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George W. Bush's Criminal Wars of Aggression: a Detailed History

By Richard W. Behan
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The illegal warmaking of the Bush Administration has returned to public view once more, thanks to the activist women of CODEPINK. They recently convened "The People's Tribunal on the Iraq War" in Washington D.C. Over two days more than 100 people testified to the deliberate lies that led the nation into war and to the horrendous consequent costs: millions of lives lost and shattered, trillions of dollars squandered, environmental catastrophes. 40,000 people watched the Tribunal live online; the testimonials remain available for viewing at IraqTribunal.org.

The detailed history below is adapted from a powerpoint presentation, The Fraudulent War, submitted to the Tribunal for the record. (The presentation can be viewed [here](#).)

CODEPINK will now seek the appointment of a formal "Commission on Truth and Accountability," to mirror the Chilcot Inquiry in the U.K.

The need is acute for a similar truth-telling in the U.S., but not just for the sake of an accurate record. If George Bush is not held accountable for invading sovereign nations at will, President Donald Trump will be empowered to do likewise.

Definitive Facts About the Wars of Aggression

The magnitude of George Bush's criminality is apparent in the following truths, fully documented in the narrative to follow:

1 The Bush Administration declared its formal commitment to the invasion of Iraq just ten days after taking office, on January 30, 2001. This was seven months prior to the terrorism events of 9/11. (Planning for an attack on Afghanistan was underway later in the spring.)

2 Also in January Mr. Bush appointed Vice President Cheney to chair a "National Energy Policy Development Group." By early February the Group was studying maps of Iraqi oil fields, pipelines, refineries, tanker terminals, and undeveloped exploration blocks.

3 A top-secret National Security Council memorandum dated February 3, 2001 spoke explicitly about "...the capture of new and existing oil and gas fields."

4 A full year before Congress authorized military action in Iraq, the State Department undertook a policy-development study called "The Future of Iraq Project."

5 It worked out a protocol for transferring control of 81% of the undeveloped oil fields in Iraq to American and British oil companies.

6 The plan eventually became the template for the draft "hydrocarbon law" in postwar Iraq.

7 President Bush, on January 10, 2007 made passage of the law a mandatory "benchmark" for continued U.S. support of the Maliki regime in Iraq.

8 Osama bin Laden's attacks on 9/11 provided a spectacular smokescreen for the premeditated invasions. To bring Osama bin Laden to justice, President Bush declared a "global war on terror."

9 His duplicity was appalling: *three times prior to 9/11 President Bush had rejected a standing offer from the Taliban to surrender bin Laden. Immediately after the attacks he would do so twice more.*

10 Conjecture: had President Bush accepted custody of bin Laden early in 2001 the terrorist events might never have occurred.

11 Certainty: had President Bush accepted custody after 9/11, bin Laden could have been brought to justice immediately. A "war on terror" could not have been seriously proposed.

Four Determined Men and a Retrograde Ideology

For ten years four powerful and influential men, episodically holding office at the highest levels of government, were obsessed with the military invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam

Hussein. In 1992 they were at home in the Defense Department of the George H.W. Bush Administration. Richard Cheney was Secretary of Defense,

Paul Wolfowitz was Undersecretary for Policy, and top staffers were Lewis Libby and Zalmay Khalilzad.

Wolfowitz, Libby, and Khalilzad authored for Cheney's signature a 46-page document entitled *Draft Defense Planning Guidance*, to establish the global strategic posture of the United States. It would be used by the Defense Department in planning force levels and budgetary needs.

The document represented a radical departure from the *status quo* of U.S. foreign policy. It was unequivocal in advocating:

- + the assertion of lone superpower status
- + the prevention of the emergence of any competitor on the world stage
- + the forsaking of multilateralism if it didn't suit U.S. interests
- + the intervening in disputes anywhere in the world
- + the use of pre-emptive war
- + a massive increase in military spending

In seeking permanent global supremacy, the document sketched the political ideology that would come to be known as "neoconservatism." Historically, it was a truly regressive initiative. In a world receding from overt imperialism, here was a blueprint promoting it.

The document asserted the need for "...access to vital raw materials, primarily Persian Gulf oil." It warned of "...proliferation of weapons of mass destruction." It spoke of "...threats to U.S. citizens from terrorism." It targeted Iraq as a "scenario" where global dominance might have to be exercised. With uncanny precision it foretold the signature message of the George W. Bush presidency ten years in the future.

The *Draft Defense Planning Guidance* was so radical it provoked a storm of outrage when released to public view. President George H.W. Bush denounced it and immediately retracted it.

But global dominion lived on in the minds of these four determined men—and others in and out of government who shared their retrograde ideology. Two who did so, William Kristol and Robert Kagan, created an organizational home in 1997 for the frustrated neoconservatives. It was called *The Project for the New American Century*, and among the founding members were Richard Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Lewis Libby, and Zalmay Khalilzad.

The spirit of *Defense Planning Guidance* was enshrined in the PNAC "Statement of Principles:" "[We need] a military that is strong and ready to meet both present and future challenges; a

foreign policy that boldly and purposefully promotes American principles abroad; and a national leadership that accepts the United States' global responsibilities. *We need...to challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values.*" (Emphasis added.)

Cheney, Wolfowitz, Libby, and Khalilzad now had a large and growing organization pushing their neoconservatism, and on January 26, 1998 the Project for the New American Century sent a letter to President Clinton. It recited the liturgy of global dominion, and said specifically:

We urge you...to enunciate a new strategy...that should aim above all at the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime from power...We believe the U.S. has the authority under UN Resolutions... [but] in any case American policy cannot be crippled by a misguided...UN Security Council.

The PNAC was urging President Clinton to commit an international crime: the charter of the United Nations expressly prohibits the unprovoked invasion of a sovereign nation. President Clinton wisely ignored the request.

But in September of 2000, nearing the end of the presidential campaign, the PNAC tried again. Hoping to influence a new Administration, it published a detailed prospectus entitled *Rebuilding America's Defenses*, again seeking unquestioned superiority in conventional, nuclear, and space weaponry. The PNAC wanted a radical "transformation" of the existing policy of deterrence into a posture of global military dominance. On page 51 the document noted, with surreal anticipation, the difficulty of achieving the transformation:

"...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."

Here is an oblique reference to international terrorism, a hazard recognized as early as 1992 in *Defense Planning Guidance*, and the concern was not misplaced. In 1998 Osama bin Laden had claimed credit for bombing the U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; President Clinton in response had launched a few cruise missiles into Afghanistan.

Now, just weeks after PNAC's *Rebuilding* document appeared, bin Laden struck again: on October 12, 2000 the *U.S.S. Cole* was bombed in Aden harbor, killing 17 American sailors.

Some people in the lame-duck Clinton Administration wanted immediately to "bomb the hell out of Afghanistan." But the State Department first dispatched Mr. Kabir Mohabbat, a U.S. citizen but a native Afghani, to arrange a meeting with the Taliban.

The parties met November 2, 2000 in the Sheraton Hotel in Frankfurt, Germany. Ambassador William Milam was the U.S. negotiator. To avoid a massive retaliatory bombing, the Taliban eventually offered the unconditional surrender of Osama bin Laden. Or, alternatively, they offered to arrange his execution by targeting him for a U.S. missile.[i]

The chaotic and controversial election of 2000 was underway, however. When it was settled, Ambassador Milam told Mr. Mohabbat the surrender (or assassination) of bin Laden would have to be arranged by the Bush Administration.

Initiating the Wars of Aggression

George Bush was declared President by a Supreme Court decision. Richard Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Lewis Libby, Zalmay Khalilzad, and twenty five other members of the Project for the New American Century joined his Administration, sixteen of them at the highest levels:

Richard Cheney, Vice President; Lewis “Scooter” Libby, Mr. Cheney’s Chief of Staff; Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense; Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense; Steven Cambone, Undersecretary of Defense; Peter Rodman, Assistant Secretary of Defense; Dov Zakheim, Controller, Department of Defense; Abram Shulksy, Chairman, Office of Special Plans, DOD; Richard Perle, Chairman, Defense Policy Board; James Woolsey, member, Defense Policy Board; Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State; Paula Dobriansky, Undersecretary of State; John Bolton, Undersecretary of State; ZalmayKhalilzad, President’s Special Envoy; Elliott Abrams, National Security Council; Robert Zoellick, U.S. Trade Representative

The PNAC’s document, *Rebuilding America’s Defenses*, would have the desired effect: it was codified formally as *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*: global dominion, by pre-emptive war if necessary, became the written policy of the nation.

On January 30, 2001, President Bush convened his National Security Council for an hour-long meeting. It was a triumph for the Project for the New American Century—and certainly for Cheney, Wolfowitz, Libby, and Khalilzad.

The long-standing priority for the Middle East—reconciling the conflict between Israel and Palestine—was abandoned. The overthrow of Saddam Hussein was moved to the top of the foreign policy agenda instead.[ii]

Within ten days of taking office the Bush Administration was committed to the invasion of Iraq.

It would be undertaken not only in pursuit of ideology. There was a conspicuous strategic reason as well: “..access to vital raw materials, primarily Persian Gulf oil,” in the words of the seminal document in 1992, the *Draft Defense Planning Guidance*.

President Bush and Vice President Cheney had close ties to the U.S. oil companies, and so did National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice. So did eight cabinet secretaries and 32 other Bush appointees in the Departments of Defense, State, Agriculture, Energy, Interior, and the Office of Management and Budget.[iii]

The commercial interests of the oil companies were no less effectively represented in the Bush Administration than the anachronistic ideology of the PNAC, and the companies would be served equally as well.

In January President Bush appointed Vice President Cheney to chair a National Energy Policy Development Group.

The “Energy Task Force” as it came to be known was staffed by relevant federal officials and energy industry executives and lobbyists. It operated in extreme secrecy. Its full membership was never revealed, but some corporate members were leaked: Enron, Exxon-Mobil, Shell, Conoco-Phillips, and BP America.

On February 3, 2001, a top-secret National Security Council memo spoke directly about “...actions regarding the capture of new and existing oil and gas fields,”[iv] and throughout that month the Energy Task Force was poring over maps of the Iraqi oil fields, pipelines, refineries, tanker terminals, and undeveloped oil exploration blocks. It studied a two-page list of “Foreign Suitors for Iraqi Oil Field Contracts,” companies that were negotiating with Saddam Hussein as of March 5, 2001. Not a single one was a major American or British oil company.[v]

During its first weeks in office, then, the Bush Administration programmed the invasion of Iraq, with its oil fields in the crosshairs. Still on the president’s desk, however, was the Taliban’s offer to surrender Osama bin Laden.

Kabbir Mohabbat was retained as a consultant to the National Security Council, but received no immediate assignment. Instead he was given a copy of a letter the Administration had sent to the Taliban: the new government was still “settling in,” and wished to postpone the handover.[vi]

This was the first refusal of the Bush Administration to take custody of Osama bin Laden. There would be four more, two prior to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and two more immediately thereafter.

Coming in Part Two: designing the “capture of new and existing oil fields in Iraq;” pursuing pipeline aspirations in Afghanistan.

Notes.

[i] See, “How Bush Was Offered bin Laden and Blew It,” by Jeffrey St. Clair and Alexander Cockburn, *Counterpunch*, November 1, 2004; “Bush Rejects Taliban Offer to Hand bin Laden Over,” *UK Guardian Unlimited*, October 14, 2001; and “Bush Rejects Taliban Offer to Surrender bin Laden,” *UK Independent*, October 15, 2001

[ii] The NSC meeting is described in Ron Suskind’s book, *The Price of Loyalty*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 2004.

[iii] See, “Crude Alliance,” by Jeffrey St. Clair, *Counterpunch* March 9-11, 2007.

[iv] See, “Contract Sport,” by Jane Mayer, *New Yorker* magazine, issue 23, February 16, 2004.

[v] The maps and documents were pried into the public domain by a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit brought by Judicial Watch. The Administration appealed the suit all the way to the Supreme Court. They can be seen here.

[vi] See St. Clair and Cockburn, “How Bush Was Offered bin Laden and Blew It” above.