



# **We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People (American Empire Project)**

*Peter Van Buren*

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**A *Kirkus Reviews* Best Nonfiction of 2011 title**

**From a State Department insider, the first account of our blundering efforts to rebuild Iraq—a shocking and rollicking true-life tale of Americans abroad**

Charged with rebuilding Iraq, would you spend taxpayer money on a sports mural in Baghdad's most dangerous neighborhood to promote reconciliation through art? How about an isolated milk factory that cannot get its milk to market? Or a pastry class training women to open cafés on bombed-out streets without water or electricity?

According to Peter Van Buren, we bought all these projects and more in the most expensive hearts-and-minds campaign since the Marshall Plan. *We Meant Well* is his eyewitness account of the civilian side of the surge—that surreal and bollixed attempt to defeat terrorism and win over Iraqis by reconstructing the world we had just destroyed. Leading a State Department Provincial Reconstruction Team on its quixotic mission, Van Buren details, with laser-like irony, his yearlong encounter with pointless projects, bureaucratic fumbling, overwhelmed soldiers, and oblivious administrators secluded in the world's largest embassy, who fail to realize that you can't rebuild a country without first picking up the trash.

Darkly funny while deadly serious, *We Meant Well* is a tragicomic voyage of ineptitude and corruption that leaves its writer—and readers—appalled and disillusioned but wiser.

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