

Bush's Postwar Ambitions for Iraq

Feb 10, 2003



Articles & Testimony

To bolster the case for war, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell presented the United Nations Security Council new evidence that Saddam Hussein continues to violate the disarmament clauses of Security Council resolution 1441. This strategy dovetails with President George Bush's repeated mantra that Saddam Hussein poses an unmistakable threat to the international community. There is only one problem with this public relations strategy -- even the president's gainsayers rarely contest this point. Instead of harping on Saddam's proven record of deceit and aggression -- which is unchallenged -- the president should articulate U.S. postwar ambitions, particularly concerning Iraqi oil.

Contrary to popular opinion, skeptics of "regime change" apparently do not need a "smoking gun" to understand the nature of Saddam's regime. War skeptics worry most about the president's motivations for invading Iraq. At the January 18 anti-war protests in Washington, D.C. and San Francisco, the placards centered on one theme -- oil. Television coverage of the events showed the ubiquitous "No Blood For Oil," "Go Solar Not Ballistic," and "It's About Oil" slogans at the heart of the anti-war movement.

Tellingly, nary a one seemed to dispute that Saddam is a brutal dictator with a history of invading lawful countries or that he possesses illegal weapons. This trend is even more apparent overseas. That same day, throngs of "peace protesters" turned out in dozens of countries around the globe. According to the British newspaper Guardian, "One of the most popular themes on the placards of anti-war demonstrators is that the looming confrontation is primarily about oil."

To be sure, not all war skeptics cynically believe that the policy of regime change is just a big oil grab. But the protests over U.S. oil ambitions reflect a wider concern of American world dominance. To bridge the disconnect between the U.S. administration's justifications for war and segments of the public's reservations about war, the administration should devote more attention to explaining its plans for postwar reconstruction in Iraq.

Many skeptics seem to envision a scenario in which the U.S., after carpet-bombing innocent Iraqi civilians into submission, will quickly annex Iraqi oil fields, flood the world petrol market, and pocket the revenue to the detriment of the Iraqi people. But the odds are that almost the exact opposite scenario would likely play out, should the U.S. and its allies wage war against Saddam. To win over skeptics, both at home and abroad, the Bush administration should broadcast the following plans.

Far from carpet-bombing, U.S. forces would do everything possible to minimize civilian casualties. This is the primary reason the U.S. government has invested billions of dollars in new "smart" bombs, which are both more precise and more plentiful than during the 1991 campaign. Though Pentagon planners have admitted that U.S. forces would in fact rush to secure Iraqi oil fields, the motivation for this haste would be altruistic -- to prevent Saddam from setting them ablaze, as he did in 1991.

Even if Saddam fails to pull off a scorched-earth policy, there is little chance the U.S. would flood the world market with cheap Iraqi oil. For starters, though Iraq is a major oil country, its long-term potential far outstrips its current

production capacity. At the present, Iraq is capable of exporting a mere 3 percent of the world's total oil. According to one authority, for Iraq to double its capacity could take more than a decade. U.S. oil companies may not even want suddenly to inundate the market with cut-rate oil since profit margins could fall with lower prices.

There would also be tremendous international pressure against flooding the market, especially from Russia and Saudi Arabia, whose fragile economies depend significantly on oil revenue. These factors suggest that, whatever the United States' role in Iraqi reconstruction, oil would be handled in a more prudent way than many war skeptics may think.

Most significantly, in contrast to annexing Iraqi oil fields and pocketing the revenues, "Oil will be the engine of Iraq's reconstruction," as a spokesman for the State Department recently put it. Senior officials are united that Iraqi oil should finally become "the patrimony of the Iraqi people," instead of Saddam's dictatorship regime. In fact, it is not even clear the U.S. would get any type of economic advantage from liberating Iraq. After all, upon liberating Kuwait in 1991, the U.S. did not receive any preferential benefits to its oil fields.

No one is saying that postwar reconstruction of Iraq would be easy, but the problem is that the U.S. administration is hardly talking about it publicly at all. The evidence suggests that Iraq's natural resources would grease the reconstruction process and promote the type of democracy the Iraqi people deserve.

Even more than a "smoking gun," a frank explanation of the administration's postwar objectives could win over the skeptics both at home and abroad. ❖

Haaretz

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Libya's Renewed Legitimacy Crisis

Feb 14, 2022



Ben Fishman

[\(/policy-analysis/libyas-renewed-legitimacy-crisis\)](/policy-analysis/libyas-renewed-legitimacy-crisis)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

The UAE Formally Ceases to be a Tax-Free Haven

Feb 14, 2022



Sana Quadri,
Hamdullah Baycar

[\(/policy-analysis/uae-formally-ceases-be-tax-free-haven\)](/policy-analysis/uae-formally-ceases-be-tax-free-haven)

TOPICS

[Energy & Economics \(/policy-analysis/energy-economics\)](/policy-analysis/energy-economics)

[Gulf & Energy Policy \(/policy-analysis/gulf-energy-policy\)](/policy-analysis/gulf-energy-policy)

[U.S. Policy \(/policy-analysis/us-policy\)](/policy-analysis/us-policy)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[Iraq \(/policy-analysis/iraq\)](/policy-analysis/iraq)