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Twenty-Six Things We Now Know Seven Years After 9/11

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Each year around the anniversary of 9/11, I summarize what we ordinary citizens have learned since that awful day in 2001. This is the seventh annual look backwards, a 2008 update that contains new information and surmising about those horrific events and what followed.

1. One 9/11 Size Fits All. What we now more fully understand is how the CheneyBush Administration utilized the murderous terrorism of 9/11 as the linchpin justification for their unfolding domestic and foreign agenda, much of it illegal, immoral and impeachable.

By and large, one can sum up that overall agenda as: Amass and control power in the U.S. and much of the world ("full-spectrum dominance"), and, in cahoots with their corporate supporters such as Halliburton and Blackwater, loot the federal treasury. All this was to be carried out secretly, with no accountability.

2. Iraq War Planning Began Before 9/11. We also know more about the nature of the lies (including forged documents) used by the Administration to sell the Iraq War, which attack already was in the planning stages well before 9/11.

The first faked document, by CIA forgers at the behest of White House officials, was a 2005 letter (back-dated 2001) supposedly coming from the then-Iraqi

intelligence chief to his boss Saddam Hussein mentioning alleged "facts" that established a tie-in between 9/11, Al-Qaida and Iraq and about Saddam's supposed purchase of uranium. The official, Tahir Jalil Habbush al-Tikriti, who had been an informant for the U.S. during the run-up to the war, actually had written his CIA handlers at the time, reported [author Ron Suskind](#), that there were no WMD, no 9/11 or Al-Qaida connections; that letter was deep-sixed by the CIA and the official was taken into protective custody, hidden away in Jordan and given \$5million for services rendered (which later included his signature on the phony letter).

The second fake document, which was used by the Brits and Americans in the run-up to the war, supposedly was from the African nation of Niger. It was an amateurish botch job (incorrect letterhead, signature of a minister of state who no longer was in that office, etc.) that came from the [Italian Secret Service](#), but the idea for it might have originated elsewhere, perhaps from a clandestine American service. It was designed to bolster the fiction that Iraq was purchasing uranium "yellowcake" from Niger. Since the yellowcake theory was of great value to the CheneyBush plans to bomb Iraq -- as Ambassador Joe Wilson had made plain in his various articles --the tendency worldwide was to believe that the U.S. might well have been involved in having the phony letter written.

3. Domestic Spying Started Before 9/11. Similarly, we know more about the illegal and widespread domestic spying ordered by CheneyBush [seven months BEFORE 9/11](#). We still don't fully understand the reasons for this top-secret, massive data-mining, to be carried out without proper legal warrants. But the point is that the CheneyBush Administration, for its own reasons, and long before 9/11, asked the giant communications companies to furnish them with the private records of its customers, which then were passed on to the relevant governmental security departments.

All this new information has made fringe theorists about 9/11 all the more numerous: If CheneyBush did all those illegal things to fool the population -- the forgeries, the lies, the coverups, the deceptions, the police-state tactics BEFORE 9/11 -- how far, they ask, might they have gone to order or carry out or be in some complicit relationship with the 9/11 attacks?

4. McCain and 9/11/Iraq. We also know that one of the two major contenders for the presidency in the 2008 elections [swallowed the CheneyBush line](#) about 9/11 and propagandized for the Iraq War and Occupation because, he said, Iraq was tied to the events of 9/11 and to Al-Qaida and to WMD stockpiles. None of those was

true, but even though John McCain had problems with how Rumsfeld was managing the war, the Arizona senator placed himself right in the neo-con corner about the necessity for the war. He continues to this day to justify the U.S. Occupation as necessary for a U.S. "victory," whatever that term may mean -- even, he says, if it takes another hundred years and trillions of dollars more. (His opponent, Barack Obama, is more dedicated to drawing down troops in Iraq, "re-deploying" some of them to the anti-Taliban war in Afghanistan, and sending the rest home.)

So, with that introduction, let's take a look at the rest of the list. Some of what follows has appeared in my previous articles, and some is new or expanded:

9/11 and "the War on Terror"

5. *9/11/Anthrax and Iraq*. Let's remember the chronology of how we got here: The Administration's far-right domestic agenda was bogged down in 2001 after Jim Jeffords left the Republican caucus and joined the now-majority Democratic one in the Senate. The murderous terrorism of 9/11 occurred several months later. As did the mysterious anthrax attacks aimed at Congress and the media, which seven years later was blamed conveniently on a single scientist at the Army's [Fort Detrick biological weapons lab](#)), who committed suicide a few months ago. Both the anthrax attack and the 9/11 terror attacks had the effect of providing the CheneyBush Administration pretty much a free ride in putting police-state tactics in place. Those tactics were embodied in the so-called "Patriot Act," which superseded Constitutional protections, and which succeeded in greasing the wheels for all sorts of questionable domestic legislation that otherwise might have been bottled up forever.

The planning for an attack on Iraq, as Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill later told us, already had begun at the first cabinet meetings after Inauguration Day in early 2001. After 9/11, those plans proceeded apace, even when the intelligence indicated that it was not an Iraq operation but an al-Qaida terrorist attack, out of Afghanistan.

It appeared that the U.S. military over time would capture or kill Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and effectively wipe out most of al-Qaida, which had attacked America on 9/11. But CheneyBush abruptly pulled the U.S. forces from Afghanistan and sent them to Iraq, a country that was no real danger to the U.S. and its allies. (Addendum: By Fall of 2008, the Taliban regrouped and began mounting more and more

attacks on U.S. and Western coalition forces in Afghanistan and now once again control a good share of the country. If the U.S. troops had not been precipitously pulled out and dispatched to Iraq, instead of taking care of business in Afghanistan, today's reality there might well have been significantly different.)

6. Unanswered 9/11 Questions. There still are numerous unanswered questions about the horrific events of September 11, 2001, mainly centered around: A. Why Bush sat there in the Florida school for seven minutes reading the "Pet Goat" book after he'd been informed by his chief of staff, after the second plane struck the World Trade Center, that "America is under attack," and why the Secret Service, as they are trained to do when the President is believed to be in danger, didn't surround him and get him the hell out of that classroom. The clear implication is that a delay-operation was in progress. B. Why NORAD didn't scramble its fighters in time to do anything. (Same implication). C. Whether World Trade Center Towers 1, 2 and 7 collapsed into their footprints as a result of fire/structural damage or from pre-set demolition charges (there are reputable scientists on both sides of that one). D. How to explain all the "put" options on American Airlines and United Airlines stocks just prior to the attacks, clearly suggesting someone knew which airlines were going to be hijacked and was trying to profit from the pending attacks?

But regardless of whether CheneyBush were complicit in the deaths and destruction that day -- and there is no conclusive proof that they were -- what we do know is that in the months, weeks and days prior to 9/11, red-hot warnings about a planned terrorist attack, using planes as weapons aimed at buildings in New York and Washington, were coming into the White House from a wide variety of other countries.

At the very least then, CheneyBush and a few other key insiders knew that a "spectacular" attack was coming and did absolutely nothing. Bush was presented by the CIA on August 6 with a Presidential Daily Briefing entitled "Bin Laden Determined to Attack Inside the U.S.", which talked about preparations for plane hijackings, suspected terrorists surveilling federal buildings in New York, teams of terrorists being inside the U.S. with explosives. But, even following these dire warnings, there was no heightening of awareness in the Bush Administration, no alerting airlines, no sending out photos of al-Qaida suspects to be on the lookout for, no calling an urgent meeting of counter-terrorism experts inside the White House to coordinate either a way of minimizing the damage or dealing with a post-attack response. Nothing.

One is left with two reasonable alternative explanations:

A: These Cheney/Bush guys in charge were (and remain) totally over their heads in terms of governance. They simply didn't have a clue what was about to happen and what to do about it. Administration actions during the past seven and a half years supply more than enough evidence that Bush and his crew are total fuck-ups. It's a reverse-Midas syndrome: everything they touch turns to excrement. Total bumblers, screwups, incompetent dolts.

B: They knew something major was about to go down (although 3000 deaths may have been way beyond what they imagined), and did nothing in order to use those attacks as a rallying point to amass power and push their agenda through a Congress that otherwise was antagonistic to them.

7. *The Facts of 9/11*. We know that the Bush Administration didn't want the public to learn much, if anything, about the events of that day. Bush&Co. had to be dragged kicking and screaming into agreeing to the appointment of the official 9/11 Commission, and they named as the executive director one of their made men, Philip Zelikow, who later would be named a high-ranking Administration official.

As it turned out, the Administration stonewalled many of the Commission's requests for documents. Moreover, Bush would not testify under oath and would deign to appear only with Cheney by his side, (here's my imagined [transcript of that testimony](#).) We later learned that the commission was so angered by the constantly-shifting stories told by the Pentagon/NORAD that they were [ready to urge that legal charges be filed](#) against those who testified from those two governmental bodies.

In short, the 9/11 Commission's probe was not exhaustive, leaving many areas of investigation unplumbed, and the documentation provided by the Administration was insufficient and often late in arriving. Conclusion: Even today, many questions remain unsatisfactorily unanswered.

8. *PNAC & the Neo-Cons*. We know that a FarRight segment of the conservative movement, by and large former Reagan Administration officials in exile from power during the Clinton presidency, was dedicated to using America's sole superpower status to move aggressively in the world while, they believed, no other country or international force could put up much resistance. The key neo-con leaders who were placed in charge of U.S. foreign/military policy after the 2000 election (Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Bolton, Perle, Khalilzad, et al.) were founders of, and affiliated with,

The Project for The New American Century (PNAC), a group that urged the U.S. to use its sole-superpower muscle in creating Pax Americana "hegemony" over key regions of the world.

The Bush 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 President Bush#1. Ergo, Bush#2 would become a PERMANENT wartime president, and those who opposed him could then be tarred forever with the smear of "unpatriotic" and "hating America," thus marginalizing their political impact. And it worked: the Democrats cowered and gave Bush virtually everything he wanted, up until relatively recently, when occasionally they remembered that they have spines and stood up and fought as an opposition party should. As they did more of that, and promised to end the war and reign in CheneyBush lawlessness, the public swept them into majority control of the House and Senate in the 2006 elections. (Note: After the election, however, the Democrats continued funding the war, approved the Administration's illegal domestic-surveillance, and took "off the table" the possibility of impeaching Bush and Cheney for their gross abuse of power and of the Constitution.)

We know that Bush&Co. saw, in Condi Rice's apt term at the time, the "opportunity" offered by the 9/11 attacks to move quickly and forcefully with the Administration's foreign and domestic agenda. PNAC talked about its Pax Americana plan for global "benevolent hegemony" using a retooled military. This military transformation would take forever to implement, a PNAC report said, unless a "new Pearl Harbor" changed the equation in the public mind. 9/11 came along and was used as that "new Pearl Harbor." (See ["How We Got Into This Imperial Pickle: A PNAC Primer"](#)).

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 their Afghanistan homebase. But there's no oil in that destitute country, and, as Rumsfeld reminded us, not much worth bombing. 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 which could be taken easily by U.S. forces. Thus Iraq became the object-lesson to other autocratic leaders in the Middle East, especially in Syria and Iran. If you do not do our bidding, prepare to accept a massive dose of "shock&awe." You will be removed and replaced by democratic-looking governments as arranged by the U.S. Control of Iraq's oil has been at the

forefront of U.S. occupation policies in Iraq, and remains so there and elsewhere as oil and gas become even more sought-after energy sources.

These neo-con members of PNAC and similar organizations, such as the American Enterprise Institute and Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, had urged Clinton to depose Saddam Hussein in 1998. But he demurred, seeing a mostly contained dictator there, whereas Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, 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 Iraqi dictator. They were after effective control of energy sources around the globe. To get to that hegemonic point, they developed a philosophy that included: "pre-emptively" attacking countries that were of no imminent danger to the U.S., abrogating treaties when they conflicted with U.S. goals, making sure no other nation or organization (such as the United Nations) could ever achieve power-parity with the U.S., installing U.S.-friendly governments to do America's will, expressing a willingness to use 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.

The Iraq Invasion and Occupation

9. Sexing Up the Intel. Given the extreme nature of the neo-con agenda in fomenting support for an invasion and occupation of Iraq, Bush&Co. had their work cut out for them. Therefore, among the first moves by Rumsfeld following 9/11 was to somehow try to connect Saddam to the terror attacks. When the various intelligence agencies reported to Rumsfeld that there was no Iraq connection to 9/11, and 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, much of it untrue, from self-interested Iraqi exiles, straight to Cheney and others in the White House. Shortly thereafter, the White House Iraq Group -- the in-house marketing cabal for the war, with such major players as Libby, Rove, Card, Rice, Hadley, Hughes, Matalin, et al. -- went big-time with the WMD and mushroom-cloud scares and the suspect 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 (with phony photos shown to members of Congress), 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 allegations. While the U.S. corporate media was unanimous in its opinion that Powell had cinched the case, the world didn't buy it. (Powell, who resigned in 2004, has since lamented his role in this charade.) The opposition to the impending U.S. war on Iraq was palpable and huge: 10 million citizens throughout the world hit the streets to protest, and former allies publicly criticized Bush. Only Tony Blair in England eagerly hitched his wagon to the Bush war-plan, dispatching large numbers of troops, as it turned out over the objections of many of his closest aides and advisers.

10. The Big Lie & 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 that 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 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, the mass media, and their citizens that no decisions had been made. In fact, the Bush Administration had let it be known privately that it had decided to attack Iraq a year before the invasion. "Fuck Saddam," Bush told three U.S. Senators in March of 2002. "We're taking him out."

We know that many of Blair's most senior advisers thought the WMD argument rested on shaky ground, and that without specific authorization from the United Nations Security Council, the legality of the war was doubtful. The U.N. inspectors on the ground in Iraq were not finding any WMD stockpiles, but the Bush Administration rushed to war anyway. The haste to begin the war meant that there was little or no proper planning to secure the peace and reconstruct the country after the major fighting. Some weeks later, Bush prematurely declared, under a "Mission Accomplished" banner, that the U.S. had "prevailed" in the Iraq war. The Iraqi "insurgency" was about to blow up in their

faces.

The Downing Street Memos make clear that both the U.S. and U.K. were well aware that Iraq was a 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 falsehoods into Americans' 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 public might accept. But frightening people with talk of nuclear weapons, mushroom clouds, toxins delivered to the East Coast of the U.S. by Iraqi drone airplanes and the like would work like a charm in convincing Americans to go to war.

11. Iran Is Beneficiary of U.S. Policy. We know that the real reasons for invading Iraq had precious little to do with WMD, with Islamist terrorists inside that country, with installing democracy, and the like. There were no WMD to speak of, and Saddam, an especially vicious dictator, did not tolerate religious or political zealots 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.

However, as it turned out, the invasion and brutal occupation of Iraq removed the one major buffer against the expansion of Iran's political and military power in the region. In addition, because the U.S. Occupation was so incompetently carried out, it pushed Iraq 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. CheneyBush may have sacrificed thousands of American dead, tens of thousands of American wounded, and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis as "collateral damage," and now the Administration, which has constantly downsized its definition of "victory," seems quietly willing to accept a stable Islamic government that may well turn out to be more attuned to Teheran than to Washington.

12. Iraq As a Disaster Zone. We know that Bush's war has been a thorough disaster, built on a foundation of lies, and bungled from the start. The 2007 "surge" of U.S. troops has eased the violence in a military sense, but the political reconciliation that could bring peace still

has not been made by the warring sects and clans and politicians. In short, peace has not come, and billions of dollars have been (and continue to be) wasted or lost in the corrupt system of organized corporate looting that ostensibly is designed to speed up Iraq's "reconstruction." Indeed, so much has Bush's war been botched that the "realists" in the Administration know the U.S. must get out as quickly as possible if they are to have any hope of exercising their considerable muscle elsewhere in the Middle East. But, so far, the neo-con strategy still rules, and "stay-the-course" remains the operating principle, at least until the new American President is installed.

13. The Stretched-Thin Military. We know that Bush's Greater Middle East agenda also is suffering because the U.S. military is spread way thin in Afghanistan and Iraq, the desertion and suicide rates are high, morale (especially among Reserve and National Guard troops) is way down as a result of the never-ending multiple tours of duty, soldiers are not re-enlisting at the usual clip, recruitment isn't working and deceptive scams are being used to lure youngsters (many of them gang-members, felons, psychologically damaged) into signing up. In short, there are no forces to spare on the ground. There is way too much reliance on air power or from missiles, which merely deliver a message about U.S. superiority in the air but with no successful follow-up possible on the ground. The air attacks result in making the civilian citizens of those countries even angrier at America, and with little likelihood of success in forging U.S.-friendly "democratic" governments in Iran, Syria, et al., since bombed populations tend to support their existing governments. In short, America's failure in Iraq and Israel's failure in Lebanon demonstrate the limits of muscle-bound, high-tech armies in the modern, nationalist-guerrillas world.

14. Hiding Facts from the Public. We know that Bush&Co. made sure that there would be no full-scale, independent probes of their role in using and abusing the intelligence that led to war on Iraq. This is the most secretive Administration in American history, and they want no investigations of any of their mistakes or corruptions of the democratic process.

The Senate Intelligence Committee, then 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, following the 2004 election, Roberts said 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. In short, this secretive administration made sure that everything was done to head off at the pass any investigations whatsoever.

After the 2006 elections, many years too late, the now-majority Democrats eventually began their probe into the Administration's use of intelligence to promote the Iraq War. [The committee concluded](#) that the Administration "repeatedly presented intelligence as fact when in reality it was unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent. As a result, the American people were led to believe that the threat from Iraq was much greater than actually existed." Chairman Jay Rockefeller added: "There is no question we all relied on flawed intelligence. But, there is a fundamental difference between relying on incorrect intelligence and deliberately painting a picture to the American people that you know is not fully accurate."

The Turn to Tyranny at Home

15. Perilously Close to Dictatorship. We know that Bush has no great love for democratic processes, certainly not inside the United States. (On at least three occasions, he has "jokingly" expressed his preference for dictatorship, as long, he said, as he can be the dictator.) He much prefers to rule as an oligarch, but to do that, he had to invent legal justifications that would grant him the requisite power. So he had longtime lawyer-toady Alberto Gonzales, and Cheney's now-chief-of-staff David Addington, devise a legal philosophy that would permit Bush to do pretty much what he wants -- ignore laws on the books, disappear U.S. citizens into military prisons, authorize torture, spy on citizens' phone calls and emails, declare martial law and rule by decree, etc. -- whenever Bush says he's acting as "commander-in-chief" during "wartime."

And, since "wartime" is the amorphous "war on terror," a war against a tactic, there is no end and 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 (and any successor) 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.

However, even with ultra-conservative Bush appointees John Roberts and Samuel Alito on the bench, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled several times that the Administration has gone beyond constitutional limits with regard to its treatment of suspected terrorist

"detainees." But somehow Bush&Co. always manage to postpone and delay implementation or find ways around the court rulings.

16. Torture As Official U.S. Policy. We know that Gonzales, Addington and Pentagon and DoJ 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 "rendering" 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 CheneyBush's desk. If something goes wrong (and they never will admit to mistakes), it's always someone else's fault. If and when Iraq "falls," the names of scapegoats are being prepared: al-Maliki, Democrats, the "liberal media" and bloggers, Bill Clinton, et al. Never Cheney, never Bush.

17. The Bill of Rights Goes "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. John Ashcroft and Tom Ridge emerged periodically to manipulate the public's fright by announcing yet another "terror" threat, based on "credible but unverified" evidence. As he departed from his directorate of the Homeland Security Department, Ridge admitted that he was required to issue many of those "terror" warnings when there was [no justifiable reason for doing so](#). It has [been demonstrated](#) and Ridge seemed to be suggesting that those warnings were activated usually when the Administration was facing an election or when they were having an especially bad-news day. Meanwhile, Congress (shame on you, Democrats!) made most of the Patriot Act laws permanent. Unless those can be repealed, and the juridical tradition of *habeas corpus* (where a court has to rule on the legality of a suspect's arrest) re-introduced into American jurisprudence, that vote will be a nail into the coffin housing the remains of the Bill of Rights.

18. Outing CIA Agents for Political Reasons. The Bush Administration, for its own crass political reasons, compromised American national security by revealing the identity of two key intelligence operatives. The first was CIA agent Valerie Plame, who had important contacts in the shadowy world of weapons of mass destruction, especially in dealing with Iran's nuclear

capabilities. Whoever else also was responsible for the agent's outing, it is clear that Cheney (through Libby) and Rove disclosed Plame's covert identity in an attempt to punish her husband for exposing Bush's lie to the nation that Saddam was seeking supplies of uranium from central Africa. Revealing the identity of a covert CIA agent is a felony. The other outing of a CIA operative, by Condi Rice, apparently to show off how successful the Administration was in its anti-terrorism hunt, was that of a high-ranking mole close to bin Laden's inner circle. This operative could have kept the U.S. informed as to ongoing and future plans of al-Qaida. That's Bush's "war-on-terrorism" at work.

And, no surprise, after Libby was convicted of obstruction of justice and perjury, Bush commuted his sentence just before Libby was to head for prison. As usual, there is no accountability for illegal behavior in the Bush Administration, and miscreants know that if they keep their mouths shut or tell lies to the police and get caught, they have a guaranteed Get-Out-of-Jail-Free card.

19. Do You Know If Your Vote Is Counted? We know that America's vote-counting system is corrupted. Sophisticated statistical analysis along with wide-scale exit-polling, suggests strongly that the 2000 and 2004 presidential 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. It has been demonstrated publicly that those who control the software or who hack into the easily-penetrated system can manipulate the vote totals without anybody being the wiser.

There are no good reasons to "outsource" vote-counting to private corporations. These are the same companies who make and program the voting machines, who refuse to permit inspection of their 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 Rove's dirty-tricks department whose function has been, by hook or by crook, to lower the number of potential Democrat voters, especially minority voters; a favorite tactic is to purge hundreds of thousands of likely Democratic voters from the voting rolls in advance in key states such as Florida and Ohio. (As I write this, the GOP in Ohio is lobbying for 600,000 voters to undergo electoral scrutiny, most of them probably leaning Democratic, with many, perhaps several hundred thousand, to be stricken from the voting rolls.) Various states were

concerned enough about touch-screen computer-voting to order significant changes in equipment. But because the same companies control the secret counting of the votes, unless the vote-tabulating system can be changed soon, the integrity of our elections will be suspect into the far future. Even if all the other reforms were implemented for November's federal election, they would mean nothing without the guarantee of honest tabulation.

20. No Privacy Anymore. We also now know that even before 9/11, CheneyBush authorized massive data-mining of Americans' phone calls and emails, along with other domestic spying operations, many of them in clear violation of the FISA law establishing a separate, secret court to rule on requests for eavesdropping warrants. There was a flurry of outrage about citizens' privacy being breached in such an obviously illegal manner, but a few months ago Democrats joined Republicans in giving retroactive cover for such domestic-spying and even gave post-facto immunity to the giant communications corporations who joined in breaking the law.

21. Purging the Body Politic. We now know that CheneyBush, angered by the unwillingness of the intelligence analysts at the CIA and State Department to cook the intel books for political reasons, conducted purges of recalcitrant analysts at CIA and State.

There also were purges in the Justice Department -- including the use of illegal partisan criteria in an attempt to keep independent-minded jobseekers from being hired -- so that only "loyal Bushies" (their term) would be in place, those who would do the bidding of the White House without opposition or questioning. And so the DOJ, under Bush toady Alberto Gonzales, fired at least nine U.S. Attorneys around the country and replaced them with their own guys. They tried to pretend that the firings were the result of poor performance ratings, but that wasn't the case. It was simply partisan, to help guarantee GOP control of the election and indicting process through which the Democratic Party and its supporters could be legally hassled in court or likely Democratic voters kept from the polls. A side-effect of Bush&Co. putting their own U.S. Attorneys in power would be protection for themselves and their supporters from criminal charges.

The resulting public furor got Gonzales canned, but his replacement, Michael Mukasey, continues in the same tradition of representing Bush and Cheney as presidential counsel, rather than representing the Constitution and the American people's interests. In short, not much has changed at the DoJ.

22. *There Is No Real Economic Plan.* We know that the Bush Administration paid off its backers (and itself) by giving humongous tax breaks, for 10 years, to the already wealthy and to large corporations. In addition, corporate tax-evasion was made easier via offshore listings and by laying off thousands of IRS auditors of high-end returns. All this was done at a time when the U.S. economy was in a sorry state and when the treasury deficit from those tax-breaks was growing even larger from the Iraq/Afghanistan/"war-on-terror" costs. (Those war costs are now closing in on a TRILLION dollars! and Congress continues to grant Bush's requests for several hundred billion more). 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 long-time employees, many of whom have had their positions outsourced to foreign lands.

The economy is in such desperate shape in late-2008 that the Administration's and McCain's lack of a plan to turn things around is at the heart of the upcoming election, and the issue could decide the race.

23. *Drowning Government In a Bathtub.* 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 since, as GOP honcho Grover Norquist has admitted, they want to shrink government "down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub." 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. Bush's plan to privatize a huge chunk of the Social Security System is still out there as a goal -- McCain is on board -- though Republicans are keeping quiet about it.

24. *Privatizing Government Functions.* We know that in addition to trying to privatize Social Security and other government programs, CheneyBush have begun privatizing the military, partially through its all-volunteer army and by employing mercenaries ("independent contractors") to carry out numerous national-security functions, such as intelligence-gathering. (It's estimated that about 130,000 such mercenaries are on the ground in Iraq, close to the same number as official U.S. military forces.) The corporate army known as Blackwater is used not only in Iraq but was used domestically as well, to police New Orleans after the Katrina disaster. Private corporations built and presumably will run internment

centers around the U.S. in the event of a natural or terrorist disaster. Under the ambiguous provisions of martial-law, it is possible that those who too actively oppose government policy could be classified as aiding and comforting "terrorists" and be housed in those camps.

25. *Who Cares What You Drink or Breathe?* 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 lines do 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. Perhaps the best worst example of the Administration's attitude toward protecting the public's health can be seen in the EPA giving the green light for residents and workers to safely return to their homes and jobs in Lower Manhattan shortly after the WTC Towers fell seven years ago, even though EPA scientists had determined that the air was grossly polluted and dangerous.

26. *It's Faith Over Science, Myth Over Reality.* We know that this "my mind is made up, don't bother me with the facts" attitude shows up most openly in how science is disregarded by the Bush Administration in favor of faith-based reasoning. A good example would be the issue of global warming. 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 seems to believe what he's saying, about evolution vs. creationism, stem-cell research, abstinence education, censoring the rewriting of government scientific reports that differ from the Bush party line, cutbacks in R&D 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, or anywhere else for that matter. Reality, to them, is an annoyance that is best ignored.

AMERICA OR GERMANY IN THE '30S?

In sum, we know that permanent-war policy abroad and police-state tactics at home are taking us further 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 happening regularly on

both the local and federal levels. (You need look no further than the martial-law behavior of federal, state and local agencies in pre-emptively arresting and disciplining would-be protesters at both the Democratic and Republican conventions in 2008.) More and more, America is resembling Germany in the early 1930s, with group pitted against group while the central government amasses more and more power and control of its put-upon citizens, and criticizing The Leader's policies is denounced as unpatriotic or even treasonous.

The good news is that after suffering through seven-plus years of the CheneyBush presidency, and despite the Bush-compliant corporate mass-media that often disgraces the journalistic profession, the public's blinders are falling off. The Republicans can rely on no more than 35% of the voting population for "base" support. The 2006 defeat of the Republicans in the House and Senate and Tom DeLay's fall from power are good symbols of this, and the true nature of these men and their regime is finally starting to hit home. Cheney is widely acknowledged as the true power behind the throne, and Bush is seen for what he is: an insecure, uncurious, arrogant, dangerous, dry-drunk bully who is endangering U.S. national interests abroad with his reckless and incompetently-managed wars, his wrecking of the U.S. economy at home, and with his over-reaching in all areas.

It goes without saying that had a Democratic president and vice president behaved similarly to Bush and Cheney, they'd have been in the impeachment dock in a minute.

Given all these scandals and more, and the loss of public support for the Iraq war and Republican policies in general, it would seem that the Democrats are in an enviable position to take back the White House in 2008.

DEMS DOING "BUSINESS AS USUAL"

But the Democrats, who were given the majority in Congress by voters anxious and desperate for major change, seem content to fritter away their political advantage by nibbling around the edges of CheneyBush policy but rarely attacking them frontally, especially on the continuing war in Iraq and a possible attack on Iran coming down the pike, and on impeachment. It's more or less business as usual in the nation's capitol.

It's possible that this inaction of Democratic leadership is a result of their own complicity in many of the worst decisions of the past eight years. Or perhaps they believe that because the war is so unpopular and the scandal-

ridden GOP is self-destructing from within, the Dems should just keep their heads down and coast to a victory in 2008. In Barack Obama, they have a charismatic candidate who mobilizes millions with his promise of hope and change.

But a lot can happen between now and November that could prove disastrous or wonderful for Democratic chances. It's possible that the positive GOP momentum with Sarah Palin could lead the Republican ticket to victory. Or the never-ending series of scandals in Sarah Palin's political life could help sink John McCain's chances. Or Bush could make some sort of "peace" agreement with Iran. Or he could bomb Iran. Or announce the capture or death of Osama bin Laden. Or Biden or Obama could self-destruct in some embarrassing way. Anything is possible in American politics.

The Democrats are not politically pure, to be sure. Too many (including, to a certain extent, Obama) are beholden to the same interests that have corrupted the Republicans during the CheneyBush years. However, in enough instances that matter -- moving away from the Iraq War, naming less ideological judges to the Supreme Court, paying attention to Constitutional protections of citizens' rights, acting on global warming, beefing up governmental regulation to protect the environment, etc. -- the Democrats would be different enough to start to turn the ship of state away from its reckless, dangerous extremism and back more toward the center and maybe even, on some issues, in the direction of progressive liberalism.

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