

# Downside UP

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## **Invasion of Iraq: As the Tide of Truth Rolled In, The Bushies Rushed to War**

Think about this:



Three years ago, in March of 2003, the Bush White House rushed to invade Iraq not because it was convinced there were weapons of mass destruction but precisely because by then it knew there were not.



Three years ago, in March of 2003, the Bush White House rushed to invade Iraq not because it was convinced that there were weapons of mass destruction, not even in careless disregard for whether there were weapons of mass destruction, but precisely because by then it knew there were no weapons of mass destruction.

The Bush White House decided three years ago to invade Iraq not because it was by then convinced that there were weapons of mass destruction, not because of "faulty intelligence," not in careless disregard for whether there were weapons of mass destruction, and certainly not because it feared rising summer temperatures would severely impact US personnel and equipment. The Bush White House rushed to war because it knew there were no weapons of mass destruction.

By early 2003, the cabal of lower-level Reagan-Bush I radical interventionists who came to power under George Bush II were growing increasingly restive. They came to power intent on transforming 50 years of internationalist US foreign policy, and Iraq was their instrument. But now, United Nations' inspection teams under Hans Blix were proving what the Bushies already knew: there were no weapons of mass destruction. The Bush II radicals had long known Saddam Hussein's Iraq had no role in 9/11. Now their back-up rationale for invasion -- finding weapons of mass destruction -- was about to be exposed for the sham it was. Without WMD's, their opportunity to transform the Middle East in their image would disappear. They needed to act and act soon before the truth was clearly out. To hell with Colin Powell, the French and the Germans. Their long hoped for invasion of Iraq would have to begin now.

Do I know all the above is exactly true? Maybe not, though the just exposed additional details of George Bush's meetings with Tony Blair lend further credence to what I was already drafting four weeks ago. How much more the above account explains than do the confusing, ever-changing, false, and contradictory explanations that have come out of a secretive White House over the past three years. Most of all, only this account explains the incredible rush to invade so soon in 2003 when there was no honest reason not to give Blix enough time to prove there were WMD's. At worst, the invasion could have waited until fall and nothing would have been lost; with US and British over-flights and bombings, Saddam was in no position to attack anyone.

The Bush II White House did not wait to build a broad-based alliance like Bush I built for the 1990-91 Gulf War because they knew that it was precisely waiting itself which would reveal the truth and make any such alliance impossible.

### **Background to Invasion**

Coming to power in January of 2001, George Bush brought with him a group of radical interventionists intent on transforming American foreign policy from its long-standing bi-partisan, internationalist base arising out of World War II and the Allied defeat of Germany. For Americans, the most important symbol of this internationalist policy, which itself was a reversal of previous narrowly-conceived nationalist policy, is the Marshall Plan, created by the United States.<sup>1</sup> But the policy

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<sup>1</sup> US foreign policy before World War II is typically described as "isolationist," but the United States never isolated itself from the world; what it did was operate on its own terms without much regard for other nations. Sound familiar?

was in fact part of a broad-based Euro-American effort which created the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United Nations, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Much of this policy was self-interested: The United States was now clearly the world's economic powerhouse but if the rest of the world was in chaos, there would be no one to buy the products of American industrial dominance. The economic system would be fundamentally capitalist; socialism need not apply. Containing communism underlay all the policies of both Democratic and Republican governments. Yet the vision was much more than veiled imperialism. It was enlightened self-interest, a plan for peace under the umbrella of open markets, capitalism, and democracy. It was in a way the international counterpart to Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal domestic policies creating a new American capitalist system to balance the interests of capitalists, workers, and consumers. The vision was of cooperation, conciliation, and compromise superceding conflict.

We know what the New Right Republican intelligentsia thinks of the Rooseveltian vision of domestic policy. It is less well known how much Bush foreign policy is also an extreme counter-reaction to the bi-partisan consensus which had come to guide United States foreign policy over the previous 45 years. Neither is it well understood how much even Ronald Reagan accepted the broad outlines of this policy. He may have played politics with the invasion of Grenada, undertaken a terrorist war on Nicaragua, and beat his chest about the Soviet Union's evil empire, but all this was as much about domestic politics as foreign policy. The United States has always seen Latin America more as a colony than a partner. Beyond the hemisphere, as he did in domestic policy, Reagan compromised with foes as well as allies and signed nuclear non-proliferation and ballistic missile treaties with the Soviet Union itself.

It was to this world that George Bush II brought a group of radical unilateralists who had held lower level positions in the Reagan-Bush I (and even the Nixon) era, but now came to the top under George II. Led by Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, this group would bring Latin American policy to the world, laying out a new American World Order.<sup>2</sup> They had already laid out their vision in a 1992 Defense Department report quickly suppressed by what this group undoubtedly saw as a weak-kneed Bush I government which failed to overthrow Saddam Hussein after the Gulf War. The vision was there in a September 2000 report of the Project for the New American Century. It is as clear as can be in the unilateralism and preemption of Bush's National Security Strategy, the official policy of the United States published on September 20 of 2002.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> My personal favorite not often talked about as part of Bush II's radical foreign policy cohort is John Negroponte. Negroponte, as ambassador to Honduras, ran the terrorist Contra War against Nicaragua in the 1980's -- a war in which 50,000 Nicaraguans -- 1/60<sup>th</sup> of the population -- died. Under Bush, he has moved from US Ambassador to the United Nations, to US Ambassador to Iraq, to Director of National Intelligence. He is so controversial that Bush made him a "recess" appointee rather than have him face Congressional hearings. As a recess appointee, he can stay in office through Congress's next session (now in session). His being in charge certainly gives me a lot of confidence that my privacy and my person are safe!

<sup>3</sup> And confirmed in the just-released 2006 version, J.D. Crouch, Deputy National Security Advisor, "Press Briefing on the National Security Strategy," [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), March 16, 2006.

The United States under Bush II would forsake the weak-kneed policies of not just Bill Clinton and Bush I but all of the presidents going back long before even Franklin Roosevelt.<sup>4</sup> Now that the Soviet Union was gone and the United States the only world power, the latter would assume its rightful role appropriate to its power. Cooperation and compromise might be useful tools at times, but nation-building, bipartisanship, and conciliation were out. The United States had the power and should use it to make the world not in its image but its service. If you weren't with us, you were against us. Shoot first and ask questions later. Unilateralism and preemptive strikes were in. The United Nations above all else was out.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Cabinet War Room**

Afghanistan had always been a side matter to the Bush team. Their plan was to finish Daddy's war and remake the Middle East by military force. Only a fool or a liar can any longer pretend that the Bush regime had not been talking about invading Iraq from the day they came into office. The idea that the Bush regime was forced reluctantly into invading Iraq is one of those "king-has-no-clothes"/we-can't-call-the-president-a-liar games which Republicans, Democrats, and the media have long been playing. The general blueprint is in the documents cited above and dating back at least as far as 1992. The radicals have not been shy about their views since Bush's election. And try as Bush's character assassin squads have tried to impugn the testimony of former Secretary of the Treasurer Paul O'Neill and former National Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism Richard Clarke, their words ring true with little basis for questioning their motivation.

Clarke, who served under both Reagan and Bush I, and who was held over by Bill Clinton and then again by Bush II, began warning about the terrorism threat from al Qaeda in the first days of the Bush II Government. On January 24, 2001, right after Bush II's inauguration, he wrote Condoleezza Rice asking urgently for a Cabinet-level meeting to deal with an impending al Qaeda attack. When he got a meeting three months later, it was with second level people, including Wolfowitz who was only interested in Iraq terrorism. Neither then nor after 9/11 would anyone listen either to his, the CIA's, or the FBI's protestations that an al Qaeda attack was imminent and there had been no Iraqi terrorism against the United States in eight years.<sup>6</sup> Far from listening to Clarke, Bush II downgraded Clarke's position as Counter-Terrorism Coordinator from the Cabinet level it had held under Clinton.

Clarke testifies that after 9/11, all Rumsfeld could talk about was bombing Iraq. Bush II, Clarke says, ignored terrorism for months after his inauguration and after 9/11 pressed hard – really hard – for evidence that Iraq was responsible: "The president dragged me into a room with a couple of other people, shut the door, and said, 'I want you to find whether Iraq did this.' Now he never said, 'Make it up.' But the entire conversation left me in absolutely no doubt that George Bush wanted me to come back with a report that said Iraq did this." Only thing is that he came back not only without that report but a report, backed by the CIA and the FBI, that there was no evidence of an Iraqi role in 9/11.

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<sup>4</sup> I can make a case for Republicans Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover in the 1920's as the founders of internationalism in American foreign policy.

<sup>5</sup> I like to call these doctrines the Israelification of American foreign policy. The latest manifestation of it is the "war against terrorism"'s predilection for killing tens and hundreds in order, maybe, to get one, probably bad, guy.

<sup>6</sup> For this information and the quoted material below, see "Clarke's Take On Terror," [www.cbsnews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com), March 21, 2004. Also, Clarke's book, [Against All Enemies](#).

Everyone who resigns or is fired from a position and then writes some kind of exposé is readily accused of sour grapes. Clarke is accused of that because his office was demoted -- or indeed because he supposedly failed to warn the president of the 9/11 attack! The latter is ridiculous; the former would be plausible if the president had appointed someone else rather than downgraded the position itself.

Similarly, Paul O'Neill is portrayed as a wacko loud-mouth who failed because he wasn't a team player. But I knew something of O'Neill long before he was appointed. I had been impressed by a Business Week article about him as the CEO of Alcoa. He was known then as "outspoken," meaning he tended to tell the truth, or what he saw as the truth, sometimes to the embarrassment of his fellow CEO's. I remember especially his talking about the problems of workers and how corporations were screwing them. Then, under the second George Bush, he dared to question the second round of tax cuts for the rich at a time when the budget was ballooning out of control after 9/11: "'It was not just about not wanting the tax cut. It was about how to use the nation's resources to improve the condition of our society,' says O'Neill." "'And I thought the weight of working on Social Security and fundamental tax reform was a lot more important than a tax reduction.'"<sup>7</sup> Let's elect him president!

O'Neill gave Ron Suskind 19,000 documents for Suskind's book, The Price of Loyalty. For this solid Republican who served in both the Reagan and Ford administrations, the Bush II bunch simply went too far. George W. Bush's Cabinet was a war room from day one:

"From the very beginning, there was a conviction, that Saddam Hussein was a bad person and that he needed to go," says O'Neill, who adds that going after Saddam was topic "A" 10 days after the inauguration - eight months before Sept. 11. "From the very first instance, it was about Iraq. It was about what we can do to change this regime," says Suskind. "Day one, these things were laid and sealed." As treasury secretary, O'Neill was a permanent member of the National Security Council. He says in [Suskind's] book he was surprised at the meeting that questions such as "Why Saddam?" and "Why now?" were never asked.

"It was all about finding a way to do it. That was the tone of it. The president saying 'Go find me a way to do this,'" says O'Neill. "For me, the notion of pre-emption, that the U.S. has the unilateral right to do whatever we decide to do, is a really huge leap." And that came up at this first meeting, says O'Neill, who adds that the discussion of Iraq continued at the next National Security Council meeting two days later.

He got briefing materials under this cover sheet. "There are memos. One of them marked, secret, says, 'Plan for post-Saddam Iraq,'" adds Suskind, who says that they discussed an occupation of Iraq in January and February of 2001. Based on his interviews with O'Neill and several other officials at the meetings, Suskind writes that the planning envisioned peacekeeping troops, war crimes tribunals, and even divvying up Iraq's oil wealth. He obtained one Pentagon document, dated March 5, 2001, and entitled "Foreign Suitors for Iraqi Oilfield contracts," which includes a map of potential areas for exploration. "It talks about contractors around the world from, you know, 30-40 countries. And which ones have what intentions," says Suskind. "On oil in Iraq."

Describing the aftermath of his report to the President on 9/11 and Iraq, Clarke comments, "I have no idea, to this day, if the president saw it, because after we did it again, it came to the same conclusion. And frankly, I don't think the people around the president show him memos like that. I don't think he sees memos that he doesn't-- wouldn't like the answer." O'Neill says in turn, "that the president did not

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<sup>7</sup> See "Bush Sought 'Way' To Invade Iraq?," [www.cbsnews.com](http://www.cbsnews.com), January 11, 2004, and The Price of Loyalty by Ron Suskind for this and related material quoted below.

make decisions in a methodical way: there was no free-flow of ideas or open debate. At cabinet meetings, he says the president was 'like a blind man in a roomful of deaf people. There is no discernible connection."

The Bush Government's problem was never faulty intelligence nor even an absence of planning. It wasn't that they were so committed that they convinced themselves they were right. They knew they were wrong about Iraq's role in 9/11 and knew they were wrong about WMD's.

### **The Best Laid Plans**

Meanwhile, Saddam Hussein had been pursuing his own plan to avoid his overthrow. He conceived a ruse. The Bush I/Clinton policy of embargo, over-flights, and bombings convinced him that he had to eliminate any legitimate basis for the UN, NATO, or the United States invading or overthrowing him. That meant destroying his weapons of mass destruction. But to save face and veil his weakness, he pretended that he still had them – or might have them. First he would let the UN inspectors in the country and then he would kick them out. He would show documentation of WMD destruction and then refuse to show more. While constantly denying that he had WMD's, he acted as if he did and was hiding them. The next best thing to having WMD's was pretending to have WMD's.

And Saddam's plan was working. The new imperialists in the Bush White House had decided to invade Iraq sometime, somehow, and 9/11 had given them their excuse. But they were running into problems. Richard Clarke, the CIA, the FBI: all of them were denying any Iraqi involvement in 9/11. Even under extreme pressure to give the White House the evidence it wanted, there was none. That was when the White House conspirators turned to WMD's and that pesky Hans Blix got in their way. Not even his inspection teams with surprise visits to suspected WMD sites could find anything. The conspirators first tried their usual smear tactics branding him incompetent. Fox News joined in. But France, Germany, and other allies were waiting for evidence. Not only did it appear that Blix was not going to find any WMD's; it was looking like there actually weren't any!<sup>8</sup> The new imperialists were going to have to act fast before it was obvious that they had been wrong all along.

Saddam's strategy was based on the assumption that he was playing with the old crowd of internationalists who worked with allies and waited for evidence before acting. Saddam assumed that no one would invade unless they actually found WMD's and he figured he could play his game until he wore out NATO, the UN, and the U.S.

Big mistake. He didn't reckon on the new radicals in the White House. They didn't care about evidence except when it got in the way of what they wanted to do. So one bad guy's plan ran into other bad guys' plans. The first guy's plan worked better until the other guys' proved even bolder.

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<sup>8</sup> The political right in the United States has been mad at the United Nations for years. They usually cover their rage with talk about incompetence and corruption. But the real reason is that the UN gets in the way of what the United States wants to do. This time the anger is compounded because the UN was right and there is nothing more reprehensible than the other guy being right. That's all the French and the Germans did too: ask that the United States wait to determine whether Saddam had WMD's or not.

The rush to war explains why there was no plan in place for what to do after the invasion. There was no occupation plan. No nation-building plan. No exit strategy. This was not because the war hawks did not think it was important or had not been talking about it. It was probably not even that they were so ignorant or foolish to believe that the people would rise up in unison, come together, and establish a harmonious new democracy serving as a model for the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> The problem was they were rushed by events.

Most readers looking back to early 2003 can probably remember that, aside from the alleged risk of Hussein using his WMD's, the official US explanation for invading before Blix had a chance to complete his inspections was that summer was coming and Iraq's intense weather represented a risk to US personnel and equipment. While at first seemingly plausible, this explanation was the problem President Jimmy Carter had in April, 1980, with his hostage rescue attempt, and, as the Iraq war confirmed, with 23 years to work on it (!), the US military had solved the problem. The weather rationale was just another deceit to cover up the real objectives -- and the lies -- of the war hawks. The real problem now was the pre-emptive unilateralists' own dishonesty, arrogance, and, by early 2003, the fading opportunity to implement their great foreign policy experiment.

### **The Tragedy of Arrogance**

Saddam Hussein's Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11. Secular Iraq was the antithesis of al Qaeda. 9/11 was a brilliantly planned and executed demonstration project for al Qaeda's ability to strike the United States. But when the plan to fly planes into the greatest symbols of US power, killing maybe a few hundred, morphed into a total meltdown of the two World Trade Center towers and the death of thousands, no one could have been more surprised than Osama Bin Laden and his cohorts.

If 9/11 seemed like a sign from God for the radical Islamist hate-mongers of the Muslim world, it was no less a revelation for the radical foreign policy advocates around George W. Bush. Here was their long-awaited opportunity for a pre-emptive strike against Iraq. This was their opportunity to insert the United States into the heart of the Middle East, create, along with Israel, a second pillar of US power there, and remake the world. Now, no one would get in their way. No truth-telling husband of a CIA agent. No CIA or FBI. No wimpy, internationalist, honorable ex-general Secretary of State. No pesky Congress. No peace-loving Jimmy Carter Democrats. No cautious allies. No effete French sissies or pinko Germans. No multi-lingual, multi-cultural, Scandinavian methodical scientist talking about evidence.

They would do what they had to in Afghanistan and then, as fast as they could, redirect the focus of US power to Iraq.

What else would we expect from a president who barely reads, shuns the free exchange of ideas, and so much hates to be told bad news that no one will tell it to him. What else would we expect from a president who believes all his actions reflect God's will, who believes there is only one meaning to God's Word and he knows what that meaning is, who believes that only people who believe in God through Jesus as

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<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, cultural wastelands that the new imperialists are, they were totally incapable of seeing what would happen. Just as with Katrina, there were plenty of us who said out-loud that it was a big mistake. It was no such thing as "something no one could have foreseen."

he believes will be saved when the world comes to an end in a great apocalypse.<sup>10</sup> What else would we expect from a president who is so insecure, been so silver-spoon coddled, and allowed so often to shirk the consequences of his actions that he cannot admit to any mistake -- and has done so only recently and vaguely because it was politically expedient to do so. Our leadership is as blindly fundamentalist as any of the fundamentalists we denounce.

The tragedy of this arrogant Iraqi misadventure is that more people, almost all Iraqis, died in the first few hours of the invasion than died in 9/11, and hundreds of thousands – millions -- more have suffered, and will as a result, suffer death, dismemberment, loss of homes and livelihood, loss of family and friends. Who yet knows what kind of civil war or government just as tyrannical as Saddam Hussein's will yet come to rule. It is not ludicrous to see the United States as the world's primary sponsor of terrorism.

Between 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq, we bathed in the sympathy and blessing of most people around the world, even those with whom we have often been in conflict. We intervened in Afghanistan with many allies and the support of most of the countries of the world. Since invading Iraq, we have lost all that goodwill and billions more people think ill of the United States today than before 9/11. We have made enemies of friends and bitter enemies of opponents. We are seen as a nation of arrogance and cultural narrow-mindedness. In support of our cause we make alliances with governments as undemocratic and authoritarian -- or worse -- than Saddam Hussein's ever was. It is ludicrous to deny that we are far less safe as a nation and a people than we were before the invasion of Iraq.

At home, in turn, the war we started "to fight terrorism and preserve democracy and freedom" has become the rationale for endless encroachments on our own democracy and freedom. Giant data bases track much more than ever our movements, email, telephone calls, and financial transactions. Not only foreigners but American citizens have been jailed without charges and without trial – fundamental violations of the Constitution which makes no distinction between foreigners and citizens. We have taken people to other countries to deliberately remove them from the jurisdiction and Constitutional protections of US courts and thereby subject them to torture by "friendly" countries without such protections. We have allowed our own military to torture prisoners in violation of all international standards. George W. Bush himself has authorized unconstitutional surveillance of citizens without court orders and in direct violation of the law.

Today, all the same people who got us in this mess are still in power. And they are just as arrogant, just as ignorant, and just as dangerous as they were in 2003. The just-released 2006 version of our National Security Strategy "builds on the foundation of the National Security Strategy that was released in 2002" and still advocates preemption as justified whenever the United States – that is the president

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<sup>10</sup> Numerous second-hand reports have appeared in such publications as Wikipedia, National Public Radio, and The New York Times quoting Bush as telling some Amish people during his 2004 reelection campaign that "I trust God speaks through me. Without that, I couldn't do my job." An apparently direct source on the spot comes from Jack Brubaker, Lancaster New Era/"Lancaster On-Line," [www.informationclearinghouse.com](http://www.informationclearinghouse.com), July 16, 2004.

-- decides such aggression is in its best interest.<sup>11</sup> It is not at all crazy for many people at home and abroad to see the United States – not Iran, not Cuba, not North Korea – as the world’s most truly rogue nation and the greatest threat to world peace.

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**Ronald Woodbury** is the publisher, editor, and general flunkey for all of Downside Up. While publication benefits from the editorial advice of one of his daughters, a friend, and occasional other pre-publication readers, they will, for their own privacy and sanity, remain anonymous. The web spinner's name is also best left anonymous.

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<sup>11</sup> “I think if you look at the discussion of preemption and -- in the document, you'll see that it's very consistent with the lay down that was in the 2002 document,” J.D. Crouch, Deputy National Security Advisor, “Press Briefing on the National Security Strategy,” [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).