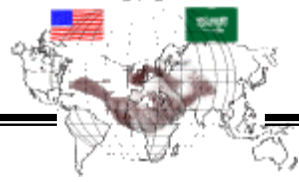


# Saudi-American Forum

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SAF Item of Interest

June 1, 2004

## Novak: Bandar, Bush and "Plan of Attack"

By Robert Novak

### Editor's Note:

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### Saudi knew of Bush war plans just hours before Powell

By Robert Novak

Did President Bush really brief Prince Bandar on his Iraq war plans before he informed Colin Powell? Did the Saudi ambassador really cut a deal with the Bush administration to increase oil production in time for the presidential election? The answer to both questions is no, but those allegations entered the election year bloodstream thanks to distortion of Bob Woodward's *Plan of Attack*.

The crack investigative reporter's latest blockbuster does not make those allegations, but still became instant Democratic talking points, employed by presidential candidate John Kerry himself. In contrast, Woodward's revelation of Saudi Arabia's support for the Iraq invasion went virtually unmentioned.

Judging by published excerpts, news accounts and even some of Woodward's comments on television, *Plan of Attack* is akin to a kiss-and-tell anti-Bush memoir on the best-seller list. The full 443-page text, however, portrays George W. Bush as a conscientious, well-informed leader presiding over a military team that devised an ingenious attack plan. Whether Bush made the right decision to remove Saddam Hussein by force, he does not come across as the nitwit portrayed by Democrats.

Publicity about the book has overlooked Woodward's account of the Saudi connection. While the Israeli government and its ardent American supporters have waged a disinformation campaign against the kingdom, Prince Bandar bin Sultan -- a senior member of the Washington diplomatic corps -- actively collaborated in preparing for war. Early in 2003, he went to Paris to try to bring around an obdurate French President Jacques Chirac.

Woodward reveals that war planning always included sending U.S. Special Operations Forces through and from Saudi Arabia into Iraq. Last Sunday, amid the anti-Saudi buzz inadvertently spawned by Woodward's book, the Associated Press reported "Saudi Arabia secretly helped the

United States far more than has been acknowledged.” U.S. and Saudi officials told the AP not only about special operations but also that the kingdom provided the United States with at least three air bases on Saudi soil, plus cheap fuel.

In return, Bandar wanted assurances that this time the United States was intent on removing Saddam. On Jan. 11, 2003, Woodward reports, the Saudi ambassador met with Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and was shown a war-planning map. On Jan. 13, Bandar received confirmation of war plans from Bush himself, according to the book.

At this point, Woodward writes, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice advised the president that “you need to call [Secretary of State] Colin [Powell] in and talk to him.” He did so on Jan. 13, a few hours after meeting with Bandar. The widely speculated notion in anti-Bush circles that Bandar was in on war plans well before Powell is nonsense. Woodward writes of Powell learning in May 2002 of detailed planning for war with Iraq. The secretary of state's misgivings were no secret, but Powell knew what was going on and clearly conveyed his apprehensions to the president.

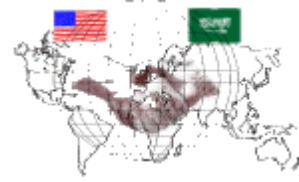
As for the price of oil, Woodward quotes Bandar as telling Bush on Feb. 24, 2003, that “the Saudis hoped to fine-tune oil prices over 10 months to prime the economy for 2004.” The Democratic campaign machine expanded that into something sinister. Kerry himself, questioning whether there was “a deal” or a “secret pledge,” asserted “the American people are getting a bad deal.”

When Woodward appeared on CNN’s “Larry King Live” April 19, Bandar made an unsolicited telephone call to the program. King brought up “the story that Mr. Woodward has about the promise to lower the oil prices by the election.” Woodward interrupted: “That's not my story. What I say in the book is that the Saudis.. hoped that oil prices will stay low because that's good for America’s economy.” Bandar agreed: “I think the way that Bob said it now is accurate.”

Plan of Attack is the end product of massive research and reporting, from which many conclusions can be drawn, but not many are by the author. In television appearances since publication, Woodward has tried not to go beyond what is in the book and has mostly succeeded. The accounts used in the continuing defamation of both Bush and Saudi Arabia were not written by Woodward.

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