



Common Sense



News Round-Up

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Bush to Double Iraq Spending

The President has requested an additional funding request for over \$80 billion for the reconstruction of Iraq just as declassified intelligence shows that Bush was warned of major post-war resistance. This will bring spending on Iraq to well over \$150 billion so far and will bring the federal deficit over half a trillion dollars. With few in Washington willing to contest that Iraq was an immanent threat, many are increasingly critical of what is viewed as an "elective war", as well as the President's reluctance to share authority in order to share the financial burden. The President's recent proposal for a new UN mandate has been largely rejected by UN members already for giving too little and expecting too much.

See *USA Today*, September 8, 2003
Judy Keen

Ashcroft Facing GOP Criticism

Several leading Republican law-makers and organizations have become increasingly vocal in their concerns about the extent of John Ashcroft's expanded powers as attorney general. Ashcroft's support has slipped below 50% in polls. Critics argue that the repercussions of Ashcroft's powers, including those granted in the Patriot Act, have been largely obscured by the secrecy in which the powers are used.

See *MSNBC*, August 29, 2003

Touted Texas Education Figures Found to be Fraudulent

A staple of Bush's election campaign was his record on education in Texas, particularly in Houston. But the outstandingly low dropout rates Bush referred to (the "Texas Miracle") have been found to be drastically misstated, and in reality reflect a level worse than the national average. Rod Paige, who was in charge of producing these figures in Houston, has since been named the Secretary of Education. Both Paige and Bush have refused to comment.

See *Washington Post*, September 4, 2003
Richard Cohen, A21

Soldiers' Moms Protest White House

A group of mothers of soldiers in Iraq plans to protest at the White House demanding that George W. Bush "bring the troops home". There protest also coincides with administration rollbacks in active military pay, deep cuts in veterans' affairs, and the lengthening active duty terms a full year. "The new deployment policy...is already prompting concerns by troops and their advocates, who said uncertainty about the length of deployments can have a highly negative impact on morale."

See *Washington Post*, September 9, 2003
Vernon Loeb & Steve Vogel, A1

False WMD Tips From Iraqi Defectors Suspected

Much of the most persuasive evidence regarding Iraq's WMD program was provided by Iraqi defectors such as Ahmed Chalabi, who have enjoyed the favor of the Pentagon. The credibility of such defectors has been consistently snubbed by the State Department and the CIA, but when those agencies did not produce the analysis Rumsfeld hoped for, he formed the highly secretive Office of Special Plans, which manipulated the claims of the defectors into a more "imaginative" case for war.

See *LA Times*, August 28, 2003

Gas Prices Hit Record High

Largely as a result of turmoil in the Middle East, average gas prices have hit an all time high of \$1.74 per gallon. In some locations on the West Coast the price has surpassed \$2.00 per gallon.

See *USA Today* August 26, 2003

Bush Election Reforms Vulnerable to Manipulation

Bush's controversial election reform plan has come under increased criticism in the media for relying on private voting machine companies that have displayed overt political bias in favor of the administration. The president of one such company stated "We are committed to helping Ohio deliver its electoral votes to the president next year". The reform package also requires all states to adopt practices used in Florida which have already been condemned by the state Supreme Court.

See *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 28, 2003

Poll: Iraq War Made US "Less Safe"

A Rasmussen Reports poll finds that 41% of Americans believe they are less safe as a result of the war, with only 39% saying they are safer. Less than half of Americans rated Bush's performance in Iraq favorably. The polls come at a time where other studies have recently found that only 45% support Bush's reelection, with 54% against.

See *WorldNetDaily* August 28, 2003

70% of Americans Falsely Believe Saddam Behind 9/11

A Washington Post poll found that 70% of Americans believe Saddam Hussein was behind the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, despite a complete lack of evidence and recent admissions from administration officials including Paul Wolfowitz that the connection did not exist. The administration continues to juxtapose Hussein and Al Qaeda in a way that many blame for this widespread misconception.

See *Washington Post*, September 6, 2003
Dana Milbank and Claudia Deane, A1

In Afghanistan Bush Rhetoric Does Not Match Reality

As the administration has contended that Afghanistan remains under control, in reality the country is largely in anarchy and many on the ground worry that it is once again on the brink of brutal civil war between Warlords. The Taliban has reconstituted its central command, and attacks on US troops have escalated into full-scale battles recently. Lawmakers have stated that the area bordering Pakistan has been particularly tumultuous.

Payrolls Cut 93,000 Jobs in August

The "jobless recovery" escalated from the previous month (when 43,000 jobs were cut from payrolls). On Capitol Hill concern is growing that trillions in deficits are being incurred with little or no benefit to the working people of America. A recent study found that between one and two million jobs lost under Bush are gone for good.

See *Washington Post*, *New York Times*

Opinion

Blood Oil, and Tears

And The 2004 Bush Campaign Strategy – *Thom Hartmann*

The two words we never hear in the corporate media's discussion of Iraq are "oil" and "nationalism." Yet these are the keys to understanding why we got into Iraq, why we only want "limited" involvement from the U.N., why we won't succeed in stopping attacks against us in Iraq, and why George W. Bush's crony capitalism and aircraft-carrier-landing phony-warrior drama have so terribly harmed our nation and set up a disaster for our children's generation.

If we stay, we'll continue to control ten percent of the world's oil (and perhaps as much as twenty percent - Iraq still has vast unexplored areas that Cheney was dividing up in his pre-9/11 Energy Task Force meetings with Halliburton and Enron). Maintaining control of Iraq's oil will keep OPEC off balance, and will keep faith with Rupert Murdoch's advice to George W. Bush before the war that cheap oil resulting from seizing Iraq's oil fields would help the American economy more than any tax cuts.

(Actually, we should stop calling our invasion of Iraq a "war" - we'd already crippled the nation with 12 years of attacks and sanctions, and then sent the UN in to verify that they were helpless. It's like beating somebody senseless on the street, breaking both their legs with a baseball bat, blindfolding them, and then challenging them to fight. This was an invasion, not a war.) Thus, keeping control of Iraq's oil will help us keep our SUVs and keep faith with Poppy Bush's famous dictum that "the American lifestyle is not negotiable." And transferring the money from Iraq's oil to large corporations that heavily support Republican candidates has obvious benefits to those currently in control of the White House, Senate, House, and Supreme Court.

But let's consider the future. Our occupation troops are mostly European-, Hispanic-, and African-American-ancestry Christians in an Arab Muslim land that suffered during the Crusades. Thus, we will continue to draw thousands of Jihadists who find it infinitely easier to travel to Iraq than New York, and our presence will continue to inflame nationalists passions just as the British did in their failed venture in Iraq nearly a century ago. And George W. Bush will probably lose the 2004 election, unless he can divert our attention by ginning up a war somewhere else within 13 months.

On the other hand, if we declare victory and leave Iraq to its warlords and zealots (as we've done in almost all of Afghanistan except the city of Kabul), we'll lose access to all that oil, re-empower OPEC, further drive up domestic gasoline prices, and leave Iraq either as a warlord-dominated state

like Afghanistan, a cleric-dominated state like Iran, or a strongman-dominated state like...well...Iraq was before we arrived. And it'll cost Arnold more to run his Hummer.

Adding insult to injury, every tinpot dictator in the world will figure there's little downside in thumbing his nose at the United States, and, unless he can gin up a war somewhere else within 13 months (or once again fail to prevent another 9/11-type attack, God forbid), George W. Bush will probably lose the 2004 election.

August of 2003 brought two milestones that flow directly from the invasion: the U.S. national deficit reached an all time high, surpassing for the first time in history the previous all-time record held by President G.H.W. Bush; and the price of gasoline hit an all-time high, surpassing the previous record held by President G.W. Bush.

A small part of the deficit is related to the cost of the Iraq invasion and occupation, and roughly 70 percent of the positive uptick in the last quarter's economic activity was from payments to defense contractors for the invasion itself (private for-profit Republican-supporting companies get about a third of all the money we're spending every month in Iraq). Profits from the occupation help Halliburton, but don't create many jobs in Peoria.

Similarly, while the price of gasoline is high in part because we've been slow to pump Iraq's oil (mostly because of looting and sabotage), it'll go even higher if we turn the administration of the oil over to a UN consortium. Every other industrialized nation in the world is aggressively working to cut reliance on oil and is ready for higher crude oil prices; the US under the Bush administration and their corporate cronies has put forth, instead, an energy policy that requires increasing amounts of foreign oil imports and will be a disaster to our nation in the face of sustained high oil prices or oil shortages. At least Bush/Cheney knew where they'd get the oil to fuel their National Energy Policy. Documents pried by a Judicial Watch lawsuit against the Cheney energy task force meetings (http://www.judicialwatch.org/071703.c_.html) show that Cheney and his buddies from Enron and other energy companies had drawn up maps of Iraq's oil fields and made lists of potential corporate purchasers of Iraqi oil - all months before 9/11/01.

These former oil industry executives know their priorities. When George W. Bush spoke on national television to announce the start of "war" against Iraq, he looked into the camera and asked to speak directly to the Iraqi people. He could have appealed to their nationalism, and asked them to join our soldiers (or at least not shoot at them) in toppling Saddam. He could have appealed to their knowledge of the peaceful side of Islam and asked them to go to their mosques, which we would protect from bombing, and pray for a quick resolution of the conflict. He could have apologized in advance for the death and destruction he was about to unleash on their land, that would kill many times more innocent

civilians than died in the World Trade Center, and promise that the US would do our best to make it good after the war.

But these were not the things on Bush's mind. Instead, he said, "And all Iraqi military and civilian personnel should listen carefully to this warning. In any conflict, your fate will depend on your action. Do not destroy oil wells..."

Corporations that contribute heavily to Republican campaign coffers are now firmly in control of Iraq's oil and have started taking payment for reconstruction and supply that will amount to billions of US tax dollars. It's unlikely these multinational corporations (many of them allowed by the Republicans in Congress to reincorporate in Bermuda to avoid US taxes) will look kindly on efforts to turn control of Iraq and its oil over to the United Nations or an Arab-led consortium, even if it will mean stability in the region and will save the lives of U.S. servicemen and servicewomen, and Iraqi civilians caught in the crossfire.

If Bush turns the oil and the reconstruction bonanza over to the UN, he could lose millions in campaign contributions, and Cheney's company Halliburton, which lost \$498 million last year but just reported (July 31) a \$26 million profit, may go back to losing so much money it can't continue the million-dollar-a-year payoff he's still receiving.

George W. Bush confronts one of the most difficult choices of his life: Should he turn Iraq over to the UN and thus save the lives of our men and women in uniform, but lose the oil, the campaign cash, and probably the election? Or should he keep our troops in Iraq to protect Halliburton, Bechtel, and his other Republican corporate campaign donors, skim millions in campaign cash out of the billions these friendly corporations are being paid by American taxpayers, and hope all that money can buy enough commercials to make Americans forget about the price of gasoline, growing Iraqi nationalism, and the resulting coffins returning to America on a daily basis.

Or maybe there's a third option. If the American media keep ignoring the oil, don't report on Bush's unwillingness to attend GI funerals (he'd rather take a month-long vacation and play golf), and continue to overlook the obvious connections between Iraqi nationalism and dead Americans, Bush could repeat his very successful political strategy from the middle of the fall 2002 election campaign that threw the Senate into Republican hands. He could simply declare his intention to start another war mid-2004, stimulating anti-war protests and dividing Americans, and then again use that division to paint Democrats with a yellow brush.

Which will it be? Only Karl Rove knows for sure. But whichever way it goes, you can bet American taxpayers and soldiers will pay the bill in cash and blood, and democracy will be the weaker for it.