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## Twenty Things We Now Know Four Years After 9/11

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In a few days, it will be four years since the awful events symbolized by the date "9/11." Time for our annual list of what we've learned from that tragedy and what followed from it.

Much new information has been revealed this year, with corroborating documents verifying aspects of the story [we only surmised previously](#). So without further ado, below are the twenty things we now know four years after 9/11, based mainly on documented evidence found in the Bush-friendly mainstream media.

A general assessment before we begin the numbered list: There now is a widely-accepted foreign and domestic judgment that the Bush Administration is composed of bumbling, dangerous, close-minded ideologues. You can see it in the polls (as I write this, Bush has only a 40% approval rating, amazingly low) and, particularly, in how many conservative/traditional Republicans and former military officers are expressing remorse at having

supported this guy in the 2004 election. Bush these days still has his true-believer base of about 30%, but he's extremely vulnerable politically, which is why Rove and his minions are so desperate right now and are ratcheting up the rhetoric and smear-tactics against their political enemies. And the desperation helps us understand why Bush keeps returning to 9/11, the one talisman that he thinks still may work for him, that singular moment in his history when many Americans thought he looked good.

## **1. THE 9/11 ATTACK & COVERUP**

We know that 9/11, regardless of the degree of complicity you believe the Bush Administration was guilty of, was seized on by Bush&Co. as the event that would be used to justify all that would follow domestically and in foreign/military affairs. The evidence indicates that, at the least, the highest circles in the White House knew a spectacular attack was in the works in the days and weeks preceding 9/11 -- warnings were coming into the White House from a host of foreign leaders and intelligence agencies -- but chose to do nothing, presumably to make use of those events in the service of their hidden agenda.

Similarly, nothing was done as a result of the government's own intelligence warnings. The August 6, 2001 Presidential Daily Briefing, entitled "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S.," talked about al-Qaida wanting to hit the nation's capital, preparations for airline hijackings, casing of buildings in New York, terrorists in the U.S. with explosives, etc. Bush went to ground in Texas, the FBI told Ashcroft to stop flying commercial jets, etc. The attacks finally came about a month later, and the Bush forces were ready to make their moves.

The key neo-con leaders in charge of U.S. foreign/military policy (Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Bolton, Perle, Khalilzad, et al.) were founders of, and affiliated with, The Project for The New American Century; in one of their key reports, they noted that the far-right should expect their revolution to take a long time, "absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event -- like a new Pearl Harbor." Enter 9/11. (See ["How We Got Into This](#)

## [Imperial Pickle: A PNAC Primer.](#))

The neo-cons realized that presidents enjoy enormous patriotic support during wartime, but when the war ends, those leaders lose their compelling luster, as was the case with Bush#1. Ergo, Bush#2 would become a PERMANENT wartime president, and those who opposed him could then be tarred forever with the "unpatriotic" brush, and their political opposition marginalized. And it worked: the Democrats cowered and gave Bush virtually everything he wanted, up until relatively recently, when occasionally they remember they have spines in their bodies and stand up and fight as an opposition party should.

## **2. OIL & THE POLITICS OF PNAC**

We know that after 9/11, Bush seemed to bring the entire country along with him when he launched an attack on al-Qaida and its Taliban-government supporters in Afghanistan. But there's no oil in that destitute country -- and, as Rumsfeld reminded us, not much worth bombing -- and thus no lessons could be drawn by Middle East leaders from the U.S. attack. But, as Cheney's secret energy panel was aware, there was another country in the region that did have oil, and lots of it, and could be taken easily by U.S. forces; thus Iraq became the object-lesson to other autocratic leaders in the Middle East: If you do not do our bidding, prepare to accept a massive dose of "shock&awe": You will be overthrown, replaced by democratic-looking governments as arranged by the U.S.

The neo-cons -- most from PNAC and similar organizations, such as the American Enterprise Institute -- had urged Clinton to depose Saddam Hussein in 1998, but he demurred, seeing a mostly contained dictator there, whereas Osama bin Laden, and those terrorists like him, actually were successfully attacking U.S. assets inside the country and abroad.

But the PNAC crowd had larger ambitions than simply toppling a brutal dictator. Among their other recommendations: "pre-emptively" attacking countries

devoid of imminent danger to the U.S., abrogating agreed-upon treaties when they conflict with U.S. goals, making sure no other nation (or organization, such as the United Nations) can ever achieve power-parity with the U.S., installing U.S.-friendly governments to do America's will, using tactical nuclear weapons, and so on. All of these extreme PNAC suggestions, once regarded as lunatic, were enshrined in 2002 as official U.S. policy in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America.

### **3. SEXING UP THE INTEL**

We know that given the extreme nature of the neo-con agenda, the Bush Administration had their work cut out for them in fomenting support for an invasion and occupation of Iraq. Therefore, among the first move by Rumsfeld following 9/11 was to somehow try to connect Saddam to the terror attacks. The various intelligence agencies reported to Rumsfeld that there was no Iraq connection to 9/11, that it was an al-Qaida operation, but that was merely a bothersome impediment. Since the CIA and the other intelligence agencies would not, or could not, supply the intelligence needed to justify a war on Iraq, Rumsfeld set up his own rump intelligence agency, the Office of Special Plans, stocked it with political appointees of the PNAC persuasion, and soon was stovepiping cherry-picked raw intel straight to Cheney and others in the White House. Shortly thereafter, Cheney, Rice and others in the White House Iraq Group went big-time with the WMD scare and the melding of Saddam Hussein with the events of 9/11.

Based on this sexed-up and phony intelligence, Cheney, Bush, Rice, Rumsfeld and the others began warning about mushroom clouds over the U.S., drone planes dropping biological agents over the East Coast, huge stockpiles of chemical weapons in Iraq, etc. Secretary of State Colin Powell, regarded as the most believable of the bunch, was dispatched to the United Nations to make the case, which he did, reluctantly, by presenting an embarrassingly weak litany of surmise and concocted facts. The world didn't buy it, and the opposition to the U.S. war plan was palpable and huge: 10 million citizens throughout the

world hit the streets to protest, former allies publicly criticized Bush. Only Tony Blair in England eagerly hitched his wagon to the Bush war-plan with large numbers of troops dispatched -- as it turned out, over the legal, moral and political objections of many of his closest aides and advisers.

#### **4. THE DOWNING STREET REVELATIONS**

We know that those advisers warned Blair that he was about to involve the U.K. in an illegal, immoral and probably unwinnable war -- which would put U.K. and U.S. troops in great danger from potential insurgent forces. How do we know about these inner workings of the Blair government? Because a few months ago, someone from inside that body leaked the top-secret minutes from those war-Cabinet meetings, the so-called Downing Street Memos.

We also learned from those minutes that Bush & Blair agreed to make war on Iraq as early as the Spring of 2002 -- the intelligence, they decided, would be "fixed around the policy" to go to war -- despite their telling their legislative bodies and their citizens that no decisions had been made. In fact, the Bush Administration had decided to go to war a year before the invasion. "Fuck Saddam,?" Bush told three U.S. Senators in March of 2002. "We're taking him out."

#### **5. BUSH RACES TO WAR**

We know that many of Blair's most senior advisers thought the WMD argument rested on shaky ground, and that the legality of the war was in question without specific authorization from the United Nations Security Council. But the Bush Administration rushed to war anyway -- in haste because the U.N. inspectors on the ground in Iraq were not finding any WMD stockpiles -- without proper planning and with no workable plan to secure the peace and reconstruct the country after the major fighting.

## **6. THE BIG LIE TECHNIQUE ON WMD**

We know (thanks to the Downing Street Memos) that both the U.S. and U.K. were well aware that Iraq was a military paper tiger, with no significant WMD stockpiles or link to Al-Qaida and the 9/11 attacks. Nevertheless, the major thrust of Bush&Co.'s justification for going to war was based on these non-existent weapons and 9/11 links. The Big Lie Technique -- repeating the same falsehoods over and over and over -- drummed those lies into our heads day after day, month after month, with little if any skeptical analysis by the corporate mainstream media, which marched mostly in lockstep with Bush policy and thinking. Wolfowitz admitted later that they chose WMD as the primary reason for making war because they couldn't agree on anything else the citizenry would accept. But frightening people with talk of nuclear weapons, mushroom clouds, toxins delivered by drone airplanes and the like would work like a charm. And so they did, convincing the American people and Congress that an attack was justified. It wasn't.

## **7. PUSHING IRAQ TOWARDS IRAN**

We know that the real reasons for invading Iraq had precious little to do with WMD, Islamist terrorists coming from inside that country, installing democracy, and the like; there were no WMD to speak of, and Saddam, an especially vicious dictator, did not tolerate religious or political zealotry of any stripe. No, the reasons had more to do with American geopolitical goals in the region involving oil, control, support for its ally Israel, hardened military bases and keeping Iran from having free rein in the region.

As it turned out, by invading and occupying Iraq, it pushed that country and Iran into a far closer religious and political alliance than would have been the case if Saddam had been permitted to remain in power. Bush may have sacrificed thousands of American dead, tens of thousands of American wounded, and more than 100,000 Iraqis as "collateral damage" -- and now Bush&Co. quietly are willing to accept an Islamist government more attuned to

Teheran than to Washington, one with precious little regard for human rights, especially involving women. That is one royal FUBAR.

## **8. IRAQ AS A DISASTER ZONE**

We know that Bush's war has been a thorough disaster -- built on a foundation of lies, and incompetently managed from the start. As a result, the Occupation has provided a magnet for jihadists from other countries, billions have been wasted or lost in the corrupt system of organized corporate looting that ostensibly is designed to speed up Iraq's "reconstruction," etc. etc. Indeed, so much has Bush's war been botched that the "realists" in the Administration know they must get out as quickly as possible if they are to have any hope of exercising their considerable muscle elsewhere in the Middle East.

## **9. WHERE WILL THE BODIES COME FROM?**

We know that Bush's Middle East agenda also is suffering because the U.S. military is spread way thin in Afghanistan and Iraq, the desertion rates are high, soldiers are not re-upping at the usual clip, recruitment isn't working and illegal scams are being used to lure youngsters into signing up -- in short, there are no military forces to spare on the ground. Either a military draft will be instituted or all future attacks will have to come from air power or from missiles, which will merely deliver a message, making the bombed populations even angrier at America, and with no guarantee of success in forging U.S.-friendly "democratic" governments in Iran, Syria, et al. In short, we are witnessing the limits of imperial power in the modern world.

## **10. HIDING THE TRUTH FROM THE PUBLIC**

We know that Bush&Co. made sure that there would be no full-scale, independent investigations of their role in using and abusing the intelligence that led to war on Iraq.

The Senate Intelligence Committee, led by Republican Pat Roberts, held hearings on the failures lower down the chain, namely at the CIA and FBI level, and promised there would be followup hearings on any White House manipulation of intelligence. But, election over, Roberts says no purpose would be served in launching such an investigation. Likewise, the 9/11 Commission did not delve deeply into how the Bush Administration misused its pre-9/11 knowledge. Bush sent an October 5, 2001 memo to Rumsfeld, Powell, O'Neill, Ashcroft, and the heads of the CIA and the FBI restricting their talking to Congress about 9/11 and other "national-security" matters; the only Democrats who could receive these "sensitive" briefings -- meaning they were forbidden to make them public -- were the Senate and House Minority Leaders, and the ranking members of the Intelligence Committees. Nobody else was to be in the loop. In short, this secretive administration made sure that everything was done to head off at the pass any investigations whatsoever. Cheney and Bush told the minority and majority leaders in Congress that there should be no 9/11 hearings, for "national security" reasons. Bush&Co. fought tooth and nail against an independent 9/11 Commission, and against the families who pushed for it.

## **11. THE ROAD TO DICTATORSHIP**

We know that Bush has no great love of legitimate democratic processes, certainly not inside the United States. He much prefers to rule as an oligarch, but to do that, he had to invent legal justifications that granted him the requisite power. So he had his longtime lawyer-toady, Alberto Gonzales, devise a legal philosophy that permits Bush to do pretty much what he wants -- ignore laws on the books, disappear U.S. citizens into military prisons, authorize torture, etc. -- whenever Bush says he's acting as "commander-in-chief" during "wartime."

And, since "wartime" is the amorphous "war on terrorism," from which there is no end, Bush is home free. There always will be terrorists trying to do anti-U.S. damage somewhere around the globe, or inside America, and the "commander-in-chief" will need to respond. Ergo,

goes this logic, Bush is above the law, untouchable, in perpetuity. (Bush&Co. also made sure that U.S. officials and military troops would not be subject to indictment by any international court or war-crimes tribunal.)

Neither Gonzales, nor Bush, has disavowed this legal philosophy of a dictator-like President being beyond the reach of the law. No doubt, the issue ultimately will be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court, to which Bush has nominated Judge John Roberts, who would be the key swing vote. Roberts, as author Chris Floyd has noted, recently upheld Bush's sovereign right to dispose of "enemy combatants" any way he pleases. In a chilling decision, the appeals panel, of which Roberts was a member, ruled that the Commander-in-Chief's arbitrarily-designated "enemies" are non-persons, with no legal rights. Bush now feels free to subject anyone he likes to the "military tribunal" system he has concocted.

The fact that Roberts did not recuse himself from ruling on this issue while he was in the process of being interviewed for the Supreme Court appointment by the employer being sued in the case, would seem to be an open-and-shut case of conflict-of-interest. If the Democrats have any balls, this egregious ethical lapse should serve as an "extraordinary" reason for a filibuster of his nomination.

## **12. TORTURE AS OFFICIAL STATE POLICY**

We know that Gonzales, then Bush's White House Counsel, and Pentagon lawyers beholden to Rumsfeld, devised legal rationales that make torture of suspects official state policy. These Bush-loyalist lawyers also greatly widened the definition of what is acceptable interrogation practice -- basically anything this side of death or terminally abusing internal organs. They also authorized the sending of key suspects to countries specializing in extreme torture. After all this, Bush and Rumsfeld professed shock, shock!, that those under their command would wind up torturing, abusing and humiliating prisoners in U.S. care. But the Administration made sure to stop all inquiries into higher-up responsibility for the endemic torture. The buck never stops on Bush's

desk -- if something goes wrong (and he never will admit to mistakes), it's always someone else's fault.

### **13. MAKING THE BILL OF RIGHTS "QUAINT"**

We know that the Bush Administration has been able to obtain whatever legislation it needs in its self-proclaimed "war on terror" by utilizing, and hyping, the understandable fright of the American people. The so-called Patriot Act -- composed of many honorable initiatives, and many clearly unconstitutional provisions, cobbled together from those submitted over the years by GOP hardliners and rejected as too extreme by Congress -- was presented almost immediately to a House and Senate frightened by the 9/11 attacks and by the anthrax introduced into their chambers by someone still not discovered. Ridge and Ashcroft emerged periodically to manipulate the public's fright by announcing another "terror" threat, based on "credible" but unverified evidence; Ridge, who has since resigned, recently admitted that there were no good reasons for many of those supposed "alerts." Meanwhile, Congress (shame on you, Democrats!) recently made most of the Patriot Act laws permanent! Unless those can be repealed, that vote will be a nail into the coffin housing the remains of the Bill of Rights.

### **14. THE OUTING OF COVERT AGENTS**

The Bush Administration, for its own crass political reasons, compromised American national security by outing two key intelligence operatives -- one, CIA agent Valerie Plame, who had important contacts in the shadowy world of weapons of mass destruction (outed by "senior Administration officials," apparently in retaliation for her husband's political comments); revealing the identity of a CIA agent can be a felony. The other, apparently to show off how successful they were in their anti-terrorism hunt, was a high-ranking mole close to bin Laden's inner circle, who could have kept the U.S. informed as to ongoing and future plans of al-Qaida. That's our war-on-terrorism government at work.

It's now clear who at least two of the "senior administration officials" were who leaked Plame's identity: Karl Rove, Bush's guru, now deputy chief of staff, and I. Lewis Libby, Cheney's chief of staff. Special Counsel Patrick Fitzgerald is expected to unseal indictments in this case sometime this Fall that either could focus narrowly on perjury involving Plame's outing, or could be expanded to the broader issue of the manipulative lies emanating from the machinations of the White House Iraq Group (Cheney/Libby, Rove, Card, Rice, Hadley, Hughes, Matalin, et al.) in taking this nation to war. It is possible that Bush and Cheney and Bolton, among others, could be charged or listed as unindicted co-conspirators.

## **15. PROTECTING THE VOTE**

We know that America's voting-machine system -- and more importantly, vote-counting system -- is corruptible and likely has been corrupted. Sophisticated statistical analysis along with wide-scale exit-polling, suggests strongly that the 2004 election results were fiddled with by the private companies that tally the votes. These companies are owned by far-right Republican supporters. But the same objection would be lodged if Democrats owned the companies. There are no good reasons to "outsource" vote-counting to private corporations -- who refuse to permit inspection of their proprietary software, and whose technicians have behaved suspiciously on election nights in 2000 in Florida, in 2002 in Georgia, and in Ohio and Florida in 2004. And we haven't even mentioned the GOP dirty-tricks department whose function has been, by hook or by crook, to lower the number of potential Democrat voters, especially minority voters. Note: Unless the vote-counting system can be changed soon -- and the vote-tallying scandal will not be adequately dealt with by voter-verified receipts -- the integrity of our elections will be suspect into the far future. Even if all the other reforms were implemented, they would mean nothing without the guarantee of honest elections.

## **16. NO ECONOMIC PLAN**

We know that the Bush Administration paid off its backers (and itself) by giving humongous tax breaks, for 10 years out, to the already wealthy and to large corporations. In addition, corporate tax-evasion was made easier via offshore listings. All this was done at a time when the U.S. economy was in recessionary doldrums and when the treasury deficit from those tax-breaks was growing even larger from Iraq war costs. So far as we know, the Bush Administration has no plans for how to retire that debt and no real plan (other than the discredited "trickle-down" theory) for restarting the economy and creating well-paying jobs for skilled workers, so many of whom have had their positions outsourced to foreign lands.

## **17. STARVING THE GOVERNMENT**

We know that the HardRight conservatives who control Bush policy don't really care what kind of debt and deficits their policies cause; in some ways, the more the better. They want to decimate and starve popular social programs from the New Deal/Great Society eras, including, most visibly, Head Start, Social Security, Medicare (and real drug coverage for seniors), student loans, welfare assistance, public education, etc. (Especially egregious is the education scam known as "No Child Left Behind.") Since these programs are so well-approved by the public, the destruction will be carried out stealthily with the magic words "privatization," "deregulation," "choice" and so on, and by going to the public and saying that they'd love to keep the programs intact but they have no alternative but to cut them, given the deficit, weak economy and "anti-terrorist" wars abroad. Bush's whirlwind tour trying to sell his Social Security "reform" plan has backfired badly, but he's still pushing a good many of those ideas, just in case he can slip it in somewhere, maybe by tying it somehow to Saddam Hussein and 9/11.

## **18. THE ENVIRONMENTAL GIVEAWAY**

We know that Bush environmental policy -- dealing with

air and water pollution, mineral extraction, national parks, and so on -- is an unmitigated disaster, giving pretty much free rein to corporations whose bottom line does better when they don't have to pay attention to the public interest. It's the worst sort of grab-the-money-and-run scenario.

## **19. THE GREED OF POLITICAL POWER**

We know from "insider" memoirs and reports by former Bush Administration officials -- Joseph DeJulio, Paul O'Neill, Richard Clarke, et al. -- that the public interest plays little role in the formulation of policy inside the Bush Administration. The motivating factors are mainly greed and ideological control and remaining in political power. Further, they say, there is little or no curiosity to think outside the political box, or even to hear other opinions.

## **20. FAITH- OR REALITY-BASED PROGRAMS**

We know that this attitude ("my mind is made up, don't bother me with the facts") shows up most openly in how science is disregarded by the Bush Administration (good example: global warming) in favor of faith-based thinking. Some of this non-curiosity about reality may be based in fundamentalist religious, even Apocalyptic, beliefs. Much of Bush's bashing of science is designed as payback to his fundamentalist base, but the scary part is that a good share of the time he actually believes what he's saying, about evolution vs. intelligent-design, stem-cell research, abstinence education, censoring the rewriting of government scientific reports that differ from the Bush party line, cutbacks in research&development grants for the National Science Foundation, etc., *ad nauseum*. This closed-mind attitude helps explain, on a deeper level, why things aren't working out in Iraq.

## **AMERICA OR GERMANY IN THE '30s?**

In sum (although we could continue forever detailing the crimes and misdemeanors of this corrupt, incompetent

Administration), we know that more and more the permanent-war policy abroad and police-state tactics at home (the shredding of Constitutional rights designed to protect citizens from a potential repressive government) are taking us into a kind of American fascism domestically and an imperial foreign policy overseas. All aspects of the American polity are infected with the militarist Know-Nothingism emanating from the top, with governmental and vigilante-type crackdowns on protesters, dissent, free speech, freedom of assembly, etc. happening regularly on both the local and federal levels. More and more, America is resembling Germany in the early 1930s, group pitted against group while the central government amasses more and more power and control of its put-upon citizens.

Bush has had a rough first year of his second term. It's as if the public blinders are starting to come off, and the true nature of this man and his regime are finally starting to hit home and he is seen for what he is: an insecure, arrogant, dangerous, dry-drunk bully who is endangering U.S. national interests abroad with his reckless war in Iraq, his wrecking of the U.S. economy at home, and with his over-reaching in all areas.

If a Democrat president and vice president had behaved similarly to Bush and Cheney, they'd have been in the impeachment dock in a minute. If the Plame-Iraq indictments come down as expected, a momentum for impeachment of Bush and Cheney will be generated.

Our job now is to keep that political momentum building to get rid of these guys, while we try to organize a pro-democracy, anti-imperialist movement for change in this country that is inclusive, non-dogmatic, and capable of winning elections. That may or may not involve the Democratic Party.

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