

# War on Iraq



The Mega-Lie Called the "War on Terror": A Masterpiece of Propaganda

By [Richard W. Behan](#), [AlterNet](#). Posted [September 27, 2007](#).

The fraudulence of the "War on Terror" is clearly revealed by looking at the pattern of actions that preceded and followed its launch.

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*"If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the state can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie ... The truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the state." --Joseph Goebbels, minister of propaganda in Nazi Germany, 1933-1945*

Since Sept. 11, 2001, the administration of George W. Bush has told and repeated a lie that is "big enough" to confirm Joseph Goebbels' testimony. It is a mega-lie, and the American people have come to believe it. It is the "War on Terror."

The Bush administration endlessly recites its mantra of deceit:

The War on Terror was launched in response to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. It is intended to enhance our national security at home and to spread democracy in the Middle East.

This is the struggle of our lifetime; we are defending our way of life from an enemy intent on destroying our freedoms. We must fight the enemy in the Middle East, or we will fight him in our cities.

This is classic propaganda. In Goebbels' terms, it is the "state" speaking its lie, but the political, economic, and military consequences of the Bush administration lie are coming into view, and they are all catastrophic. If truth is the enemy of both the lie and George Bush's "state," then the American people need to know the truth.

The military incursions into Afghanistan and Iraq were not done in retaliation for 9/11. The Bush administration had them clearly in mind upon taking office, and they were set in motion as early as Feb. 3, 2001. That was seven months prior to the attacks on the Trade Towers and the Pentagon, and the objectives of the wars had nothing to do with terrorism.

This is beyond dispute. The mainstream press has ignored the story, but the administration's congenital belligerence is fully

documented in book-length treatments and in the limitless information pool of the internet. (See [my earlier work](#), for example.)

Invading a sovereign nation unprovoked, however, directly violates the charter of the United Nations. It is an international crime. Before the Bush administration could attack either Afghanistan or Iraq, it would need a politically and diplomatically credible reason for doing so.

The terrorist violence of Sept. 11, 2001, provided a spectacular opportunity. In the cacophony of outrage and confusion, the administration could conceal its intentions, disguise the true nature of its premeditated wars, and launch them. The opportunity was exploited in a heartbeat.

Within hours of the attacks, President Bush declared the United States "... would take the fight directly to the terrorists," and "... he announced to the world the United States would make no distinction between the terrorists and the states that harbor them." Thus the "War on Terror" was born.

The fraudulence of the "War on Terror," however, is clearly revealed in the pattern of subsequent facts:

- In Afghanistan the state was overthrown instead of apprehending the terrorist. Offers by the Taliban to surrender Osama bin Laden were ignored, and he remains at large to this day.
- In Iraq, when the United States invaded, there were no al Qaeda terrorists at all.
- Both states have been supplied with puppet governments, and both are dotted with permanent U.S. military bases in strategic proximity to their hydrocarbon assets.
- The U.S. embassy nearing completion in Baghdad is comprised of 21 multistory buildings on 104 acres of land. It will house 5,500 diplomats, staff and families. It is ten times larger than any other U.S. embassy in the world, but we have yet to be told why.
- A 2006 National Intelligence Estimate shows the war in Iraq has exacerbated, not diminished, the threat of terrorism since 9/11. If the "War on Terror" is not a deception, it is a disastrously counterproductive failure.
- Today two American and two British oil companies are poised to [claim immense profits from 81 percent of Iraq's undeveloped crude oil reserves](#). They cannot proceed, however, until the Iraqi Parliament enacts a statute known as the "hydrocarbon framework law."
- The features of postwar oil policy so heavily favoring the oil companies were [crafted by the Bush administration State Department in 2002](#), a year before the invasion.
- Drafting of the law itself was begun during Paul Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority, with the invited [participation of a number of major oil companies](#). The law was written in English and translated into Arabic only when it was due for Iraqi approval.

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- President Bush made passage of the hydrocarbon law a mandatory "benchmark" when he announced the troop surge in January of 2007.

When it took office, the Bush administration [brushed aside warnings about al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden](#). Their anxiety to attack both Afghanistan and Iraq was based on other factors.

## Iraq

The Iraqi war was conceived in 1992, during the first Bush administration, in a 46-page document entitled [Draft Defense Planning Guidance](#).

The document advocated the concept of preemptive war to assure the military and diplomatic dominance of the world by the United States. It asserted the need for "... access to vital raw materials, primarily Persian Gulf oil." It warned of "... proliferation of weapons of mass destruction." And it spoke of "... threats to U.S. citizens from terrorism." It was the template for today's war in Iraq.

The *Draft Defense Planning Guidance* was signed by the secretary of defense, Richard Cheney. It was prepared by three top staffers: Paul Wolfowitz, Lewis "Scooter" Libby and Zalmay Khalilzad-all of whom would fill high-level positions in the administration of George W. Bush, nine years in the future.

In proposing global dominance and preemptive war, it was a radical departure from the traditional U.S. policy of multilateral realism, and it was an early statement of the emerging ideology of "neoconservatism."

The document was too extreme. President George H.W. Bush publicly denounced it and immediately retracted it. Many in his administration [referred](#) to its authors as "the crazies."

But the ideology survived. Five years later William Kristol and Robert Kagan created a neoconservative organization to advocate preemptive war and U.S. global dominion to achieve, [in their words](#), a "benevolent global hegemony." It was called the Project for the New American Century, quickly abbreviated as PNAC. Among the founding members were Richard Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Zalmay Khalilzad, Donald Rumsfeld and Jeb Bush.

In a letter to President Clinton on Jan. 26, 1998, the Project for the New American Century once more urged the military overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime.

President Clinton ignored the letter, apparently viewing this iteration of the proposal as no less crazy than the original.

As the presidential campaign of 2000 drew to a close, the PNAC produced yet another proposal for U.S. world dominion, preemptive war and the invasion of Iraq. It was a document called "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces, and Resources For a New Century" ([PDF](#)).

Weeks later, in January of 2001, 29 members of the Project for the New American Century joined the administration of George W. Bush. Their ideology of world dominion and preemptive war would dominate the Bush administration's foreign and defense policies.

Within 10 days of his inauguration, President Bush convened his National Security Council. The [PNAC people triumphed](#) when the invasion of Iraq was placed at the top of the agenda for Mideast foreign policy. Reconciling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, long the top priority, was dropped from consideration.

The neoconservative dream of invading Iraq was a tragic anachronism, an ideological fantasy of retrograde imperialism. A related and far more pragmatic reason for the invasion, however, would surface soon.

No administration in memory had been more closely aligned with the oil industry. President Bush and Vice President Cheney were intimately tied to it, and so was National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice. So were [eight cabinet secretaries and 32 other high-level appointees](#).

By early February, Vice President Cheney's "Energy Task Force" was at work. Federal agency people were joined by executives and lobbyists from the Enron, Exxon-Mobil, Conoco-Phillips, Shell and BP America corporations.

Soon the task force was [poring over detailed maps of the Iraqi oil fields, pipelines, tanker terminals, refineries and the undeveloped oil exploration blocks](#). It studied two pages of "foreign suitors for Iraqi oil field contracts" -- foreign companies negotiating with Saddam Hussein's regime, none of which was a major American or British oil company.

The intent to invade Iraq and the keen interest in Iraqi oil would soon converge in [a top secret memo](#) of Feb. 3, 2001, from a "high level National Security Council official." The memo: "... directed the NSC staff to cooperate fully with the Energy Task Force as it considered the 'melding' of two seemingly unrelated areas of policy: 'the review of operational policies toward rogue states' such as Iraq and 'actions regarding the capture of new and existing oil and gas fields.'"

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As early as Feb. 3, 2001, the Bush administration was committed to invading Iraq, with the oil fields clearly in mind.

The terrorist attacks on Washington and New York were still seven months in the future.

## Afghanistan

The issue in Afghanistan was the strategically valuable location for a pipeline to connect the immense oil and gas resources of the Caspian Basin to the richest markets. Whoever built the pipeline would control the Basin, and in the 1990s the contest to build it was spirited.

American interests in the region were promoted by an organization called the Foreign Oil Companies Group. Among its most active members were Henry Kissinger, a former secretary of state but now an advisor to the Unocal Corp.; Alexander Haig, another former secretary of state but now a lobbyist for Turkmenistan; and Richard Cheney, a former secretary of defense, but now the CEO of the Halliburton Corp.

Late in 1996, however, the Bridas Corp. of Argentina finally signed contracts with the Taliban and with Gen. Dostum of the Northern Alliance to build the pipeline.

One American company in particular, Unocal, found that intolerable and fought back vigorously, hiring a number of consultants in addition to Kissinger: Hamid Karzai, Richard Armitage, and Zalmay Khalilzad. (Armitage and Khalilzad would join the George W. Bush administration in 2001.)

Unocal wooed Taliban officials at its headquarters in Texas and in Washington, D.C., seeking to have the Bridas contract voided, but the Taliban refused. Finally, in February of 1998, John J. Maresca, a Unocal vice president, asked in a congressional hearing to have the Taliban replaced by a more stable regime.

The Clinton administration, having recently refused the PNAC request to invade Iraq, was not any more interested in a military overthrow of the Taliban. President Clinton did, however, shoot a few cruise missiles into Afghanistan, after the al Qaeda attacks on the U.S. embassies in Africa. And he issued an executive order forbidding further trade transactions with the Taliban.

Maresca was thus twice disappointed: The Taliban would not be replaced very soon, and Unocal would have to cease its pleadings with the regime.

Unocal's prospects rocketed when George W. Bush entered the White House, and the Project for the New American Century ideology of global dominance took hold.

The Bush administration itself took up active negotiations with the Taliban in January of 2001, seeking secure access to the Caspian Basin for American companies. The Enron Corp. also was eyeing a pipeline to feed its proposed power plant in India.) The administration offered a package of foreign aid as an inducement, and the parties met in Washington, Berlin and Islamabad. The Bidas contract might still be voided.

But the Taliban would not yield.

Anticipating this in the spring of 2001, the State Department had sought and gained the concurrence of India and Pakistan [to take military action if necessary](#). The PNAC people were not timid about using force.

At the final meeting with the Taliban, on Aug. 2, 2001, State Department negotiator Christine Rocca, clarified the options: "Either you accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs." With the futility of negotiations apparent, "President Bush promptly informed Pakistan and India the U.S. would launch a military mission into Afghanistan before the end of October."

This was five weeks before the events of 9/11.

## **Sept. 11, 2001**

A tectonic groundswell of skepticism, doubt and suspicion has emerged about the Bush administration's official explanation of 9/11. Some claim the administration orchestrated the attacks. Others see complicity. Still others find criminal negligence. The cases they make are neither extreme nor trivial.

Whatever the truth about 9/11, the Bush administration now had a fortuitous, spectacular opportunity to proceed with its premeditated attacks.

The administration would have to play its hand skillfully, however.

Other nations have suffered criminal acts of terrorism, but there is no precedent for conflating the terrorists with the states that harbor them, declaring a "war" and seeking with military force to overthrow a sovereign government. Victimized nations have always relied successfully on international law enforcement and police action to bring terrorists to justice.

But the Bush administration needed more than this. War plans were in the files. They needed to justify invasions. Only by targeting the "harboring states," as well as the terrorists, did they stand a chance of doing so.

The administration played its hand brilliantly. It compared the terrorist attacks immediately to Pearl Harbor, and in the smoke and rage of 9/11 the comparison was superficially attractive. But Pearl Harbor was the violent expression of hostile intent by a formidably armed nation, and it introduced four years of full-scale land, sea and airborne combat. 9/11 was al Qaeda's violent expression of hostility: 19 fanatics armed with box cutters. Yes, extraordinary destruction and loss of life, but the physical security of our entire nation was simply not at stake.

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Though the comparison was specious, the "War on Terror" was born, and it has proven to be an exquisite smokescreen. But labeling the preplanned invasions as a "War on Terror" was the mega-lie, dwarfing all the untruths that followed. The mega-lie would be the centerpiece of a masterful propaganda blitz that continues to this day.

## The wars

On Oct. 7, 2001, the carpet of bombs is unleashed over Afghanistan.

Soon, with the Taliban overthrown, the Bush administration installed Hamid Karzai as head of an interim government. Karzai had been a Unocal consultant.

The first ambassador to Karzai's government was John J. Maresca, a vice president of Unocal.

The next ambassador to Afghanistan was Zalmay Khalilzad, another Unocal consultant.

Four months after the carpet of bombs, President Karzai and President Musharraf of Pakistan signed an agreement for a new pipeline. The Bidas contract was moot. The way was open for Unocal.

In February of 2003 an oil industry trade journal reported the Bush administration was ready to finance the pipeline across Afghanistan and to protect it with a permanent military presence. Osama bin Laden remained at large.

The mega-lie, the fabricated "War on Terror" was an easy sell in the Afghanistan adventure. The shock of 9/11 was immense, Osama bin Laden was operating from Afghanistan and the "state," the Taliban, was at least sympathetic to his organization. And the signature secrecy of the Bush Administration had kept from public view its eight months of negotiating with the Taliban. The first premeditated war was largely unopposed.

Selling the Iraq invasion to the American people and to the Congress would be far more difficult.

With the Trade Towers and the Pentagon still smoldering, President Bush and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld [ordered their staffs](#) to find Saddam Hussein's complicity in the attacks. Of course they could not, so there would need to be a sustained and persuasive selling job -- a professionally orchestrated campaign of propaganda.

Soon after 9/11, fear-mongering propagandizing became the *modus operandi* of the Bush Administration. It began in earnest with the president's "axis of evil" State of the Union address in 2002, full of terrorism and fear. "The United States of America," the president said, "will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons."

No regime anywhere was in fact threatening anyone with anything, but Bush appointed a 10-person "White House Iraq Group" in August of 2002. Chaired by Karl Rove, its members were trusted partisans and communications experts skilled in perception management. Their role was explicitly to market the need to invade Iraq. The group operated in strict secrecy, sifting intelligence, writing position papers and speeches, creating "talking points," planning strategy and timing, and feeding information to the media. This was the nerve center, where the [campaign of propaganda](#) was orchestrated and promulgated.

The group chose to trumpet nearly exclusively the most frightening threat-nuclear weapons. Rice soon introduced the litany of the smoking gun and the mushroom cloud, Cheney said hundreds of thousands of Americans might die, and Bush claimed Saddam was "six months away from developing a weapon."

In the 2003 State of the Union address, President Bush uttered the infamous "sixteen words": "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa." This was typical of White House Iraq Group work: The CIA knew and had said the information was bogus.

The propaganda campaign was ultimately successful, not least because of the axiomatic trust American people extend to their presidents: Nobody could have anticipated the range, intensity and magnitude of the expertly crafted deception. And the campaign was aided by a compliant mainstream press that swallowed and regurgitated the talking points.

The Congress was persuaded sufficiently to authorize the use of military force. The American people were persuaded sufficiently to accept the war and to send Mr. Bush to the White House for a second term. But no other war in the country's history had to be so consciously and comprehensively sold.

Much of the deception, distortion and lies was eventually exposed. The link between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda, the weapons of mass destruction, the aluminum tubes, the mobile laboratories, the yellowcake from Niger: none of it true. Only the mega-lie, the "War on Terror," survives.

On Feb. 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell addressed the Security Council, waving the vial of simulated anthrax and claiming "there is no doubt in my mind" Saddam Hussein was working to produce nuclear weapons.

But the Security Council, not so easily propagandized, refused to authorize American force.

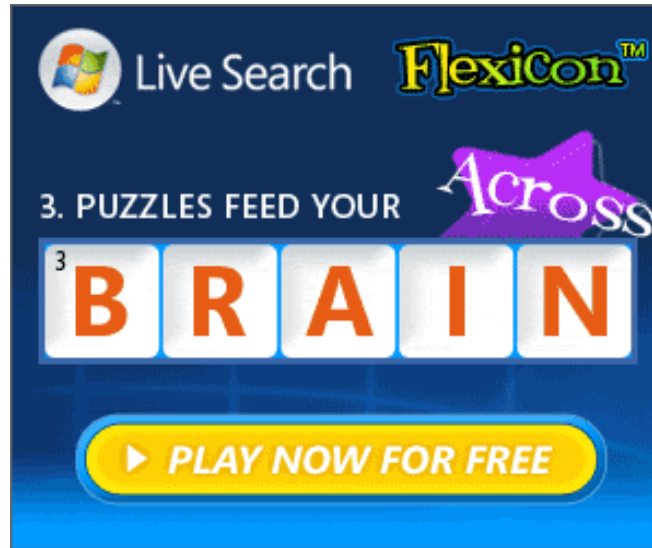
On March 14, 2003, President Bush met in the Azores with Prime Ministers Blair of the United Kingdom and Aznar of Spain. They abandoned the effort for U.N. authorization, claimed the right to proceed without it and a week later launched the war.

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Four years of violence. Nearly 4,000 young Americans dead. Seven times that many maimed. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis dead. Millions fleeing as refugees, their economy and infrastructure in ruins. A raging civil war. Half a trillion dollars and counting.

### Stopping the madness

And for what? Neither face of the war has come remotely close to success. The "War on Terrorism" has not suppressed terrorism but has encouraged it instead. The premeditated war -- for ideological dreams of world dominion and the pragmatic capture of hydrocarbon assets -- is a colossus of failure.

The Afghan pipeline is a dead issue. As the warlords and the poppy growers in Afghanistan thrive, and as the Taliban regroup and regains dominance, the country tilts ominously into chaos once more.

The Iraqi hydrocarbon law -- the clever disguise for capturing the oil fields -- is fatally wounded, its true purpose becoming more widely known. Organized resistance is growing quickly, both in Iraq and in the United States. And the factions who need to agree on the law are otherwise engaged in killing each other.

The Iraqi war has not resulted, either, in the global dominance sought by the Project for the New American Century people, but in global repugnance for what their pathetic ideology has wrought.

Clearly the involvement of the U.S. military in the Mideast must cease. Pouring more lives and dollars into the quagmire may keep alive the warped dreams of the Bush administration, but those dreams are illegitimate, indeed criminal.

President Bush and Vice President Cheney reject any alteration in their course. They ask instead for more time, more money and even -- in threatening Iran -- for more targets.

There is no apparent way to the stop madness, to end the hemorrhaging of blood and treasure, but to impeach these men and, if found guilty, to remove them from office.

The integrity of the Constitution and the rule of law are at stake as well, but the Congress continues its indifference to impeachment, effectively condoning the administration's behavior. Should this continue, thinking Americans will discard the last crumbs of respect for the incumbent legislature -- polling shows there's not much left -- and punish its members, Republican and Democrat alike, in next year's election.

Impeachment will expose the fraudulence of the "War on Terror" and liberate us from the pall of fear the Bush administration has deliberately cast upon the country. Both political parties will be free to speak the truth: Terrorism is real and a cause for concern, but it is not a reason for abject fear.

We need only compare the hazard of al Qaeda to the threat posed by the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. On the one hand is a wretched group of sad fanatics -- perhaps 50,000 in all -- clever enough to commandeer airliners with box cutters. On the other was a nation of 140 million people, a powerful economy, a standing army of hundreds of divisions, a formidable navy and air force and thousands of nuclear tipped intercontinental missiles pre-aimed at American targets.

We were a vigilant but poised and confident people then, not a nation commanded to cower in fear. We can and must regain that strength and self-assurance.

Ending the nightmare will take far less courage than the Bush people exhibited in beginning it. Taking a nation to war on distortion, deception and lies is enormously risky in many respects: in lives and in treasure, certainly, but also in a nation's prestige abroad and in the trust and support of its people. The Bush administration risked all this and more, and it has lost.

We risk far less by embracing the truth and acting on it. Our nation cherishes honesty: the fraudulence must end. But Bush and Cheney have shown themselves incapable of honesty, and we also cherish justice. They must be impeached.

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*Richard W. Behan's last book was Plundered Promise: Capitalism, Politics, and the Fate of the Federal Lands (Island Press, 2001). He is currently working on a more broadly rendered critique, To Provide Against Invasions: Corporate Dominion and America's Derelict Democracy. He can be reached by email at [rwbehan@rockisland.com](mailto:rwbehan@rockisland.com).*

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