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September 14, 2003

The crusade against 'terrorism'

Bush and his handlers are not protecting Americans by pursuing the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, they are protecting their own political skins

By [ERIC MARGOLIS](#) -- Contributing Foreign Editor



NEW YORK -- "If at first you don't succeed, lie and lie again" seems to be the watchword of the floundering Bush administration.

First, it was the ultimate evils, bin Laden and Mullah Omar. When they couldn't be found, evil forces "that hate our freedoms." Then Saddam's nuclear weapons, anthrax, mustard, and nerve gas, "drones of death," mobile germ labs, and links to al-Qaida, etc.

Now, in the latest change of sales pitch, the president insists his war on terrorism equals Iraq.

According to Bushthink, any Iraqi opposing U.S. occupying forces is a "terrorist." Ergo, growing Iraqi nationalist resistance will inevitably mean Bush's signature "war on terrorism" will be a growth industry.

Like the gigantic Enron swindle, it's a huge bubble, inflated by false claims and calculated deception.

Straining credulity even farther, the president claimed that waging war in Iraq and Afghanistan would spare America from another 9/11 that might otherwise happen at any moment - though Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11.

It was the duty of the world community, Bush proclaimed, to "share the burden of occupation" of Iraq and Afghanistan - which the White House finally admitted will total at least \$166 billion US for this year and next, an astronomical sum that could buy 39 nuclear-powered aircraft carriers. By the end of 2004, Bush's wars could amount to 30% of the total cost of the equally misbegotten 17-year Vietnam War.

Clever rebranding

By cleverly rebranding the invasion of Iraq as the essential part of his crusade against terrorism, Bush and his handlers were clearly counting on their core supporters in middle America to have short memories and a weak grasp of foreign geography and nomenclature.

They are probably right: recent polls confirm 2/3 of confused Americans still

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believe the nonsense, promoted by the White House and neo-conservatives, that Iraq was behind the 9/11 attacks.

This example of how the White House shamelessly exploited the confusion and ignorance of many Americans about world affairs recalls another famous quote.

Reich Marshall Hermann Goering at the Nuremberg trial: "The people can always be brought to the bidding of leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the peacemakers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country." Indeed.

In an astounding about-face, the Bush administration is now begging "old" Europe, led by those "cheese-eating surrender monkeys" - as Bush's know-nothing supporters called France - and the "irrelevant" UN to send troops and money to Iraq. In Europe, so long abused and slandered by Bush and his supporters, the plaintive request was greeted by sneers.

France's conservative Le Figaro headlined White House pleas for help as "Saving Private Bush."

Congress, terrified of being branded "unpatriotic," will go along with this monumental political and economic folly. While America's economy sags and its states plunge deep in the red, George Bush plans to spend in short order almost as much to wage a hugely expensive colonial war in chaotic Iraq, as the cost of the post-WWII Marshall Plan.

Bush and his handlers are not protecting Americans by pursuing the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, they are protecting their own political skins.

These twin foreign misadventures are a historic geopolitical, military and economic blunder. Europeans repeatedly warned against invading Iraq. So did genuine Mideast experts, who were dismissed as pro-Arab or, like this writer, as "friends of Saddam." The mushrooming disaster was totally predictable and avoidable.

Absurd claims

It defies understanding how the many intelligent men and women in the Bush administration believed their own absurd claims about the danger posed by Iraq, and stuck America in the worst mess since Vietnam. Mind you, chief "whiz kid" Robert McNamara, the architect of the Vietnam disaster, was also noted for his intellect, as is his heir, Donald Rumsfeld. "Brilliant" VP Dick Cheney actually claimed last spring that Saddam Hussein had nuclear weapons. In Washington, arrogance and ignorance too often combined.

Shockingly, Congress's budget office just reported the U.S. will run short of troops in Iraq by spring. Almost half of U.S. Army combat units are tied down in Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan. That's why Bush is trying to bribe or browbeat nations like Turkey, India and Pakistan into sending cannon-fodder troops to Iraq, and force rich Europe to pay part of the bill.

Grand chutzpah

But asking other nations to "share the burden" of an unprovoked invasion of another country takes grand chutzpah.

Aggression is not a burden, it's a crime under the UN Charter. The Bush administration did not invade Iraq to perform social work but to grab its vast oil reserves.

Bush's demand that Third World UN troops serve under orders of American officers

is a further insult to the United Nations and will reinforce the belief of those who attacked its Baghdad HQ that the organization is merely a cat's paw of Washington. What Bush should do is declare victory and bring U.S. troops home. Now. Save \$166 billion and many, many lives. It's still not too late to climb out of the swamp.



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