

# Risking World War III For The Right To Continue Destroying The Planet

BY BILL WEINBERG



THE KISS OF DEATH?

U.S. COUNCIL FOR ENERGY AWARENESS

U.S. President George Bush has responded to Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein's invasion and occupation of the tiny but oil-rich emirate of Kuwait by calling up the reserves and sending tens of thousands of troops to the desert of Saudi Arabia — more U.S. troops than have been mobilized in any military operation since the end of the war in VietNam.

Much of the media have lined up uncritically behind Bush's war moves. Saddam Hussein is likened to Adolf Hitler, and tabloids are scandalized by an Irish rock singer's refusal to allow the "Star Spangled Banner" to be played before a stateside concert. But does the war which our country is preparing to fight in the Middle East have anything whatsoever to do with defending principles of democracy? Or do the quickly escalating prices at the gasoline pumps say more about the real reasons for the massive troop mobilization?

To understand how this latest Middle East crisis came about, a little historical background is needed.

At the turn of 20th Century, Iraq and most of the massive Arabian peninsula were under the control of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. One of the exceptions was Kuwait, which the British empire had secured as a protectorate to check Turkish and German consolidation of power in the Persian Gulf. (Germany owned the region's rail lines and was allied with Turkey.) The Ottomans had dominated this part of the world for centuries, but the British, French and U.S. were increasingly playing for power — especially as oil became an increasingly vital pillar of the world economy and scientists increasingly speculated that the geological structure

of the Middle East deserts promised vast subterranean seas of the substance for those with the money to invest in exploration and development.

With Turkey's defeat at the end of World War I, the victorious Allies went about carving up the Ottoman Empire and dividing it amongst themselves. Britain took Palestine and Iraq, France took Lebanon and Syria, while monarchies were established in the Arabian peninsula, mostly under British tutelage. By far the most powerful of these was that of Saudi Arabia — the only country on Earth named after its ruling family. The royal Saud family stills rules as a monarchy there today. To the east of this massive but sparsely-populated state, on the Arabian shores of the Persian Gulf, ministries such as Oman, Qatar and Bahrain joined Kuwait as British-protected monarchies.

This carve-up provided the roots for the contemporary shape of the Middle East. Britain had promised the Palestinians independence following World War I if they would revolt against the Ottoman Turks. They had, but Britain had simultaneously promised the same territory to Jewish Zionist leaders in Europe. Breaking both promises, Britain simply kept Palestine for herself, eventually leading to waves of both Zionist and Palestinian nationalist violence and terrorism there. By 1920 Iraqi nationalists were leading a popular armed uprising against the British occupation of Iraq. This prompted the British to withdraw, leaving still another pro-British monarchy to rule in their stead.

Simultaneously, the world's most powerful oil companies — many of them offsprings of John D. Rockefeller's monolithic Standard Oil, which had been broken up by an antitrust suit a few years earlier — were negotiating with the Allied governments for exploration and drilling rights in the former Ottoman Empire. In one famous 1928 session in Belgium, the notorious "red line" was drawn around the presumed extent of ill-defined borders of the dismantled empire within which the oilmen divided up the turf. Standard Oil of New Jersey (today Exxon) and the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (today British Petroleum) launched a joint venture in Iraq, the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). Standard Oil of California (today Chevron) and the Texas Oil Company (today Texaco) launched a joint venture in Saudi Arabia, the Arabian-American Oil Company (Aramco). These conglomerates came to dominate the economies of, respectively, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

The oil companies began to reshape American society in anticipation of the seas of petrol which were soon to emanate from the Middle East. In a joint venture with car and tire manufacturers such as General Motors and Firestone, they started creating dummy corporations and buying up the trolley systems in such cities as Los Angeles, New York and Boston — and having them dismantled, leaving these rapidly expanding urban centers almost completely dependent on automobile transport (especially Los Angeles, which had no subway system).

Iran, which had not been part of the Ottoman Empire, had long been dominated economically by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, and was ruled by the dictatorial monarchy of the Shah, which the British had created as a means of checking Russian influence there. With the outbreak of World War II, the Shah demonstrated strong pro-Nazi sympathies, so the British quietly had him ousted and divided Iran between their own occupation forces and those of Russia, with whom Britain was by then allied again.

World War II was a setback for the development of the Middle East as a source of global oil. Military campaigns in North Africa were aimed at keeping the Axis powers away from Middle East oil — despite the facts that Standard Oil of New Jersey (Exxon) had recently given the Nazis an edge in industrial might through a power-sharing agreement with the German powerhouse I. G. Farben, that the Texas Oil Company (Texaco) had provided petroleum to the Fascist dictatorship of Generalissimo Franco in Spain, and that Sir Henri Detering, the man who had built Royal Dutch Shell, had been eased out of power by his own board of directors for spouting pro-Nazi rhetoric long after it had started to be embarrassingly inappropriate.

In World War II the Allies were supplied with oil from Venezuela (sparking a U.S. propaganda and espionage effort to check Fascist influence in Latin America, which had the paradoxical result of popular revolutions toppling U.S.-

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