

## Why Bush Went to War

By Patrick Doherty, TomPaine.com

Posted on August 5, 2004, Printed on August 11, 2004

<http://www.alternet.org/story/19472/>

As the nation begins debate on how to reform the intelligence community, it is essential to remember that the Iraq war was not driven by bad intelligence, per se. As Bush's former director of policy planning admitted, this was a "war of choice." Intelligence was not used to make a decision for war, it was manipulated to mislead Americans into backing a war already planned.

Publicly, President Bush offered four rationales to justify the invasion: the presence of WMD, Iraqi collaboration with Al Qaeda, the possibility of giving WMD to Al Qaeda, and bringing democracy to Iraq. Since the invasion, numerous commissions have shown the first three to be plainly false. The lack of post-war planning, the elevation of Iyad Allawi and the pervasive corruption among U.S.-funded contractors has put the lie to the fourth rationale.

So just why did Bush choose war?

From the evidence before us today, there is no one single reason. Rather, there are three converging and tightly interwoven reasons: oil, Israel and military transformation. The Cheney energy strategy required Iraqi oil; AIPAC and the Christian right wanted to weaken the Arab world to strengthen Israel; and Don Rumsfeld wanted to expedite the transformation of the U.S. military.

### **Reason #1: The Cheney Energy Policy**

The first rationale underlying the Iraq invasion can be found in two recommendations from the vice president's task force on energy policy, delivered in May 2001: "The NEPD Group recommends that the President make energy security a priority of our trade and foreign policy; The NEPD Group recommends the President support initiatives by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Algeria, Qatar, the UAE, and other suppliers to open up areas of their energy sectors to foreign investment."

America gets its oil from the global market, not from individual countries. But in the 1990s, oil-producing countries took a holiday from expanding production capacity, while demand grew steadily. With the supply/demand balance extremely tight, oil-producing states did not have the financial or engineering capacity to build the additional capacity, meaning the national oil companies in many OPEC states were faced with the need to open their fields to foreign investment. They resisted and prices rose.

In the post-Cold War era, the demand increase is coming from Asia. Chinese export success is raising the living standards of the 200 million Chinese consumers. That means elevated demand for energy, raising prices around the world. But unlike Cold War-era supply shocks, rising demand has the threefold effect of reducing American economic growth, creating price incentives for alternative energy sources and strengthening the political influence of the rising Asian consumers. Add OPEC's production quotas and the situation looked grim — at least to the task force.

That the U.S. government thinks about the security of global oil supplies is nothing new. America has had an explicit policy for the last 24 years—the "Carter Doctrine"—which states:

"An attempt by an outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."

Iraq, with the second-largest conventional oil reserves but lacking the capacity to exploit them, looked like the lynchpin in increasing oil production, countering rising Chinese influence and reducing OPEC's pricing power. But with Saddam Hussein in Baghdad, the only option would be to seize and privatize Iraqi oil. That goal was conspicuously absent in the task force recommendations, but revealed in former Treasury secretary Paul O'Neill's memoir. O'Neill stated that in February 2001, the National Security Council staff was already drafting a document detailing how the U.S. government should divide up the Iraqi oilfields among the major western oil companies after a U.S. invasion.

This helps to illuminate why the Bush administration had declared early in its tenure that China was a strategic competitor. What most commentators did not realize, however, was that the theatre of that competition would be the Persian Gulf.

### **Reason #2: Strengthen Israel, Weaken Arabs**

The Bush administration has a complex relationship with Israel. The president owes his election in large part to Christian conservatives. Christian Zionists, led by Tom DeLay in the House, want to see the State of Israel control all the biblical lands. President Bush is also indebted to AIPAC, the powerful Jewish lobby. AIPAC is staunchly backing the right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who rejects the longstanding policy of "land-for-peace." In addition, the neoconservatives who dominate Bush's foreign policy architecture view negotiations with Arafat and the PLO to be morally equivalent to Chamberlain negotiating with Hitler in Munich.

Not surprisingly, this convergence of powerful interests forged an alternative Israel policy for the United States. Paul Wolfowitz, interviewed in May 2003, outlined this new policy:

"...While it undoubtedly was true that if we could make progress on the Israeli-Palestinian issue we would provide a better set of circumstances to deal with Saddam Hussein, ...it was equally true the other way around that if we could deal with Saddam Hussein it would provide a better set of circumstances for dealing with the Arab-Israeli issue."

Those circumstances included the elimination of Saddam Hussein's support for Palestinian bombers' families, reduced oil prices weakening the political influence of Saudi Arabia and OPEC, and the existence of permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq, reducing our dependence on Saudi Arabia while allowing the United States to monitor Syria and Iran more intimately. Free of a credible threat of Arab invasion, Israel would enjoy a much stronger negotiating position.

### **Reason #3: Expedite Military Transformation**

The neoconservatives came into power in 2001 with the intention of remaking America's armed forces so that they can dominate in the post-Cold War security environment. In practice, however, dominance is merely an extension of the Carter Doctrine, recognizing that our economy is dependent on inconveniently distributed sources of foreign oil. In sharp contrast to 20th century containment, 21st century dominance would require new bases, new doctrine and new weapons.

Iraq was sitting at the crossroads of all three components. An American client in Baghdad would allow us to permanently station forces, dominate the Persian Gulf and the Caucasus, and back up Israel. A major war against a conventional enemy would provide an opportunity to demonstrate new operational doctrine built around information dominance and precision strike. Finally, an extended occupation would in turn shake up the structure of the military, enabling more significant changes to Cold War-era traditions and structures.

The Project for a New American Century, the think tank Rumsfeld, Cheney and Wolfowitz patronized before taking office, actually anticipated the opportunity that a 9/11 event would present to the task of transformation: "Further, the process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor."

### **Why The Deception?**

The Bush administration appears to have chosen its course of action on the basis of two converging elements: necessity and opportunity. The necessity was created by America's addiction to oil and the unwillingness of our politicians to do anything about it. In America's first Gulf War, a clear application of the Carter Doctrine, it became clear that America was not willing to trade blood for oil. That put American policymakers in a bind—either lie to America or confront our addiction. When the principals from Bush 41 returned to office in Bush 43, the threat was different, but the economic stakes just as high. This time they decided to justify war on different grounds. They chose to lie.

Sept. 11, 2001 provided a unique opportunity. The overwhelming surge of patriotism and trust derived from the attacks on New York and Washington combined with a media narrative making Al Qaeda rhetorically comparable to the Soviet Union allowed the Bush administration the cover it needed to ram through the war without serious political resistance. It was a cynical stratagem to exploit American's weak understanding of Iraq, Al Qaeda, oil markets and international relations.

Unfortunately, oil, Israel and transformation will continue to drive U.S. policy in the Middle East until we get on a path to eliminate—not just reduce—our consumption of oil for energy. With both the 9/11 Commission and experts like Jessica Stern and the CIA analyst "Anonymous" saying terror is motivated by these very policies, America must ask its presidential candidates why they are choosing cheap gasoline over security.

With near consensus between Kerry and Bush on oil, Israel and transformation, odds are this reality will not change before November. We can only hope it changes before the next attack.

© 2004 Independent Media Institute. All rights reserved.

View this story online at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/19472/>