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It's Imperialism, Stupid

Noam Chomsky

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In his June 28 speech, President Bush asserted that the invasion of Iraq was undertaken as part of “a global war against terror” that the United States is waging. In reality, as anticipated, the invasion increased the threat of terror, perhaps significantly.

Half-truths, misinformation and hidden agendas have characterised official pronouncements about US war motives in Iraq from the very beginning. The recent revelations about the rush to war in Iraq stand out all the more starkly amid the chaos that ravages the country and threatens the region and indeed the world.

In 2002 the US and United Kingdom proclaimed the right to invade Iraq because it was developing weapons of mass destruction. That was the “single question,” as stressed constantly by Bush, Prime Minister Blair and associates. It was also the sole basis on which Bush received congressional authorisation to resort to force.

The answer to the “single question” was given shortly after the invasion, and reluctantly conceded: The WMD didn't exist. Scarcely missing a beat, the government and media doctrinal

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system concocted new pretexts and justifications for going to war.

“Americans do not like to think of themselves as aggressors, but raw aggression is what took place in Iraq,” national security and intelligence analyst John Prados concluded after his careful, extensive review of the documentary record in his 2004 book “Hoodwinked.”

Prados describes the Bush “scheme to convince America and the world that war with Iraq was necessary and urgent” as “a case study in government dishonesty ... that required patently untrue public statements and egregious manipulation of intelligence.” The Downing Street memo, published on May 1 in The Sunday Times of London, along with other newly available confidential documents, have deepened the record of deceit.

The memo came from a meeting of Blair’s war cabinet on July 23, 2002, in which Sir Richard Dearlove, head of British foreign intelligence, made the now-notorious assertion that “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy” of going to war in Iraq.

The memo also quotes British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon as saying that “the US had already begun ‘spikes of activity’ to put pressure on the regime.”

British journalist Michael Smith, who broke the story of the memo, has elaborated on its context and contents in subsequent articles. The “spikes of activity” apparently included a coalition air campaign meant to provoke Iraq into some act that could be portrayed as what the memo calls a “casus belli.”

Warplanes began bombing in southern Iraq in May 2002 — 10 tons that month, according to British government figures. A special “spike” started in late August (for a September total of 54.6 tons).

“In other words, Bush and Blair began their war not in March 2003, as everyone believed, but at the end of August 2002, six weeks before Congress approved military action against Iraq,” Smith wrote.

The bombing was presented as defensive action to protect coalition planes in the no-fly zone. Iraq protested to the United Nations but didn't fall into the trap of retaliating. For US-UK planners, invading Iraq was a far higher priority than the "war on terror." That much is revealed by the reports of their own intelligence agencies. On the eve of the allied invasion, a classified report by the National Intelligence Council, the intelligence community's center for strategic thinking, "predicted that an American-led invasion of Iraq would increase support for political Islam and would result in a deeply divided Iraqi society prone to violent internal conflict," Douglas Jehl and David E. Sanger reported in *The New York Times* last September. In December 2004, Jehl reported a few weeks later, the NIC warned that "Iraq and other possible conflicts in the future could provide recruitment, training grounds, technical skills and language proficiency for a new class of terrorists who are 'professionalised' and for whom political violence becomes an end in itself." The willingness of top planners to risk increase of terrorism does not of course indicate that they welcome such outcomes. Rather, they are simply not a high priority in comparison with other objectives, such as controlling the world's major energy resources.

Shortly after the invasion of Iraq, Zbigniew Brzezinski, one of the more astute of the senior planners and analysts, pointed out in the journal *National Interest* that America's control over the Middle East "gives it indirect but politically critical leverage on the European and Asian economies that are also dependent on energy exports from the region." If the United States can maintain its control over Iraq, with the world's second largest known oil reserves, and right at the heart of the world's major energy supplies, that will enhance significantly its strategic power and influence over its major rivals in the tripolar world that has been taking shape for the past 30 years: US-dominated North America, Europe, and Northeast Asia, linked to South and Southeast Asia economies.

It is a rational calculation, on the assumption that human survival is not particularly significant in comparison with short-term power and wealth. And that is nothing new. These themes resonate through history. The difference today in this age of nuclear weapons is only that the stakes are enormously higher.