

CHENEY'S "HARD, HARD POWER" AND SYRIA

Apparently, the Poodle's memoir (the tour for which got a little messy in Dublin) confirms something that was blatantly obvious: Dick Cheney wanted to conquer the entire Middle East, country by country.

Describing the former US vice president as an advocate of "hard, hard power", Mr Blair said Damascus was next on Mr Cheney's hit list.

"He would have worked through the whole lot, Iraq, Syria, Iran, dealing with all their surrogates in the course of it – Hizbollah, Hamas, etc," Mr Blair wrote in his autobiography, A Journey. "In other words, he thought the whole world had to be made anew, and that after September 11, it had to be done by force and with urgency."

As this report notes, Cheney's transparent desire to take out Syria led that country to do things—like offer a haven for Iraqi insurgents—that hurt our overall war effort in Iraq. More importantly, Sy Hersh wrote extensively about how targeting Syria deprived the US of one of its best sources of information on al Qaeda.

State Department officials have told me that by early 2002 Syria had emerged as one of the C.I.A.'s most effective intelligence allies in the fight against Al Qaeda, providing an outpouring of information that came to an end only with the invasion of Iraq.

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... after September 11th the Syrian leader, Bashar Assad, initiated the delivery of Syrian intelligence to the

United States. The Syrians had compiled hundreds of files on Al Qaeda, including dossiers on the men who participated—and others who wanted to participate—in the September 11th attacks. Syria also penetrated Al Qaeda cells throughout the Middle East and in Arab exile communities throughout Europe. That data began flowing to C.I.A. and F.B.I. operatives.

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Syria also provided the United States with intelligence about future Al Qaeda plans. In one instance, the Syrians learned that Al Qaeda had penetrated the security services of Bahrain and had arranged for a glider loaded with explosives to be flown into a building at the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet headquarters there. Flynt Leverett, a former C.I.A. analyst who served until early this year on the National Security Council and is now a fellow at the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution, told me that Syria's help "let us thwart an operation that, if carried out, would have killed a lot of Americans." The Syrians also helped the United States avert a suspected plot against an American target in Ottawa.

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"Up through January of 2003, the coöperation was topnotch," a former State Department official said. "Then we were going to do Iraq, and some people in the Administration got heavy-handed. They wanted Syria to get involved in operational stuff having nothing to do with Al Qaeda and everything to do with Iraq. It was something Washington wanted from the Syrians, and they didn't want to do it."

But what I'm most interested in, particularly given the way that—as David Corn shows—Blair selectively edited out the parts of history that show the US was prepared to provoke an excuse to go to war against Iraq, is what it says about the intelligence we were trumping up about Syria. You know? Claims made by the now Director of National Intelligence that Iraq had moved its WMD program into Syria? Or the Al cutout leak of John Bolton's bogus testimony to Judy Miller to pre-empt intelligence community disagreements with it?

Granted, we really have known this all along: the Cheney government was inventing intelligence to justify a war not only against Iraq, but against much of the Middle East.

But as we piece together the evidence as new sources become available, this serves as a reminder that it's not just about Iraq and Iran.