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'I Haven't Suffered Doubt'

Bush wanted to invade Iraq. What's striking, Bob Woodward's new book reports, is how little he discussed it with anyone

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Hunger for war? Woodward's book says Bush, shown here with military leaders after the commencement of fighting in Iraq, urged the military to prepare for conflict there just months after September 11

By Evan Thomas

April 26 issue - It was Monday, Jan. 13, 2003, and President George W. Bush had just told his secretary of State, Colin Powell, that he was going to war in Iraq. "You know you're going to be owning this place?" inquired Powell. According to Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward's new book, "Plan of Attack," Powell "wasn't sure whether Bush had fully understood the meaning and consequences of total ownership." No matter. Bush said something to the effect of "I think I have to do this," and Powell, in essence, saluted and carried on. The whole conversation took 12 minutes.

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That's what passed for debate in the Bush war cabinet, at least as the White House is depicted by Woodward. Early press accounts about Woodward's latest behind-the-scenes narrative suggested that Bush kept even his closest advisers in the dark about his decision to go to war because he was afraid of leaks. The real news, however, is not that Bush was secretive about his war planning, but rather that there was so little consideration of the

consequences. In Woodward's telling, Bush was deeply involved in the details of the invasion plans from the moment he first grabbed Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's elbow in November 2001 and asked, "What kind of war plan do you have for Iraq?" But at no time did the president sit down with his war cabinet and debate whether the war on Iraq would distract from the war on terror—or whether the risk of postwar Iraq's becoming a failed state outweighed the reward of getting rid of Saddam Hussein.

Woodward, Washington's premier investigative reporter since he and his colleague Carl Bernstein broke the Watergate story more than 30 years ago, has not lost his knack for opening up otherwise secretive government officials. (When Woodward calls, some Washington insiders anxiously joke, "you play or you pay.") While he does not name sources, Woodward apparently had access to all the main players and interviewed Bush for more than three hours. Woodward was criticized by some for painting too rosy a portrait of the president as a resolute and bold commander in chief in "Bush at War," his 2002 book about the president and his top advisers in the wake of 9/11. The picture that emerges this time is less flattering.



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In Woodward's portrait, President Bush is single-minded, and possibly simple-minded, in his resolve. He seems to have relied more on divine guidance than the considered opinions of his top advisers. Bush told Woodward that as he approached the final decision to go to war, "I was praying for strength to do the Lord's will ... I'm surely not going to justify war based on God. Understand that. Nevertheless, in my case I pray that I be as good a messenger of His will as possible."

In the months after 9/11, Woodward writes, Bush was obsessed with the threat of another attack. The president's fears peaked in late November 2001, when British intelligence ran a sting operation on a Pakistani atomic expert who was ready and willing to sell plans for a nuclear weapon or a "dirty bomb" to Islamic extremists. Although Woodward's just-the-facts narrative doesn't put it this way, the implication is that Bush couldn't very well attack Pakistan, America's new ally in the war on terror. But Bush could go after Saddam, who (Bush believed) had weapons of mass destruction and a willingness to share them or use them. Bush did not want to play "small ball," he told his speechwriter Michael Gerson. He wanted to strike preemptively. Hence Bush's "Axis of Evil" State of the Union Message in January 2002. (The inclusion of North Korea and Iran was mostly cover for Bush's secret war planning, writes Woodward.)

FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

- **Exclusive Excerpts: Read more about "Plan of Attack," the new book by Bob Woodward. Excerpts will be published exclusively on washingtonpost.com and in *The Post* through Thursday.**
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Bush was so free of doubt about going to war that he didn't even ask most of his top advisers what they thought. Bush explained that he already knew that Vice President Dick Cheney was gung-ho, and he decided not to ask Powell or Rumsfeld. "I could tell what they thought," Bush told Woodward. "I didn't

need to ask them their opinion about Saddam Hussein or how to deal with Saddam Hussein." Rumsfeld told Woodward that he couldn't recall whether Bush had ever asked him, "Do you think I should go to war?"

Instead, Bush appears to have been increasingly drawn into Rumsfeld's relentless search for a plan of attack that would be fast and require fewer troops than Operation Desert Storm in 1991. At first the Pentagon's "Op Plan 1003" required 400,000 men and six months just for the buildup. After 15 months of whittling and rejiggering, Rumsfeld and Gen. Tommy Franks of CENTCOM had fashioned an invasion plan that required only 150,000 men. At a private meeting, Rumsfeld polled his top generals and advisers to ask how long the war would take. The estimates ranged from seven days (Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz) to about a month (Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs).



Khue Bui for Newsweek

Not-so-close consultation: In Woodward's book, Secretary of State Colin Powell is cut off from key decision-making and national-security adviser Condoleezza Rice appears ineffective and weak

From the State Department, Secretary Powell, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs (and a major source for Woodward in two earlier books, "The Commanders" and "Bush at War," and, presumably, this one), worried that not enough attention was being paid to the war's aftermath. In August 2002 Powell warned the president, "You are going to be the proud owner of 25 million people. You will own all their hopes, aspirations and problems. You'll own it all." Privately, writes Woodward, Powell and his top deputy, Richard Armitage, "called this the Pottery Barn rule: You break it, you own it." Bush brushed off Powell's cautions. The next day the president ordered his military commanders to step up their war plans and left for vacation in Texas.

The secretary of State felt cut out by the White House hawks. He sensed an undercurrent of competition with the president, who, Powell said, put him in "an ice box." Powell "soldiered on" for Bush, Woodward writes, but barely spoke to

Cheney. In Woodward's telling, Powell was increasingly disappointed by the veep.

"Powell thought that Cheney had the fever," Woodward writes. "The vice president and Wolfowitz kept looking for the connection between Saddam and 9/11. It was a separate little government that was out there—Wolfowitz, [Vice President Cheney's chief of staff, I. Lewis (Scooter)] Libby, [Under Secretary of Defense Douglas] Feith and Feith's 'Gestapo office,' as Powell privately called it. He saw in Cheney a sad transformation. The cool operator from the first gulf war just would not let go. Cheney now had an unhealthy fixation."

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Missing in action through much of "Plan of Attack" is Bush's national-security adviser, Condoleezza Rice. Armitage, Powell's No. 2 and close friend, was contemptuous of Rice. "He believed that the foreign-policy-making system that was supposed to be coordinated by Rice was essentially dysfunctional," writes Woodward. A blunt-spoken former

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Navy SEAL, Armitage criticized Rice to her face. When a Washington Post article later echoed the Armitage critique, Rice angrily complained to Powell. "You can blame Rich if you want," Powell replied, but "Rich had the guts to talk to you directly about this." According to Woodward, "Powell thought that Rice was more interested in finding someone

to blame for the public airing of the problem than in fixing it."

Rice apparently saw her role as Bush's private adviser, not a referee between clashing titans in the cabinet. But here, too, she failed, according to Woodward: "Given her closeness and status with Bush, if anyone could have warned the president to moderate his own categorical statements about WMD, it was Rice."

The official most likely to be embarrassed by "Plan of Attack" is CIA Director George Tenet. It was Tenet, as much as anyone, who convinced Bush that the president could safely tell the public that Iraq had WMD. On Dec. 21, 2002, Tenet and Deputy Director for Intelligence John McLaughlin briefed Bush, Cheney and Rice in the Oval Office. McLaughlin set up a slide show on the agency's top-secret evidence that Saddam possessed WMD. When he was finished, there was "a brief moment of silence," writes Woodward:

" 'Nice try,' Bush said. 'I don't think this is quite—it's not something that Joe Public would understand or would gain a lot of confidence from.' ... Bush turned to Tenet. 'I've been told all this intelligence about having WMD and this is the best we've got?' From the end of one of the couches in the Oval Office, Tenet rose up, threw his arms in the air. 'It's a slam dunk!' the DCI said. Bush pressed. 'George, how confident are you?' Tenet, a basketball fan who attended as many home games of his alma mater Georgetown as possible, leaned forward and threw up his arms again. 'Don't worry, it's a slam dunk!' "

Later, when the invasion was over, Tenet acknowledged to associates that the CIA should have stated upfront in the National Intelligence Estimate that the evidence was "not ironclad, that it did not include a smoking gun," writes Woodward. (In a revealing scene, Woodward describes Michael Hayden, the director of the National Security Agency, explaining the uncertainties of intelligence to his wife as they wash the dishes. "If it were a fact," says Hayden, "it wouldn't be intelligence.")



The Presidency: Iraq, Ideology and Reality
Evan Thomas, NEWSWEEK Assistant Managing Editor, Washington, **Joseph Nye**, Dean, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; author of "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics" (Public Affairs, April 2004), and **Melinda Liu**, NEWSWEEK Beijing Bureau Chief, Baghdad

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"Plan of Attack" has echoes of "The March of Folly," Barbara Tuchman's 1984 book about how the United States stumbled into Vietnam. The CIA became a force pushing for war in part for perverse bureaucratic reasons, Woodward's

book suggests. Asked if it can depose Saddam by covert action, the CIA says no—but that its spies could support a regular military invasion. Woodward describes CIA case officers sneaking into Iraq carrying briefcases with millions of dollars to buy local spies. The spooks handed out so many \$100 bills that a Kurdish leader had to ask them to bring fives and 10s. "The \$100 bills had caused extreme inflation," Woodward recounts. "It seemed even a cup of coffee was going for \$100 because no one could make small change."

The CIA base chief—"Tim"—recruited 87 Iraqi agents, collectively code-named DB/ROCKSTARS. Each "rock star" was given a satellite phone. One agent was caught and forced to confess on state TV. Waving a satellite phone, a man in an Iraqi Army uniform announced that "anyone caught with one of these was a dead person and all his brothers and his father would be killed too." The CIA never heard again from 30 of the 87 phones.

As the months passed, CIA headquarters increasingly pushed the White House to go to war before other agents could be rolled up. Woodward enjoyed remarkable access to CIA sources. In compelling detail, he recounts the role played by the CIA on the first night of the war.



The story is an object lesson in the elusiveness of good intelligence. From his hut in northern Iraq, Tim messaged Langley that one of his assets in Baghdad was reporting that Saddam and his two sons were staying at a farm in Dora, a suburb. The "rock stars" cased the place, even measuring the locations and size of Saddam's bunker. Bush and his war cabinet, including Rumsfeld, Cheney and Powell, hastily convened at the White House to consider an airstrike to "decapitate" the Iraqi leadership. After some back-and-forth over the potential for civilian casualties, Bush kicked everyone out of the Oval Office but Cheney. "This is the best intelligence we've had yet on where Saddam's located," Cheney told the president, according to Woodward. "I think we should go for it."

At 7:12 that evening, Bush called back his

Secret agenda: Woodward says Bush pulled Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld aside in November, 2001 asking 'What kind of war plan do you have for Iraq?'

shouting, "We've been betrayed," and shot one of the "rock stars" in the knee. The other son was bloodied and disoriented. "Saddam had been injured, according to a ROCKSTAR eyewitness, and had to be dug out of the rubble. He was blue. He was gray. He was being given oxygen," Woodward relates. "At 4:30 a.m. Tenet called the Situation Room and told the duty officer, 'Tell the president we got the son of a bitch.'" Bush was not awakened, however, and by the time he got to the Oval Office that morning, it appeared that Saddam was still alive.

Some five days later, Tim made his way down to Baghdad and clandestinely visited the Dora farm. There were craters from the American bombs, but no bunker, or any hint of one. The CIA man eventually tracked down some of his "rock star" agents who had reported that night. Their wives said they had been tortured, their fingernails pulled out. Tim didn't know what to believe, writes Woodward. The spymaster still doesn't know if Saddam and his sons were at Dora that night, or whether the whole thing was a hoax.

In his interview with Woodward, conducted over two days in December of last year, Bush displayed no second thoughts about Iraq's postwar miseries or the failure to turn up any WMD. "I haven't suffered doubt," he told Woodward. When the author—quoting Bush's political adviser Karl Rove—suggested that "all history gets measured by outcomes," Bush "smiled," reports Woodward. " 'History,' he said, shrugging, taking his hands out of his pockets, extending his arms out and suggesting with his body language that it was so far off. 'We won't know. We'll all be dead'."

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