

## Woodward Shares War Secrets

April 18, 2004

Journalist Bob Woodward calls his new book, "Plan of Attack," the first detailed, behind-the-scenes account of how and why the president decided to wage war in Iraq.

It's an insider's account written after Woodward spoke with 75 of the key decision makers, including President Bush himself.

The president permitted Woodward to quote him directly. Others spoke on the condition that Woodward not identify them as sources.

Woodward discusses the secret details of the White House's plans to attack Iraq for the first time on television with **Correspondent Mike Wallace**.

---

Woodward permitted **60 Minutes** to listen to tapes he recorded of his most important interviews, to read the transcripts, and to verify that the quotes he uses are based on recollections from participants in the key meetings. Both **CBS News** and Simon & Schuster, the publisher of Woodward's book, are units of Viacom.

Woodward says that many of the quotes came directly from the president: "When I interviewed him for the first time several months ago up in the residence of the White House, he just kind of out of the blue said, 'It's the story of the 21st Century,' his decision to undertake this war and start a preemptive attack on another country."

Woodward reports that just five days after Sept. 11, President Bush indicated to National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice that while he had to do Afghanistan first, he was also determined to do something about Saddam Hussein.

"There's some pressure to go after Saddam Hussein. Don Rumsfeld has said, 'This is an opportunity to take out Saddam Hussein, perhaps. We should consider it.' And the president says to Condi Rice meeting head to head, 'We won't do Iraq now.' But it is a question we're gonna have to return to," says Woodward.

"And there's this low boil on Iraq until the day before Thanksgiving, Nov. 21, 2001. This is 72 days after 9/11. This is part of this secret history. President Bush, after a National Security Council meeting, takes Don Rumsfeld aside, collars him physically, and takes him into a little cubbyhole room and closes the door and says, 'What have you got in terms of plans for Iraq? What is the status of the war plan? I want you to get on it. I want you to keep it secret.'"

Woodward says immediately after that, Rumsfeld told Gen. Tommy Franks to develop a war plan to invade Iraq and remove Saddam - and that Rumsfeld gave Franks a blank check.

"Rumsfeld and Franks work out a deal essentially where Franks can spend any money he needs. And so he starts building runways and pipelines and doing all the preparations in Kuwait, specifically to make war possible," says Woodward.

"Gets to a point where in July, the end of July 2002, they need \$700 million, a large amount of money for all these tasks. And the president approves it. But Congress doesn't know and it is done. They get the money from a supplemental appropriation for the Afghan War, which Congress has approved. ... Some people are gonna look at a document called the Constitution which says that no money will be drawn from the Treasury unless appropriated by Congress. Congress was totally in the dark on this."

---

Woodward says there was a lot happening that only key Bush people knew about.

"A year before the war started, three things are going on. Franks is secretly developing this war plan that he's briefing the president in detail on," says Woodward. "Franks simultaneously is publicly denying that he's ever been asked to do any plan."

For example, here's Gen. Franks' response to a question about invading Iraq, in May 2002, after he's been working on war plans for five months: "That's a great question and one for which I don't have an answer, because my boss has not yet asked me to put together a plan to do that."

But according to Woodward, the general had been perfecting his war plan, and Vice President Dick Cheney knew all about it. Woodward reports that Cheney was the driving force in the White House to get Saddam. Cheney had been Secretary of Defense during the first Gulf War, and to him, Saddam was unfinished business - and a threat to the United States.

In his book, Woodward describes Cheney as a "powerful, steamrolling force obsessed with Saddam and taking him out."

"Colin Powell, the secretary of state, saw this in Cheney to such an extent, he, Powell, told colleagues that 'Cheney has a fever. It is an absolute fever. It's almost as if nothing else exists,'" says Woodward, who adds that Cheney had plenty of opportunities to convince the president.

"He's just down the hall in the West Wing from the president. President says, 'I meet with him all the time.' Cheney's back in the corner or sitting on the couch at nearly all of these meetings."

The president had hoped Saddam could be removed in some way short of war. But early in 2002, Woodward reports, the CIA concluded they could not overthrow Saddam. That word came from the CIA's head of Iraq operations, a man known simply as "Saul."

"Saul gets together a briefing and who does he give it to first? Dick Cheney. He said, 'I can count the number of sources, human sources, spies we have in Iraq on one hand,'" says Woodward. "I asked the president, 'What was your reaction that the CIA couldn't overthrow Saddam? And the president said one word. 'Damn.'"

The vice president led the way on declaring that Saddam Hussein definitely had weapons of mass destruction. Before that, the president had said only that Saddam "desires them."

But ten days later, the vice president said Saddam already had weapons of mass destruction. And 12 days after that, the president too had apparently been persuaded: "A lot of people understand he holds weapons of mass destruction."

---

Three months later, on Dec. 21, 2002, Woodward says CIA Director George Tenet brought his deputy, John McLaughlin, to the oval office to show the president and the vice president their best evidence that Saddam really had weapons of mass destruction.

"McLaughlin has access to all the satellite photos, and he goes in and he has flip charts in the oval office. The president listens to all of this and McLaughlin's done. And, and the president kind of, as he's inclined to do, says 'Nice try, but that isn't gonna sell Joe Public. That isn't gonna convince Joe Public,'" says Woodward.

In his book, Woodward writes: "The presentation was a flop. The photos were not gripping. The intercepts were less than compelling. And then George Bush turns to George Tenet and says, 'This is the best we've got?'"

Says Woodward: "George Tenet's sitting on the couch, stands up, and says, 'Don't worry, it's a slam dunk case.'" And the president challenges him again and Tenet says, 'The case, it's a slam dunk.' ...I asked the president about this and he said it was very important to have the CIA director – 'Slam-dunk is as I interpreted is a sure thing, guaranteed. No possibility it won't go through the hoop.' Others present, Cheney, very impressed."

What did Woodward think of Tenet's statement? "It's a mistake," he says. "Now the significance of that mistake - that was the key rationale for war."

---

It was just two weeks later when the president decided to go to war.

"That decision was first conveyed to Condi Rice in early January 2003 when he said, 'We're gonna have to go. It's war.' He was frustrated with the weapons inspections. He had promised the United Nations and the world and the country that either the UN would disarm Saddam or he, George Bush, would do it and do it alone if necessary," says Woodward. "So he told Condi Rice. He told Rumsfeld. He knew Cheney wanted to do this. And they realized they haven't told Colin Powell, the Secretary of State."

"So Condi Rice said, 'You better call Colin in and tell him.' So, I think probably one of the most interesting meetings in this whole story. He calls Colin Powell in alone, sitting in those two famous chairs in the Oval Office and the president said, 'Looks like war. I'm gonna have to do this,'" adds Woodward.

"And then Powell says to him, somewhat in a chilly way, 'Are you aware of the consequences?' Because he'd been pounding for months on the president, on everyone - and Powell directly says, 'You know, you're gonna be owning this place.' And the president says, 'I understand that.' The president knows that Powell is the one who doesn't want to go to war. He says, 'Will you be with me?' And Powell, the soldier, 35 years in the army, the president has decided and he says, 'I'll do my best. Yes, Mr. President. I'll be with you.'" And then, the president says, 'Time to put your war uniform on.'"

Woodward says he described Powell as semi-despondent "because he knew that this was a war that might have been avoided. That's why he spent so much time at the United Nations."

---

But, it turns out, two days before the president told Powell, Cheney and Rumsfeld had already briefed Prince Bandar, the Saudi ambassador.

"Saturday, Jan. 11, with the president's permission, Cheney and Rumsfeld call Bandar to Cheney's West Wing office, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Gen. Myers, is there with a top-secret map of the war plan. And it says, 'Top secret. No foreign.' No foreign means no foreigners are supposed to see this," says Woodward.

"They describe in detail the war plan for Bandar. And so Bandar, who's skeptical because he knows in the first Gulf War we didn't get Saddam out, so he says to Cheney and Rumsfeld, 'So Saddam this time is gonna be out, period?' And Cheney - who has said nothing - says the following: 'Prince Bandar, once we start, Saddam is toast.'"

After Bandar left, according to Woodward, Cheney said, "I wanted him to know that this is for real. We're really doing it."

But this wasn't enough for Prince Bandar, who Woodward says wanted confirmation from the president. "Then, two days later, Bandar is called to meet with the president and the president says, 'Their message is my message,'" says Woodward.

Prince Bandar enjoys easy access to the Oval Office. His family and the Bush family are close. And Woodward told **60 Minutes** that Bandar has promised the president that Saudi Arabia will lower oil prices in the months before the election - to ensure the U.S. economy is strong on election day.

Woodward says that Bandar understood that economic conditions were key before a presidential election: "They're [oil prices] high. And they could go down very quickly. That's the Saudi pledge. Certainly over the summer, or as we get closer to the election, they could increase production several million barrels a day and the price would drop significantly."

---

For his book, Woodward interviewed 75 top military and Bush administration officials, including two long interviews with the president himself. Mr. Bush spoke on the record, but others talked to Woodward on condition that he not reveal their identities.

**60 Minutes** won't name those Woodward interviewed, but we've listened to the tapes and read the transcripts of his key interviews to verify that his accounts are based on recollections from people who took part in the meetings he describes, including a historic meeting on March 19, when Bush gives the order to go to war.

He's with the National Security Council, in the situation room. Says Woodward: "They have all these TV monitors. Gen. Franks, the commander, is up on one of them. And all nine commanders, and the president asks each one of them, 'Are you ready? Do you have what you need? Are you satisfied?' And they all say, 'Yes, sir.' and 'We're ready.'"

Then the president saluted and he rose suddenly from his chair. "People who were there said there were tears in his eyes, not coming down his cheeks but in his eyes," says Woodward. "And just kind of marched out of the room."

Having given the order, the president walked alone around the circle behind the White House. Months later, he told Woodward: "As I walked around the circle, I prayed that our troops be safe, be protected by the Almighty. Going into this period, I was praying for strength to do the Lord's will. I'm surely not going to justify war based upon God. Understand that. Nevertheless, in my case, I pray that I be as good a messenger of his will as possible. And then, of

course, I pray for forgiveness."

Did Mr. Bush ask his father for any advice? "I asked the president about this. And President Bush said, 'Well, no,' and then he got defensive about it," says Woodward. "Then he said something that really struck me. He said of his father, 'He is the wrong father to appeal to for advice. The wrong father to go to, to appeal to in terms of strength.' And then he said, 'There's a higher Father that I appeal to.'"

Beyond not asking his father about going to war, Woodward was startled to learn that the president did not ask key cabinet members either.

"The president, in making the decision to go to war, did not ask his secretary of defense for an overall recommendation, did not ask his secretary of state, Colin Powell, for his recommendation," says Woodward.

But the president did ask Rice, his national security adviser, and Karen Hughes, his political communications adviser. Woodward says both supported going to war. And in the run-up to war, Woodward reveals the CIA hired the leaders of a Muslim religious sect at odds with Saddam, but nonetheless with numerous members highly placed in Saddam's security services. The CIA's code name for them: the Rock Stars.

"Before the war, they recruit 87 of them all throughout the country and they give them satellite phones. And they report in regularly on secret things that are going on," says Woodward.

And it turns out, reports from the Rock Stars led to the first bombing attack, on March 19, to try to kill Saddam – at a place called Dora Farm, a farm south of Baghdad that Saddam's wife used.

"And Saddam went there at least once a year with his two sons. The security person at Dora Farm was a CIA spy, a Rock Star, and had a telephone, a satellite phone, in which he was reporting what he was seeing."

Other Rock Stars are apparently there too, so Rumsfeld and Tenet rush to the oval office to tell the president what the spies are seeing.

"They've seen the son. There is communications equipment coming in that would show that Saddam is going there. They get overhead satellite photos that show dozens of security vehicles parked under palm trees. And they say, 'Holy Moses, this is for real.' And they start getting better and more detailed reports that they think Saddam is coming. And the question is, do we take them out," says Woodward.

"The president asks everyone, and they all recommend doing it. And then he kicks everyone out, except Cheney. And he says, 'Dick, what do you think?' And Cheney says, 'I think we ought to do it, and at minimum, it will rattle Saddam's cage.' ...They start getting intelligence that maybe they hit Saddam."

But Woodward says that Tenet was wrong. Again. And to this day, Woodward reports, the CIA still doesn't know if the information from the Rock Stars was reliable, or if Saddam was really there that night. "Again, we have the fog of war, the fog of intelligence," says Woodward.

---

Although Saddam has finally been captured, Woodward says that so far, interrogators are learning very little from him.

"What people have told me is that he he's kind of out of it. Unreliable," says Woodward. "That he, at some moments, thinks he's still president. He's not in touch with reality, to the point where they can find what he says is reliable."

And in the wake of the war, according to Woodward, there's a deep rift between Powell and Cheney.

"The relationship between Cheney and Powell is essentially broken down. They can't talk. They don't communicate," says Woodward. "Powell feels that Cheney drove the decision to go to war in Iraq. And Cheney feels that Powell has not been sufficiently supportive of the president in the war or in the aftermath."

Which of the two was more prescient about how Iraq would turn out? "All of Powell's warnings think of the consequences, Pottery Barn rules: If you break it, you own it. And that's exactly what has happened in Iraq. We own it. In a way, they've had victory without success," says Woodward.

"Dick Cheney's view is that in a way, it doesn't matter how long the aftermath is... What matters is the ultimate outcome... Whether there's stability and democracy."

Are there post-war plans? "There were innumerable briefings to the president about currency about oil. And on the real issue of security and possible violence, they did not see it coming," says Woodward.

Did the administration really believe that they were going to get flowers and kisses? "Some of the exiles told them that," says Woodward. "I think the president was skeptical of that. I think people like Cheney believed it more."

---

Today, while most doubt that Saddam still possessed any weapons of mass destruction, the president told Woodward he has no doubts at all about going to war.

"The president still believes with some conviction, that this was absolutely the right thing, that he has the duty to free people, to liberate people. And this was his moment," says Woodward.

But who gave President Bush the duty to free people around the world? "That's a really good question. The Constitution doesn't say that's part of the commander in chief's duties," says Woodward. "That's his stated purpose. It is far-reaching, and ambitious, and I think will cause many people to tremble."

How deep a man is President George W. Bush? "He's not an intellectual. He is not what I guess would be called a deep thinker," says Woodward. "He chastised me at one point because I said people were concerned about the failure to find weapons of mass destruction. And he said, 'Well you travel in elite circles.' I think he feels there is an intellectual world and he's indicated he's not a part of it ... the fancy pants intellectual world. What he calls the elite."

How does the president think history will judge him for going to war in Iraq?

"After the second interview with him on Dec. 11, we got up and walked over to one of the doors. There are all of these doors in the Oval Office that lead outside. And he had his hands in his pocket, and I just asked, 'Well, how is history likely to judge your Iraq war,'" says Woodward.

"And he said, 'History,' and then he took his hands out of his pocket and kind of shrugged and extended his hands as if this is a way off. And then he said, 'History, we don't know. We'll all be dead.'"

---

Prior to publication, the contents of Woodward's book were closely guarded to prevent any leaks, and **60 Minutes** agreed not to interview anyone else for this report.

©MMIV, CBS Broadcasting Inc. All Rights Reserved.

---

• [Feedback](#) • [Terms of Service](#) • [Privacy Statement](#)