

Book Review:

PLAN OF ATTACK

Author: Bob Woodward

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In his *Plan of Attack*, Bob Woodward concentrates on behind the scenes accounts of how & why President Bush decided to go to war against Iraq.

He reports that just 5 days after Sept. 11, President Bush indicated to National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice that while he had to do Afghanistan first, he was also determined to do something about Saddam Hussain. In his own words: “We won’t do Iraq now. But it is a question we are gonna have to return to”. On Nov. 21, 2001 (72 days after 9/11) President Bush after a National Security Council meeting takes Rumsfeld aside, closes the door & says, “what have you got in terms of plans for Iraq? What is the status of the war plan?” When Rumsfeld replied that his plans were out-dated, the President asked him to get them fresh. “I want you to get on it. I want you to keep it secret”. (Secret even from CIA Director)

Rumsfeld following the urgency of the President’s directives right away asked Gen. Tommy Franks to develop a war plan to invade Iraq and remove Saddam Hussain. He gave him a blank cheque for war preparation. Tommy Franks started his work by building runways, etc. in

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Kuwait. In July 2002 Franks asked further for \$ 700 million for war preparation. President approved this budget and provided the money from a supplemental appropriation for the Afghan war. In this way the President kept, even the Congress, in darkness concerning his war plans in Iraq.

In Woodward's opinion Dick Cheney was the driving force – the functional President – in the White House. He was beyond hell-bent to invade Iraq and oust Saddam Hussain from power. He describes Cheney as a “powerful steamrolling force obsessed with Saddam & taking him out”. [In fact, Cheney was sold-out to ensure the protection of oil & the Israel]. He led the campaign that Saddam Hussain has Weapons of Mass Destruction; & is likely to pass them on to al-Qaeda & thus pose a grave & immediate threat to the United States.

On Dec. 21, 2002 George Tenet & his deputy John McLaughlin made a presentation to prove that Saddam has WMD. President listened closely & observed “nice try” but it was not going to convince the public. In brief, the presentation was a total flop & the President expressed his dissatisfaction loud & clear. However, Cheney was very much impressed and that was what ultimately mattered. For the decision to go to war in Iraq was made [by Dick Cheney] whether or not there were any Weapons of Mass Destruction; & whether or not there was any active and operational contact between Iraq & al-Qaeda. To borrow an expression from Colin Powell, Bush was “bullied” into this war by the neo-conservatives in his Cabinet – the group was of course led by Dick Cheney.

The decision was first conveyed to Condoleezza Rice in Jan. 2003. Bush said that he was frustrated with the Weapons Inspections. They were not taking us anywhere. While he had promised the United Nations

& the World & the country that either the UN would disarm Saddam Hussain or he, George Bush, would do it & do it alone if necessary. So he told Rumsfeld; he told Condoleezza Rice. He knew Cheney wanted to do this. They realized that they haven't told Colin Powell, the Secretary of the State – reason being that Powell was convinced that war against Iraq was totally unnecessary. In fact it would turn the entire Middle East into a “Cauldron”. So Condi Rice said, “You better call in Colin Powell & tell him”. Bush called Colin Powell in and told him of his decision. Powell asks in a chilly way, “Are you aware of the consequences?” Powell felt that invasion would entail colonization of Iraq with all the attendant difficulties. President said, “I understand that”. President asks Powell: “Will you be with me?” Powell, being a faithful soldier, says, “I will do my best. Yes, Mr. President I will be with you;” & then the President says, “time to put your war uniform on”.

In getting ready for the war, Bush & his war Cabinet especially Cheney & Rumsfeld felt the need to line up as many Arab countries as they possibly could. So on Jan. 11, 2003 Cheney invited Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi Ambassador to his West wing office. Rumsfeld & General Richard Myers, Chairman Joint Chief of Staff, were also present with him. War plan was presented to Bandar bin Sultan with the war map. Prince Bandar's only worries were: “what if the U.S. fails again to remove Saddam Hussain?”, Cheney replied, “Prince Bandar, once we start Saddam is toast”. Prince Bandar said, “Well I am convinced. But I have to carry message [to the Crown Prince Abdullah] from the President (Bush)”. Next day, that is, Jan. 13, 2003 Prince Bandar was invited by Condi Rice to meet the President. At the meeting the President told Prince Bandar that he was receiving advice from some of the members of his administration that in the event of war, he would have to confront

with a massive Arab & Islamic reaction that would put American interests at risk. Prince Bandar responded, Mr. President this is Saddam Hussain and not king Fahad. People are not going to shed tears over Saddam Hussain”. But if he survives, then he would be a hero and a force to be reckoned with. The Saudis needed positive assurance that in the event of Iraq invasion Saddam would be gone. Bush said, “you got the briefing from Dick Cheney, Rumsfeld & Gen. Myers. That is the message I want you to carry for the Crown Prince Abdullah. The message you are taking is mine.”

Bob Woodward told 60 Minutes that Prince Bandar promised the President that Saudi Arabia would lower oil prices in the months before the election to ensure that the U.S. economy is strong on the election day.

On Jan. 14, 2003, Bush meets the Polish President & asks his support & cooperation in his war against Iraq. Polish President gave assurance of his full support to President Bush in his war campaign but expressed his fears that Anti-American sentiments were running high. Bush said, “Success helps change public opinion.” Like Powell, Polish President also raised the query: “but what are the consequences?” He went on to express his worries, “the risk is the U.N will Collapse. What will replace it?” [Polish President shows more political acumen & insight than Bush who was just intoxicated by an excessive dose of imperialistic power]. In any case, Bush felt elated to win an ally for his war.

Bush talked to the war generals on March 20, 2003 & enquires of them if they were ready for the attack. They said, “Yes sir, we are ready.” Bush gave the order (for attack on Iraq) & walked out & went alone behind the White House. *“As I walked around the circle I prayed that our troops be safe & be protected by the Almighty. Going into this period, I was praying for strength to do the Lords will. I am surely not*

going to justify war based upon God. Understand that. Nevertheless, in my case, I pray that I be as good a messenger of his will as possible. And, of course, I pray for forgiveness”.

Bob Woodward reveals that he asked President Bush: *“Did you ever ask your father for any advice.” President said, “Well, no”. Then he said of his father, “he is the wrong father to appeal to for advice. The wrong father to go to, to appeal to in terms of strength”. And then he said, “There is a higher Father that I appeal to”.*

[In these statements, one can easily see in Bush a born again Christian and a modern-day crusader. If Usama bin Ladin is blamed for aspiring to establish an Islamic state, a worldwide “Caliphate” through terrorism, war & violence, Bush is guilty of doing the same. He, too, is aspiring for imposing Western values of so-called liberal democracy, free-market economy and eventually U.S. imperialism through military means, i.e. through bullets & bombs. What is the difference? Probably the difference lies in the quantum of power but not in the nature of their mentality. If one is condemnable so is the other: if one is lunatic so is the other. In any case, we will come to discuss the real contentions of Osama bin Ladin later in the course of this briefing.]

Woodward was startled to learn that the President not only ignored his father, but also ignored his key Cabinet members in making his decision for war in Iraq. There was nothing shocking or startling about it though as Bush himself admits that he was anxious to keep his war plan extremely secret. For if these plans were to leak out, they would have caused immense anti-U.S. sentiments & reactions. People around the world would have felt that the U.S. was red-hot to go to war in Iraq – an impression Bush desperately wanted to avoid. In brief, his plans were vicious & imperialistic – and his strategy for the realization of these

plans was secrecy mixed with lies & deception – a strange mix, doubly dangerous both for the Americans and for the rest of the world. His expectations were that if he could realize his mission really fast, he would easily get away with it as he told the Polish President “success helps change public opinion.”

Woodward further reveals that the CIA hired the leaders of a Muslim religious sect at odds with Saddam alongwith highly placed Saddam’s security service. The CIA code name for them was: The Rock-Stars. Before the war they recruited 87 of them all & the entire money spent on these “sources” was \$ 300 million. They did the same in Afghanistan just for \$70 million.

Now after five years, it looks that Colin Powell’s assessment of the situation in Iraq war was more accurate than that of Bush & his War Cabinet. The Americans may have won the victory but without any success. They might have captured Saddam Hussain but have positively lost Iraq -- & may be the rest of Middle East as well.

- Latest news from the battlefield is that the United States has engaged private armies raised from 30 different countries to fight their war in Iraq & thus camouflaged their own losses. But these mercenaries are not likely to win the war against those who are fighting for the liberation of their homeland. Eventual victory, like in Hochi Minh’s Vietnam, is destined for Iraqi freedom fighters. Much against the wishes of the United States, Shias and the Sunnis in Iraq are galvanized by a national spirit and have forgotten their sectarian differences against their common enemy, the foreign occupants.

- Muslim world should stop waiting for their turn and support those who are willing to lay down their lives for a moral & national cause. Those who fight for the liberation of their homeland deserve more respect & assistance as opposed to those who are there to rob a country of its Oil & other natural resources.
- Was there a post-war Plan? Well, Woodward gives us the impression that there was a lot of planning about the Oil money. But the issue of the security & violence (or fierce resistance) couldn't cross the mind of Bush or his War Cabinet. On the contrary, some of them were dreaming that the Americans would be received as liberators and garlanded by the Iraqi citizens.
- The President still believes with some conviction that this was absolutely the right thing, that he has the duty to free people, to liberate people. And this was his moment.
- [Only a lunatic could believe that he could hasten people to freedom & liberty by bombing them].
- Bob Woodward came away with the impression that Bush was not an intellectual or a deep thinker. Bush, Woodward tells us, feels that there may be an elite world, but he is not a part of it. He hates reading & has instinctive aversion for complicated and complex things. He loves bumper-sticker type of simplicity.
- Bob Woodward tells us that he asked the President as to what, in his opinion, will be the judgment of history on his presidency?
Bush's response was, "Well, we don't know the judgment of history. History we don't know. We'll all be dead."

[Now if a person is inclined to dismiss resurrection, i.e. the possibility of life after death & the Day of Judgment wherein our actions would be hung to our neck and we would be rewarded or punished by our own deeds, his conduct couldn't be any different than what we have witnessed in case of President Bush. One who disregards the possibility of life after death could easily contend that not only history but also the whole universe would come to an end with one's death & dying. A man of this "faith" could be a dangerous specimen of humankind indeed!].