

Reshma Khilnani

STS.091

Rewrite of Two-Pager

March 21, 2003

Bush Policies, Why Do They Sound Like Crazy Talk?

My investigation this week is based on the apparent motivations for war in Iraq. To many Americans the United States' salvation for the regime change in Iraq seems completely random, not in the best interest for our economy, and not probably linked to al Qaeda. The question then must arise: why is Washington so bent on invasion of Iraq? The obsession seems bizarre and foolhardy based on the already troublesome situations of the economic downturn and terrorist threats.

The roots of the movement for regime change, and control of Iraq in general, have a long history, which has been in the public eye since September 11, 2001, but has been brewing since the 1970's under some of the same champions who are pushing it today. The overarching principle guiding the invasion is the idea that control of the Middle East is vital for American (economic) interests, and the region over the coming half century will be key in assuring that the United States is the sole superpower.

One of the first points in understanding this need for control is the political upheavals in the Middle East in 1973, '74 and '79. These political upheavals resulted in the price of oil increasing by 15 fold over a decade.

The concept of annexing the Gulf as a strategic center based on this series of crises has been attributed to Henry Kissinger during the Nixon era, the brilliant strategist who was among the first to grasp the future value of this particular region. Kissinger had a great animosity for many Arab regimes and had in the past threatened the Saudi and Iranian regimes with political warfare. (Business Week Interview 1975) This somewhat imperialistic and grandiose idea of Middle Eastern control took off in American intellectual culture with commentary by conservative strategists, think tanks and academics.

In the Kissinger-controlled era of national security some of the Bush administration such as Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz got their start. Rumsfeld and Cheney were aides in the Ford administration, and experienced firsthand the impact of the political turmoil in the Middle East on American interests.

Due to the instabilities in the region, and resultant oil price fluctuations, President Carter, in 1980 established the Persian Gulf as an area necessary for US (as opposed to Soviet) influence. In fact the Carter Doctrine declares: "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary. Including military force." This doctrine was not an empty threat, the US Army created the Rapid Deployment Force able to quickly deploy thousands of troops in the Gulf in emergency situations. This was a drastic move because the United States had nearly no presence in the Middle East and the idea of seizing its oil was remote.

Several Pentagon and State Department leaders such as Richard Haass, Richard Perle, Richard Armitage, and William Bennett rose to power implementing these military buildups. These men served in leadership positions, such as the on the Pentagon policy board, and the National Security Advisory board. Not only were they key in the

implementation of the Rapid Deployment Force and other military escalations, but political figures such as Rumsfeld played a role in installing Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden as forces to mitigate both Soviet power in the region as well as nationalistic movements like that of Iran.

This continued over the 1980's and into the 1990's with the Gulf War, during which time Dick Cheney was the Secretary of Defense. The Gulf War was primarily a "defensive" one, in which Saddam Hussein had become power hungry and sought to control Kuwait. The Gulf War prevented the expansion of Hussein's power, and allowed his isolation over the 1990's. Incidentally, the Pentagon leaders such as Wolfowitz and Perle greatly opposed the Bush (39) decision to leave Saddam Hussein in power, wanting instead the installation of a new regime. Following up on their beliefs, at multiple points during the Clinton Presidency, Wolfowitz, Armitage, and Rumsfeld, among others, wrote to President Clinton outlining the Iraqi risk to National Security and the need for regime change.

Which brings us to today: the current war in Iraq, operation Iraqi Freedom. In the climate of post 9/11 fears, the individuals who have been eyeing control of the Middle East seek the possibility of a "tipping point" in American control of Iraq. The introduction of American presence in Iraq, a geographical center and oil rich region, would be a critical shift in leadership in the Middle East to one more friendly to western interests.

What is scary about all of this is that it is led by a small group of men who have been focused on control of the Middle East for 30 years, and control of Iraq for 10. This group is small and represents a tiny edge of the political spectrum, but through insistence, and support of the current Administration under the pretense of terrorist threat have managed to finally attain support for an agenda that they have had for a very long time. When considering whether you support a war in Iraq, think carefully, this is an agenda harbored for years by the neo-conservatives, and has just found an outlet in the fear and vulnerability of Americans. Should we let a small minority who has spent their lives building weapons and dreaming this imperialistic dream take advantage of us by taking our time and money to advance the invasion which -- till now --we have never been stupid enough to endorse?