

New Exposé of Big Oil's Role in the Iraq War

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Global Research, April 25, 2011

[ThisCantBeHappening.net](#) 25 April 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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When it was suggested the war in Iraq was about oil, Tony Blair, then the British prime minister, had this to say on February 6, 2003

"Let me just deal with the oil thing because... the oil conspiracy theory is honestly one of the most absurd when you analyse it. The fact is that, if the oil that Iraq has were our concern, I mean we could probably cut a deal with Saddam tomorrow in relation to the oil. It's not the oil that is the issue, it is the weapons..."

In fact, as I and numerous others, have [reported on many occasions before](#), both during and after the war, oil was a principal if not the principal reason, for going to war. The reason for thinking this comes from any reading of oil history in the Middle East. The modern industry began in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), which today probably boasts the largest reserves in the world. Current knowledge of oil and the war in large part comes from the work of a researcher in the UK named Greg Muttitt. Among other things, Muttitt has had close contacts with the Iraq oil workers union. Now Muttitt has written a book—released in Britain and India this week, called *Fuel on the Fire*—that makes crystal clear the role of big oil. His research had turned up hundreds of pages of heretofore secret documents and is further backed up by interviews with executives of the international oil companies.



Big Oil had plans for Iraq before the war even started

This book ought to rekindle interest in the secret meetings held on Bush energy policy by Dick Cheney, and its revelations about the British fears of France, may well provide clues to underlying factors in today's fighting in Libya. More about that later.

Here is how the Independent reported the story on April 19:

The papers, revealed here for the first time, raise new questions over Britain's involvement in the war, which had divided Tony Blair's cabinet and was voted through only after his claims that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.The minutes of a series of meetings between ministers and senior oil executives are at odds with the public denials of self-interest from oil companies and Western governments at the time.

Five months before the March 2003 invasion, Baroness Symons, then the Trade Minister, told BP that the Government believed British energy firms should be given a share of Iraq's enormous oil and gas reserves as a reward for Tony Blair's military commitment to US plans for regime change.

The papers show that Lady Symons agreed to lobby the Bush administration on BP's behalf because the oil giant feared it was being "locked out" of deals that Washington was quietly striking with US, French and Russian governments and their energy firms.

There is more:

Minutes of a meeting with BP, Shell and BG (formerly British Gas) on 31 October 2002 read: "Baroness Symons agreed that it would be difficult to justify British companies losing out in Iraq in that way if the UK had itself been a conspicuous supporter of the US government throughout the crisis."

The minister then promised to "report back to the companies before Christmas" on her lobbying efforts.

The Foreign Office invited BP in on 6 November 2002 to talk about opportunities in Iraq "post regime change". Its minutes state: "Iraq is the big oil prospect. BP is desperate to get in there and anxious that political deals should not deny them the opportunity."

After another meeting, this one in October 2002, the Foreign Office's Middle East director at the time, Edward Chaplin, noted: "Shell and BP could not afford not to have a stake in [Iraq] for the sake of their long-term future... We were determined to get a fair slice of the action for UK companies in a post-Saddam Iraq."

BP was concerned that if Washington allowed TotalFinaElf's existing contact with Saddam Hussein to stand after the invasion it would make the French conglomerate the world's leading oil company. BP told the Government it was willing to take "big risks" to get a share of the Iraqi reserves, the second largest in the world.

Muttitt's document trove is echoed just now by Nobel Prize winner Mohamed ElBaradei's new book, in which he describes leading teams looking for the elusive aluminum uranium enrichment tubes and, finding nothing, goes into a UN meeting where top American officials were trying to concoct a cover for the war.

ElBaradei, who back in the 2001-2003 period was head of the UN International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), tells of an October 2002 meeting he and chief UN nuclear weapons inspector Hans Blix had with Secretary of State Colin Powell, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and others, at which the Americans sought to convert the UN mission into a "cover for what would be, in essence, a United States-directed inspection process."

The two UN officials resisted, and their teams went on to conduct some 700 inspections of scores of potential weapons sites in Iraq, finding no evidence to support the U.S. claims of weapons of mass destruction, or an Iraqi nuclear weapons program.

ElBaradei cites examples, including the conclusion by his inspectors inside Iraq that certain aluminum tubes were designed for artillery rockets, not for uranium enrichment equipment to build nuclear bombs, as Washington asserted.

The IAEA chief reported this conclusion to the UN Security Council on Jan. 27, 2003, and yet on the next day Bush — in a "remarkable" response — delivered a State of the Union address in which he repeated the unfounded claim about aluminum tubes, ElBaradei notes, as well as the bogus claim that Iraq had sought uranium from Niger. Bush, in that speech,

also repeated an Iraqi exile's fabrication that "mobile labs" were producing biological weapons.

"I was aghast at what I was witnessing," ElBaradei writes of the official U.S. attitude before the March 2003 invasion, which he calls "aggression where there was no imminent threat," resulting in a war in which he accepts estimates that hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians were killed.

In such a case, ElBaradei suggests, the World Court should be asked to rule on whether the war was illegal. And, if that is the determination, [he asks](#), "should not the International Criminal Court investigate whether this constitutes a 'war crime' and determine who is accountable?"

However, as Muttitt suggests, this may well be not the tip of the iceberg, but rather a tip off of a far deeper conspiracy by the Bush administration to orchestrate the war from the moment the planes hit the World Trade towers and Rumsfeld scribbled his unsubstantiated notes that Iraq was responsible.

The notorious secret Cheney energy meeting may well provide more clues as to what was going on. But its secrets are now protected by the US courts.

When will Eric Holder call a grand jury to probe possible criminal prosecution of Cheney and Rumsfeld? Discovery in such a case might well provide the basis for criminal charges against the former president and vice president.

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