

DID BP HAVE SPECIAL REASON TO WORRY ABOUT THE IRAQ WAR FOR OIL?

The Independent reveals what we've always known: the Iraq War was about oil. Or rather, there were significant discussions in Fall 2002—the period when the US and UK were busy lying us into war—about who would get Iraq's oil. (h/t Susie)

The article describes BP's judgment that Iraq was "the big oil prospect. BP is desperate to get in there" and "more important than anything we've seen for a long time."

Lady Symons agreed to lobby the Bush administration on BP's behalf because the oil giant feared it was being "locked out" of deals that Washington was quietly striking with US, French and Russian governments and their energy firms. Minutes of a meeting with BP, Shell and BG (formerly British Gas) on 31 October 2002 read: "Baroness Symons agreed that it would be difficult to justify British companies losing out in Iraq in that way if the UK had itself been a conspicuous supporter of the US government throughout the crisis."

The minister then promised to "report back to the companies before Christmas" on her lobbying efforts.

The Foreign Office invited BP in on 6 November 2002 to talk about opportunities in Iraq "post regime change". Its minutes state: "Iraq is the big oil prospect. BP is desperate to get in there and anxious that political deals should not deny them the opportunity."

After another meeting, this one in October 2002, the Foreign Office's Middle East director at the time, Edward Chaplin, noted: "Shell and BP could not afford not to have a stake in [Iraq] for the sake of their long-term future... We were determined to get a fair slice of the action for UK companies in a post-Saddam Iraq."

Whereas BP was insisting in public that it had "no strategic interest" in Iraq, in private it told the Foreign Office that Iraq was "more important than anything we've seen for a long time".

But the article doesn't comment on why BP might be so concerned that the US would lock BP (and Shell and British Gas) out of Iraqi oil development.

Perhaps this might explain it:

From the beginning, it was clear that Cheney was running the show, chairing meetings of the task force – comprised of about a dozen Cabinet officers and senior officials – in his ceremonial office in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. Much of the task force's work was done by a six-person staff, led by its executive director, Andrew Lundquist, a former aide to Republican Sens. Ted Stevens and Frank Murkowski of Alaska. In 2000, Lundquist was the Bush campaign's energy expert; Bush nicknamed him "Light Bulb."

Today, Lundquist is a lobbyist and has represented some of the companies who appeared before the task force, such as BP, Duke Energy and the American Petroleum Institute. He did not return phone calls for this article.

[snip]

Cheney appears to have played a more

behind-the-scenes role in the task force's deliberations, the document indicates, listing only a handful of meetings with the vice president. Those included a previously reported meeting with Lay, who died last year; a meeting with officials from Sandia National Laboratories to discuss their economic models of the energy industry; and two sets of meetings with lawmakers. Cheney had other meetings, such as with John Browne, then the chief executive of BP, that were not listed on the task force's calendar. [my emphasis]

So in addition to the March 22, 2001 meeting that a bunch of BP folks had as part of the "official" Energy Task Force meetings, BP's CEO John Browne had his very own meeting with Cheney during the Energy Task Force discussions. And among other things the Task Force was discussing were Iraq's oil fields and the companies already trying to develop them.

Now, frankly, it wouldn't take a smarty pants to worry about Americans seizing Iraq's fields. Only very naive people believed the Iraq War was not about oil. But BP, which—aside from a number of Canadian companies—was almost the only nominally foreign company to be included in the Energy Task Force discussions (two Shell people had a meeting after the report was substantially finished), almost certainly had its own reason to worry about Americans looting Iraqi oil after regime change.