

4-14-2004

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Eugene A. Brodsky
Golden Gate University School of Law

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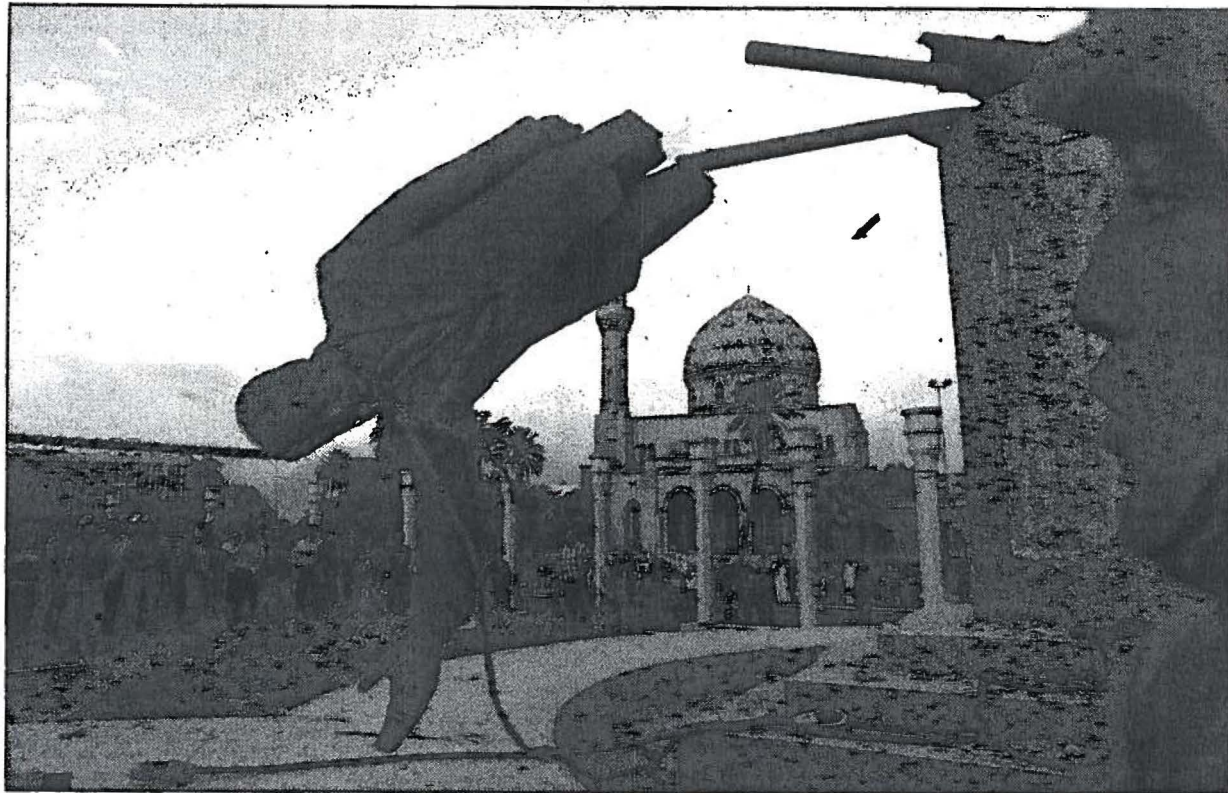
Recommended Citation

Brodsky, Eugene A., "Bush the Elder knew not to invade Iraq" (2004). *Publications*. Paper 624.
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SF Chronicle
4-14-04

Bush the elder knew not to invade Iraq



JEROME DELAY / Associated Press

Regime change: The first President Bush warned that toppling Saddam Hussein (represented in this photo taken a year ago of U.S. soldiers and Iraqis destroying a statue of the dictator) would be more involved than the United States and its international coalition could tolerate.

By Eugene A. Brodsky

The consequences of President Bush's decision to pre-emptively invade Iraq have placed the United States in a difficult and vulnerable position. Had Bush followed his father's reasoning at the end of Desert Storm, he would not have led this country into the worsening Iraqi quagmire.

In "A World Transformed," coauthored by former President George H. W. Bush and his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, and published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1998, the basis for the U.S. policy not to invade and occupy Iraq after the Iraqi army retreated from Kuwait is explained in detail. Bush and Scowcroft wrote that had the decision been made to pursue the retreating Iraqi army to Baghdad, the United States "would have been forced to occupy Baghdad and, in effect, rule Iraq." This, they point out, would have collapsed the coalition and caused the Arab members to desert the coalition in "anger." The author's impression was that under those circumstances, "there was no viable 'exit strategy'... violating another of our principles."

Bush and Scowcroft also explained that the United States had been trying to "set a pattern for handling aggression in the post-Cold War world. Going in and occupying Iraq, thus unilaterally exceeding the United Nations mandate, would have destroyed the precedent of international response to aggression that we hoped to establish." Furthermore "[had] we gone the invasion route, the United States could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land. It would have been a dramatically different — and

perhaps barren — outcome."

Our problems in Iraq include rising casualties of both U.S. and Iraqi forces and civilians, escalating federal expenditures involving billions of dollars, long-term presence of our Armed Forces and growing hatred of the United States by many Iraqi people and the Islamic world. This is the unfortunate product of the administration's decision to proceed with regime change, which was based on whatever rationale could be sold to the American people.

Former President Bush has said little, if anything, concerning his view of Iraqi policy, notwithstanding his detailed comments in his 1998 book. Scowcroft, however, a former national security adviser under Presidents Ford, Carter and Bush, did not hesitate to state his strong opposition to the administration's Iraq policy prior to the invasion. In an article he submitted to the Wall Street Journal on Aug. 15, 2002, Scowcroft argued that an invasion of Iraq "was certain to divert us for some indefinite period from our war on terrorism. Worse, there is a virtual consensus in the world against an attack." Invasion of Iraq would require the United States "to pursue a virtual go-it-alone strategy against Iraq, making any military operations correspondingly more difficult and expensive... [and] very likely would have to be followed by a large-scale, long-term military occupation." Such actions would result in a "degradation" of international cooperation, and an "explosion of outrage against us" especially in the Muslim world. Such a policy "could even swell the ranks of terrorists."

The specific advice that George W.

Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, imparted to him about invading Iraq is not public knowledge. Her interview with Ed Bradley on "60 Minutes," however, does strongly suggest that her views were in agreement with the pro-war sentiments of the Department of Defense and Vice President Dick Cheney's office. In response to questions on Iraq, she stated that "Iraq is a big reason, or was, for the instability in the region, [and] for the threats against the United States. Saddam Hussein's regime was very dangerous." Rice then went on to say, with misplaced optimism, that without Hussein "the world is a lot safer and the war on terrorism is well served." Unfortunately, events in Iraq, notwithstanding the repeated assurances of the president, support the views of Scowcroft, and not Rice.

The policy enunciated by Bush the elder at the end of Desert Storm has been shown to be correct. Scowcroft's 2002 objections to Bush the younger's determination to invade Iraq were prescient. It is unfortunate that George W. Bush did not choose Scowcroft as national security adviser, or that his views were not seriously considered by the current administration. The long-term implications of the administration's decision to invade and occupy Iraq unfortunately echo the same problems raised by Bush and Scowcroft at the end of Desert Storm, and by Scowcroft in the Wall Street Journal commentary. The end is not in sight.

Eugene A. Brodsky is a maritime and admiralty law attorney and an adjunct professor of admiralty law at Golden Gate University Law School.