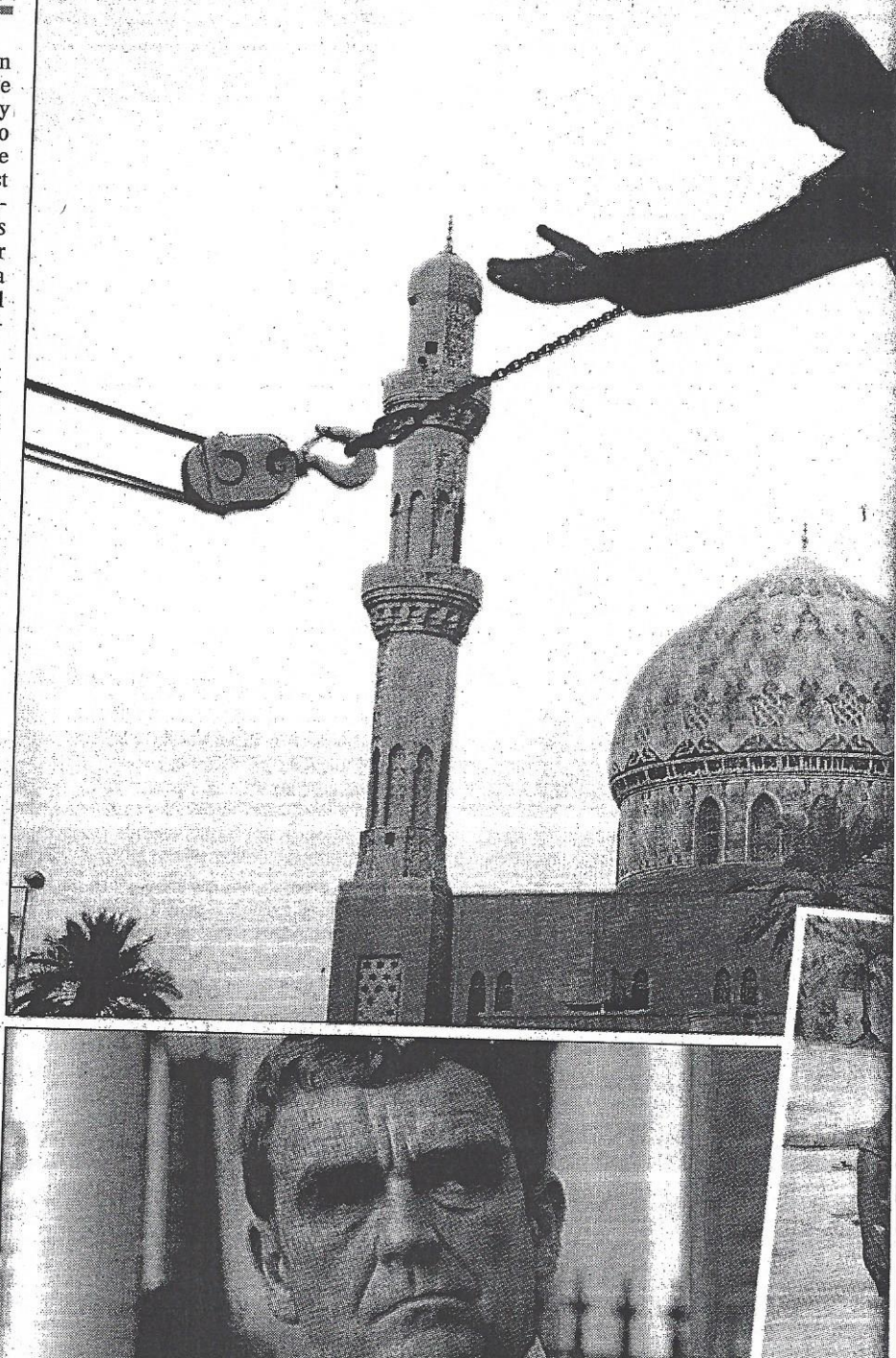
He remembered telling Blair: "We want to be jolly careful that we don't start this war until we know how we are going to finish it. And I, for one, am far from clear on how we are going to do that."

Cross knew what he was talking about. He had been a logistics commander during the 1991 Gulf war and his skill in post-war planning had been honed in Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo.

He left Downing Street with a nagging fear that Blair did not understand what was really going to be needed to deliver a stable or reconstructed Iraq: "I knew, liked and respected Blair from our earlier operations in the Balkans. But he didn't seem to have the instinct for or understand the scope and complexity of what was going to be needed in the aftermath of an invasion. I don't think he understood what the possible consequences could be."

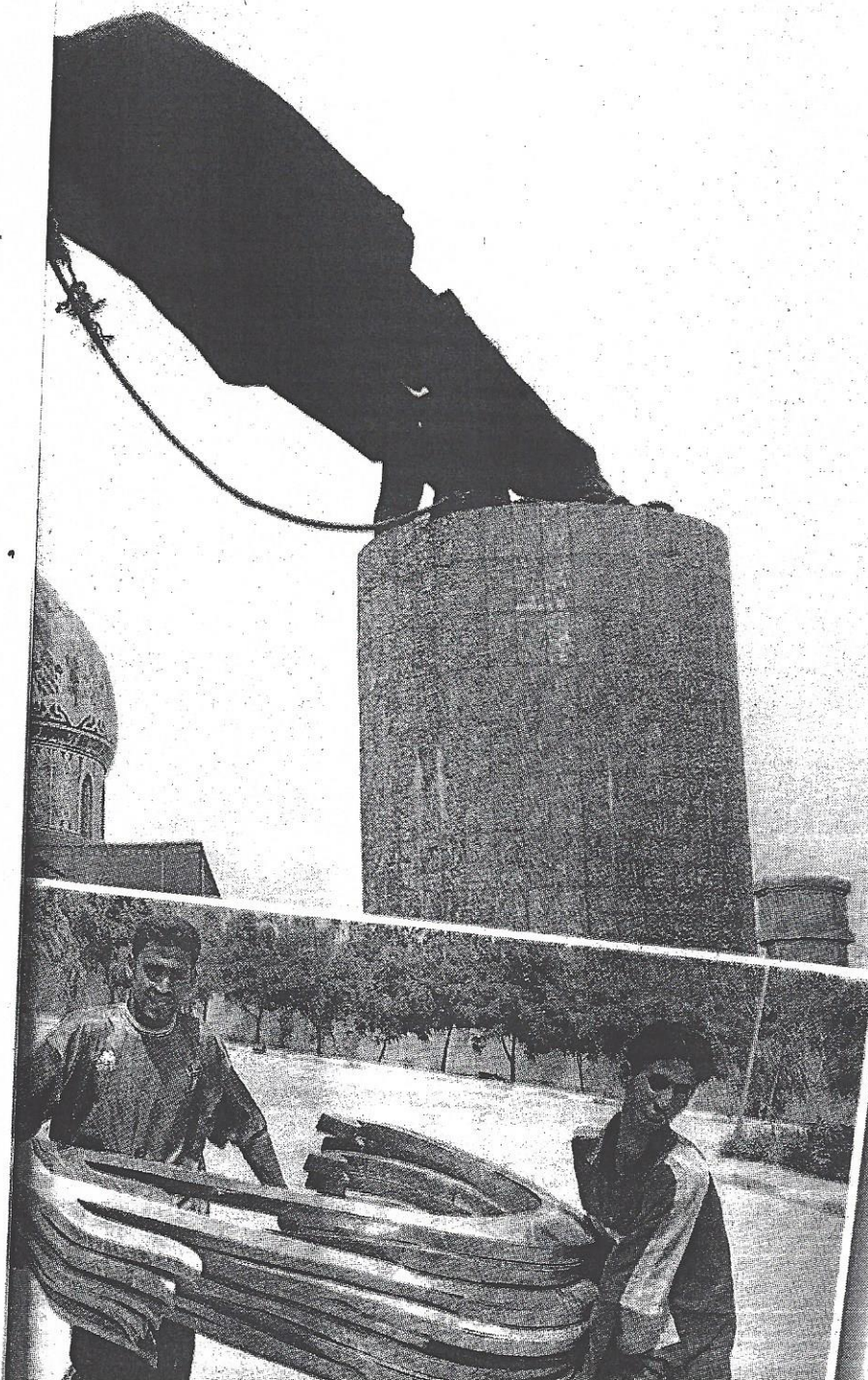
For Cross, the story of Iraq is one of a failure of leadership. Talking for the first time about this failure, he said: "We got it wrong. We underestimated the resources we would need to see the campaign through. We underestimated the amount of time we

Toppled in E clueless in V



Rex/Peter Nicholls/Jeremy Young

Baghdad, Whitehall



— his lack of authority brutally exposed. It was announced that Paul Bremer would replace him with the new title of head of the Coalition Provisional Authority. According to Cross, the Bush administration had realised its catastrophic mistake and “unfairly” hung Garner out to dry.

Crucially, Bremer came to Baghdad with the authority of the president, which Garner had never had. Cross and others briefed him about the situation that he would be inheriting. But Bremer then turned everything on its head, implementing his three pillars — to disband the army, to begin de-Ba’athification and to slow down the political process.

“By the time he arrived it was already too late,” concluded Cross. “No matter what he attempted to do he would have struggled; but with those three decisions he virtually threw away any chance of short to medium term success.”

There was one early success, however. Cross initially found the oil ministry building empty and ripped apart; but within a short time, and with little fanfare, the ministry was handed over to be run by a senior Iraqi.

From Cross’s point of view the Americans seemed no more interested in the oil ministry than education or health or any other department: “In all the debates in Washington or Kuwait, I never heard anyone talking about oil as the key issue. It would be idle to suggest it wasn’t a factor, but to be fair to the Americans all I ever heard being discussed was that we would get the oil facilities up and running and once we did that the oil would flow and bring revenue to Iraq. Then Iraq could rebuild itself.

“I never sensed any overt desire to hold on to or control the oil ministry any more than any other.”

Almost as proof of this, Gordon Brown, as chancellor, had barely set aside any funds towards the country’s rebuilding. Basra, with its southern oilfields, was in the UK’s area of responsibility and had a crumbling infrastructure in need of investment. The international development department allocated £154m in April 2003 and a further £60m was announced in the spring budget: just £210m for reconstruction and humanitarian work.

On October 30, 2003, Straw said the government planned to spend £544m on the reconstruction of Iraq during the three-year period commencing April 2003. Cross’s view, then and now, was that it was never going to be enough and that the critical moments had passed.

Cross still feels, however, that the purpose of the

would need more than a few weeks or months. We failed to recognise the amount of money and talent — both military and non-military — that would also be required.”

The failure to plan was a failure across Whitehall — not just across Washington. There was no clearly accepted “end state”, no consensus on what we wanted to achieve; nor was there a coherent and joined-up pan-governmental “campaign plan”.

“Taking a democracy to war is pretty obviously a serious business and we didn’t take it anywhere near seriously enough,” said Cross, the most senior insider to talk on the record about the planning catastrophe.

He first became involved in the autumn of 2002 when he was ordered to establish the logistics headquarters for possible operations in Iraq which he set up at Northwood, northwest London, the permanent joint headquarters. In the following months he crisscrossed the Atlantic as momentum built towards invasion.

In February 2003 he went to Washington to join the team run by Jay Garner, the retired three-star general in charge of US post-war planning. Cross’s mission was to find out what was happening. He sent daily reports to London from the British embassy.

It took him more than two weeks just to get the necessary clearance to go in and out of the Pentagon without having to be escorted constantly around the building.

He was alarmed that at this crucial time there was no British ambassador in the American capital. Christopher Meyer had just returned to the UK and it made Cross wonder if the government truly understood the scale of what it was taking on.

Even with operations looking imminent, there were no answers to some serious questions. How would we reconstruct Iraq’s economy? What currency would we use? What would we do with the judiciary and the police?

Things started to go badly wrong with looting and lawlessness soon after Saddam fell, but Cross, above, says the allies were wholly unprepared

There was no war cabinet as there had been during the Falklands campaign. It was only in February, just weeks before the war began, that the Foreign Office established the Iraq Planning Unit (IPU). Dominic Chilcott, the diplomat who headed it, “was an excellent man, but he had a tiny team around him, far smaller even than Garner’s”, said Cross. “The IPU was on to a loser from the start. It was never going to be able to deliver a joined-up and coherent post-war plan in the time then available.”

What frightened him was the Washington neoconservatives’ certainty that once the Americans and British arrived, Iraqi oil revenue would rebuild the country: “Too many people lost themselves in the luxury of political theory and forgot or chose to ignore the practical realities of what was actually going to happen on the ground, and that was at the heart of the planning blight.”

“The cabal in Washington convinced themselves that they didn’t need a plan because everything would be fine once Saddam Hussein was toppled ... There were few dissenting voices; you either agreed with their paradigm or you were frozen out.”

He added: “What they didn’t seem to understand was that you cannot bring true democracy to these fragile places in less than a generation or two.”

As for Britain, “it was apparent that Whitehall had got itself locked into the US way of thinking, not realising just how little America understood of the issues. When we got to Iraq and things started to go wrong there was just this stunned silence. There was no reserve to fill the vacuum, no ability to rethink the issues”.

Garner “was very good at not

appearing to be disloyal, but it was pretty clear that he was finding it very frustrating. He would be in meetings for hours and return irritated. He couldn’t seem to get the authority to drive things forward. We knew it was chaos.” In addition: “Garner didn’t have sufficient resources from the start or the necessary authority over the military. He was given a small planning team of regular American military and a slack handful of other people, including his retired buddies, who were good people.”

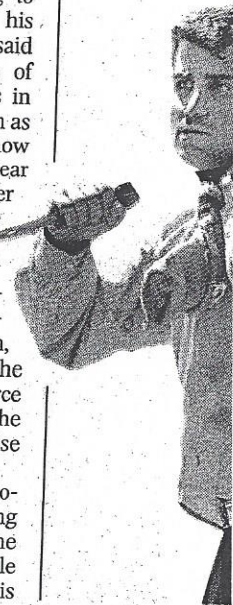
But he was not in the Beltway loop and so had no more knowledge about the war plan than he found in the newspapers. Garner tried to recruit key staff from across Washington but found those not part of the neocon fraternity were withheld by the defence department.

The war was obviously going to start and Garner wanted to get his people out on the ground. But, said Cross, “he didn’t have a piece of paper that made it clear he was in charge. The military never saw him as the boss, in fact they didn’t know what to make of him. It was unclear what his position was, so he never had the authority to say to the head of the US forces that he was in charge”.

At a lunch with a gung-ho Donald Rumsfeld, the defence secretary, before leaving Washington, Cross found himself shut out when he raised the key issues of available force ratios, the lack of a reserve and the overriding need to internationalise the reconstruction.

Garner’s team was being built agonisingly slowly. He ended up leaving Washington for Kuwait to await the invasion with fewer than 100 people and with 77 posts still empty. This

Blair did to understand scope of going to needed in aftermath invasion



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was the team the Americans sent to rebuild Iraq. "He wanted to be an enabler," said Cross, who is immensely fond of Garner, "and he was a hugely loved and capable leader, but I sensed a general lack of understanding of what was going to hit them."

En route to Kuwait, Cross stopped in London to talk to Campbell. He found him both helpful and proactive in arranging a much-needed and sadly lacking media team to work with Garner. It was during this discussion that Campbell left the room and returned with the prime minister.

As late as April, Cross still had no sense of what Britain wanted out of the war and what the government thought Iraq should look like once it was over: "The only thing that was made clear to me was that they did not want to be seen to be acting in any way that looked like they supported the division of Iraq, which was fair enough."

As the lead-up to the invasion intensified, Cross became Garner's official coalition deputy. But there was still no senior Foreign Office person in place to oversee the political reconstruction. Cross told Jack Straw, the foreign secretary, who visited Kuwait, that he needed a political "driver" alongside him, someone to influence political events. Straw responded by telling Cross that he was doing a great job and left things as they were.

By the time Garner and Cross got to Baghdad in early April, in the wake of the invasion, things

on the ground were worse than they had anticipated.

"Even with my misgivings I did not realise what a mess the place would be in," Cross said.

"It was held together with chicken wire and chewing gum. Infrastructure such as power stations were only operating with a complete hotch-potch of spare parts brought in over the years from various countries around the world during the years of sanctions. In hospitals, whatever equipment they had was old and there wasn't much of it; open sewers ran through the main hospital in Basra."

Within days he could sense that the momentum had already begun to slip away. Buildings were being set on fire and insurgents had started to emerge.

When General Sir Mike Jackson, head of the British Army, came to Baghdad, Cross briefed him. The presentation he gave was entitled: Snatching Defeat from the Jaws of Victory.

Jackson asked Cross: "How are we making a difference?"

Cross answered: "We're not."

Cross told Jackson that Garner's team was too small. It did not have adequate communications, being dependent on unreliable satellite phones that were often useless. Team members lived in an abandoned palace with no hot water, eating ready-made meals. Because Garner's team could not get adequate protection, it struggled to leave the green zone and so was isolated. Daily life turned out to be a struggle for survival.

Within days of Garner's arrival in Baghdad he seemed out of his depth

about moral imperatives and conditional sovereignty and I believe he was right," he said.

Nor does he believe that this is the time for Britain to "abandon ship". He thinks the UK military strategy now being promoted is correct but that does not tell the whole story.

"While the UK has inevitably made the decision to reduce its military commitment, it will rightly continue to support the Iraq security forces in many ways. But we do need to continue to invest in other non-military capabilities," he said.

"While the oil industry obviously needs help to get it up and running, we also need to help the Iraqis establish the various organs of their democracy. The different factions in the insurgency have started to talk to one another and there are some reasons for hope; but if that hope is to be fulfilled they will need our help, not our withdrawal."

He is critical of the media, which continue to insist that everything is a disaster and Britain should pull out: "Media pressure has not been helpful. They demand easy answers and quick solutions when there are none and can't be. This has always been a situation that was going to have long-term implications and long-term commitment. The UK must learn the lessons and hold its nerve."

Cross fears that we still have not learnt our lesson: "Gordon Brown's recent allocation of just £30m towards continuing reconstruction in Basra doesn't send much of a reassuring message. We still need answers to questions about whether the government is putting in sufficient resources and talent, both military and non-military."

Cross does not think we are. "There is still no coherent national campaign plan for the so-called global war on terror which is, after all, where this all started," he said, "nor seemingly sufficient resources overall to have any real effect."

*Source: Euromoney 2006 Awards.
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