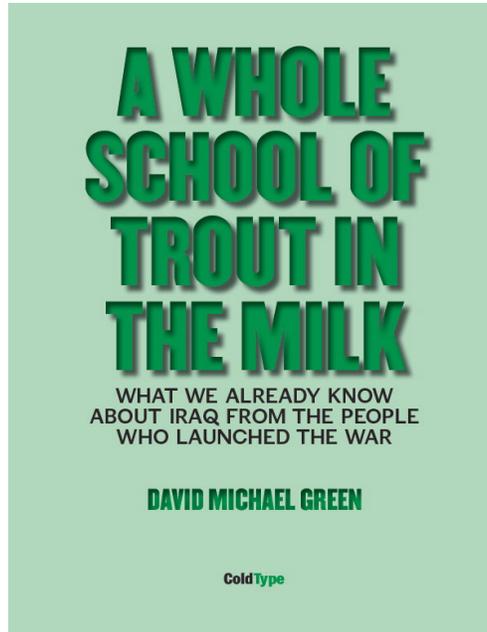


# **A WHOLE SCHOOL OF TROUT IN THE MILK**

**WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW  
ABOUT IRAQ FROM THE PEOPLE  
WHO LAUNCHED THE WAR**

**DAVID MICHAEL GREEN**

**ColdType**



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**N**ow that Scott McClellan – a member of the Bush inner circle dating back to Texas days – has come out of the closet, it becomes increasingly unimaginable how any of the true-believers can continue to truly believe. But they do.

One wonders what it would take to dissuade these folks from their faith-based politics and the belief that the war in Iraq was justified. Will they need Laura Bush to actually turn on her husband? What if George's pastor came out and divulged that the president had broken down and confessed all, begging the lord's forgiveness?

It's unlikely even those would be sufficient. And anyhow, the White House would go into its standard defensive posture that it employs whenever this happens, describing the truth-teller as "sad", lamenting his obvious psychological pathology without of course coming out and saying quite that, wondering aloud why he's never spoken out before. Indeed, it's a wonder that McClellan wasn't better prepared for this completely scripted response to his revelations, especially as he had used it himself against

Richard Clarke, Joseph Wilson and Valerie Plame.

Anyhow, all the true believers watching Fox will continue to truly believe. As the mayhem of the Bush years dwindles into numbed, robotic destruction and the tragedy of once noble national aspirations not only ruined but now also forgotten, it becomes ever more painfully obvious why these folks cannot let go, no matter how compelling nor how broad the growing mountain of evidence.

They are simply frightened to death. Frightened of bad people, frightened of brown people, frightened of terrorist threats blown ridiculously out of proportion, frightened of existential meaninglessness, frightened of cosmic insignificance. And now, to that weighty pile, must be added this: They are so frightened of their own complicity in bringing death, disaster, destruction and ungodly sorrow to Iraq that they can now only resort to astonishing levels of self-delusion to maintain their sanity. At this point, I almost don't blame them anymore. They were so lazy, so stupid, so callow, so mean-spirited, so prejudiced that they bought into a crime of epic (and epochal) proportions and can

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no longer imaginably bear taking responsibility for the damage they've produced. And yet, people continue to suffer and die. Every day spent still supporting the war out of fear or laziness or stupidity or any of the rest is another day's additional responsibility, another oil tanker of blood poured on hands long ago soaked to the bone.

And that responsibility is grave indeed. We don't know (because the White House doesn't want us to know) how many Iraqis have perished for Mr. Bush's Folly, but the best estimates are over one million. We know that almost five million have been turned into refugees. Combined, that is over one-fifth of this country's population. We know that over 4,000 Americans have been sacrificed, with tens of thousands gravely wounded and uncounted more tens of thousands psychologically traumatized. We know that our country's reputation has been shattered, and that we've spent our children's future livelihoods to pay for it by borrowing from them, without even asking for the money.

That is a very large load to bear, so now people are compounding their original sin with additional ones, because they are so frightened of what they've caused that they'd rather continue causing more of the same than confront their responsibility, even when a Scott McClellan comes along and sticks it in their face.

The truth is, though, we never needed McClellan's revelations to begin with. Just a bit of simple logic, combined with even a small, half-filled pail of basic factual information would have rendered the war rationale absurd from the beginning, well before an invasion morphed into an occupation, which morphed then into a debacle. Saddam's Iraq was no threat to anybody in 2003.

I mean, how threatening can a guy be who has already lost control of two-thirds of his own airspace, while his citizens are dying of malnutrition by the hundreds of thousands from internationally-imposed sanctions? How scary can a country be, when it has neither attacked yours, nor threatened to?

Whatever happened to the logic of deterrence, a mechanism that prevented an infinitely more powerful Soviet Union from attacking the US through forty years of cold war? Why was Saddam bad when he attacked his neighbors in Kuwait, but not when he did the same thing to Iran, with American support and encouragement? Why was he considered evil for using chemical weapons when we wanted to go to war against him, but not when he actually was doing it, during which time the very same people in the US government protected him from international rebuke?

If we knew where the WMD were, why didn't we just tell the inspectors where to look? Why was Iraq such a threat that the inspectors couldn't be allowed to finish their work, which would have required only a month or two more time? If Saddam was already so threatening, wouldn't invading his country be just the thing to trigger an attack by him, using his WMD? Weren't we supposed to be fighting the people who did 9/11, not a country that had nothing whatever to do with that? Why was Iraq all of a sudden such an immediate and urgent threat in March of 2003, when it hadn't been less than a year earlier? Why did nearly the whole rest of the world condemn this war of choice?

We could go on and on from there. But

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there isn't really much point. Anyone who wanted to think through the implications of the Bush administration's line on Iraq could have instantly realized that it was a load of crap, even before the subsequent revelations.

Now, of course, we know even more about what happened, making the war an even more sadly ridiculous proposition. There are many examples of these post-hoc logical absurdities to add to the pre-war ones just described, but my favorite is the juxtaposition of the incredible urgency to attack Iraq (and Iran) over WMD development, while the administration continues to yawn over North Korea, the one country on their own embarrassingly juvenile "Axis of Evil" list (hey, which super-hero cartoon series did they pull that nonsense out of?) that actually did go nuclear on their watch.

To the logic and the facts, however, we also now have a large raft of testimony. Laura Bush may not yet have weighed in, though in many ways we've got even better than that.

We have the voices of the architects themselves. We actually have Bush and Cheney and their PNAC cronies previewing the war and giving its real rationale. We have Wolfowitz and Card and Zelikow and Rove explaining the lies. We have Richard Clarke and Paul O'Neill witnessing them. We have Rumsfeld incriminating himself. We have the Downing Street Memos memorializing the process of deceit. And now we have McClellan confirming all of the above from within the inner circle.

I'm reminded, looking at the totality of this information, of Thoreau's line about evidence. Remarking on the difficulty of definitively proving an allegation in many cases, he nevertheless noted that it can some-

times be done, notwithstanding even the fervent denials of the culprits. Suspecting his milkman of watering down the delivered product, Thoreau said, "Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk".

When it comes to Iraq, there is a whole school of trout in the milk. And, yet, we're not talking about circumstantial evidence here. We're talking about confessions and direct witnessings of the crime. A forthright examination of this litany of evidence gives lie to the war from well before the invasion began, and does so merely by using the words of those who were there.

We can begin with the Project for a New American Century, which is such a who's who of Bush administration officials that it became pretty much a euphemism for the administration itself, and its policies. Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Libby, Bolton, Armitage, Abrams, Perle, Khalilzad, Zoellick – all of these and lots more were either members of PNAC or signatories to its most important documents.

The organization had agitated since its founding in 1998 for an invasion of Iraq, sending an open letter to Bill Clinton demanding just that in the name of American security, and calling for – as its name makes clear – a world dominated by American military power.

Their real agenda is revealed in their own words: "While the unresolved conflict with Iraq [the no-fly zones following the Gulf War] provides the immediate justification, the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein". There's a word for all that. It's called empire. When they didn't get their war in 1998, PNAC issued a report in 2000 under

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the guise of Rebuilding America's Defenses, which sounded the same tune, calling again for the ouster of Saddam, and noting ominously that the “process of transformation” they were calling for in arming the country and making its foreign policy more belligerent, “is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event – like a new Pearl Harbor”.

When they got their new Pearl Harbor on September 11, 2001, they jumped immediately into action. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld ordered his staff that very afternoon to get the “best info fast. Judge whether good enough hit S.H. [Saddam Hussein] at same time. Not only UBL [Osama bin Laden]. Go massive. Sweep it all up. Things related and not.”

At Camp David a few days later, Terrorism Czar Richard Clarke would find himself astonished to hear Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz arguing to attack Iraq – even though it had had nothing to do with 9/11 – because there were good bombing targets there, but few in Afghanistan. Clarke – a Republican who voted for Bush in 2000, and worked for the three previous presidents as well – also reported that during that same weekend, Bush pulled him aside and jabbed his chest, ordering him to find a link between 9/11 and Saddam.

When he checked for a second time and could not produce one, Condoleeza Rice tossed his report back to him unread, telling him he wasn't understanding what the boss wanted.

Outside the administration (but not really, since these were all essentially the same people), PNAC was arguing this same

preposterous linkage: “Even if evidence does not link Iraq directly to the attack, any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. Failure to undertake such an effort will constitute an early and perhaps decisive surrender in the war on international terrorism.”

Meanwhile, Bush and Cheney themselves had long already been thinking about the benefits of a nice war in Iraq. Russ Baker reported what Bush had told his would-be autobiography ghostwriter (until they removed him from the job for being too forthright, showing up early one morning and demanding all the tapes and files from candid interviews done with Bush in 1999), family friend Mickey Herskowitz: “One of the keys to being seen as a great leader is to be seen as a commander-in-chief. My father had all this political capital built up when he drove the Iraqis out of Kuwait and he wasted it. If I have a chance to invade, if I had that much capital, I'm not going to waste it. I'm going to get everything passed that I want to get passed and I'm going to have a successful presidency.”

Herskowitz also relates how the people around Bush viewed the lessons of contemporary history, including Reagan's Grenada adventure, Thatcher's Falklands War, and Carter's mistake in not having one: “They were just absolutely blown away, just enthralled by the scenes of the troops coming back, of the boats, people throwing flowers at [Thatcher] and her getting these standing ovations in Parliament and making these magnificent speeches.”

Indeed, Herskowitz quotes Cheney as offering this formula for a successful presidency: “Start a small war. Pick a country

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where there is justification you can jump on, go ahead and invade.” Leaving aside the minor operational technicality that he forgot about actually winning the war, I cannot think of a single more cynically debased statement or concept I’ve encountered in my entire life. There are now over a million people dead because of the Iraq invasion. How does someone like Dick Cheney sleep at night knowing he has caused so much grief to so many innocent people? Are there really batteries strong enough to power the pacemaker needed to keep a heart like that beating? Or did he have a secret transplant at some point, and the surgeon’s assistant unknowingly grabbed the jar with the criminal sociopath’s heart in it for the operation?

We have further confirmation of the administration’s intentions from Paul O’Neill, another witness to history, who served as Bush’s first Treasury Secretary. O’Neill reports that “From the very beginning, there was a conviction, that Saddam Hussein was a bad person and that he needed to go”, and that this was true from the very first day, well before 9/11.

“From the very first instance, it was about Iraq. It was about what we can do to change this regime. Day one, these things were laid and sealed.”

O’Neill was surprised that no one in the administration ever questioned ‘why?’ or ‘why now?’ when considering this policy. “It was all about finding a way to do it. That was the tone of it. The president saying ‘Go find me a way to do this’.” Ron Suskind, the author to whom O’Neill revealed all this, also obtained a Pentagon document from

March 5, 2001, titled “Foreign Suitors for Iraqi Oilfield Contracts” (including a map of potential areas for exploration), which he said “talks about contractors around the world from, you know, 30-40 countries. And which ones have what intentions on oil in Iraq.”

Then there’s this, from Philip Zelikow, who served on Bush’s transition team, drafted the administration’s in-your-face national security policy built around pre-emptive war, was called in to shill as executive director of the 9/11 Commission, and was sitting on the more-secret-than-top-secret President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board when he made these remarks at the University of Virginia on Sept. 10, 2002: “Why would Iraq attack America or use nuclear weapons against us? I’ll tell you what I think the real threat (is) and actually has been since 1990 – it’s the threat against Israel. And this is the threat that dare not speak its name, because the Europeans don’t care deeply about that threat, I will tell you frankly. And the American government doesn’t want to lean too hard on it rhetorically, because it is not a popular sell.”

No doubt, Phil. Actually, it has long appeared that Israel was only one of multiple reasons neoconservatives had for invading Iraq. Of course, Alan Greenspan wrote that the war was transparently for oil, but he wasn’t inside the administration, and provided no evidence for that conclusion. However, the very architect of the war himself, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, explained to *Vanity Fair*, only two months into the war that, “The truth is that for reasons that have a lot to do with the U.S. government bureaucracy, we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on,

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which was weapons of mass destruction, as the core reason”. Of course that also means that, whatever they actually believed about the quantity of WMD possessed by Iraq, they didn’t really care that much about it. It was simply the agreed-upon mutual talking point for marketing purposes.

And marketing was certainly the game. Sorry, Dick Cheney, that you found the notion that the war was being politicized “reprehensible”. Cheney somehow forgets to mention that the war resolution suddenly became so urgent that it had to be voted on the month before the election of 2002, putting Democrats in an acute bind just one year after 9/11. No wonder they did that. People forget that the Bush administration was already tanking in its eight months in office before that day.

And even after. Dick Morris wrote, as the 2002 election approached, “Polls show that only one issue works in Bush’s favor: terrorism”. Of course, we accidentally found out that this had long been part of Karl Rove’s agenda, as he briefed Republicans in Congress on the coming election, back in January 2002: “We can also go to the country on this issue because they trust the Republican Party to do a better job of protecting and strengthening America’s military and thereby protecting America”.

When Chief of Staff Andrew Card was asked why Iraq had all of a sudden become such an urgent issue out of the blue, he famously said, “From a marketing point of view, you don’t introduce new products in August”. That horrified a lot of people, and for good reason. But the real truth is far more cynical than the notion that they

made strategic decisions about how to market their war. All presidents will do that, and should as well, if they’re selling a genuinely beneficial policy.

The far deeper sin here was that this war was (meant to be) genuinely beneficial to Bush’s political career, his fragile ego, to oil companies, Israel, neoconservatives, Halliburton and Blackwater. Thus the whole marketing campaign was not about convincing people of the wisdom of a wise idea, but rather selling them on an abhorrent lie.

Then of course there are the Downing Street Memos and related revelations from the other side of the Pond, which expose emphatically – and have never been repudiated by either government – that the Bush administration had already decided on war by the time of the meetings the memos describe in July 2002, and indeed, had already even begun secret attacks by that moment. This is, of course, well before the Congressional resolution, well before the UN Security Council resolution that failed (despite, the memos reveal, Bush administration use of threats to Council member-states), and well before Bush was telling the American public how much he hoped to avoid war, if only the evil Saddam would just cooperate.

The memos also reveal, crucially, that once the war policy was in place, “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy”.

Why doctor the facts? Because the architects of the war knew that “the case was thin”. Further, the documents show that Bush was contemplating schemes by which he could create a false pretext for war, since no WMD had been found by the weapons inspectors. These included painting a US surveillance plane in UN colors and hop-

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ing it would be attacked, or assassinating Saddam.

So now comes ol' Scott McClellan, Bush's former press secretary, telling us that the president employed a "political propaganda campaign" instead of telling the truth, in order to sell his "unnecessary war", which he describes as a "serious strategic blunder" and a "grave mistake" sold on lies, "manipulating sources of public opinion" and "downplaying the major reason for going to war". According to McClellan, "Over that summer of 2002, top Bush aides had outlined a strategy for carefully orchestrating the coming campaign to aggressively sell the war", "in a way that almost guaranteed that the use of force would become the only feasible option". He also tells us that Bush admitted to him that he had personally authorized the leak of Valerie Plame's secret CIA identity, a clear act of treason intended to silence critics of the war.

Further, McClellan explains one of the reasons for the invasion: "The president had promised himself that he would accomplish what his father had failed to do by winning a second term in office. And that meant operating continually in campaign mode: never explaining, never apologizing, never retreating. Unfortunately, that strategy also had less justifiable repercussions: never reflecting, never reconsidering, never compromising. Especially not where Iraq was concerned."

Never mind that McClellan apparently thinks that "never explaining, never apologizing, never retreating" somehow has a 'more justifiable' rationale if you're a president going to war for the purposes of convincing yourself that you're better than your father. And never mind that McClellan did so much to help sell this war. And never

mind that his explanation for his change of heart rings completely bogus, or that, as press secretary, he savaged people like Richard Clarke who did what he himself did, only four years earlier, using almost exactly the same smear language that the White House and its marionettes trained on him. What ultimately matters is that he finally got it right and told the truth. Sure, many of us have been saying all these things for a long time, while people like Scott McClellan dismissed us as radical, America-hating, French-loving, treasonous underminers of the brave troops in Iraq. What matters now is that Scott McClellan was there, and adds proof positive of what happened.

So, imagine you're a member of a jury. You can never know for sure about anything – only what the evidence tells you – but you have to make a decision one way or the other. We now have confirming evidence, all saying the same thing, in one form or another, from the president's own Chief of Staff, Secretary of Defense, Deputy Secretary of Defense, Terrorism Czar, Press Secretary, Treasury Secretary, all the PNAC crowd, a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, his chief political strategist, along with documentary evidence from inside the administration. And then, of course, there are the President and the Vice President themselves, speaking candidly about their plans and the reasons for them.

Against that mountain of evidence we have Bush and Cheney, who have everything to lose by admitting these crimes, offering their fervent denials (at least when Mickey Herskowitz is not around) that they

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did anything untoward in invading Iraq. (Whew. For a minute there it looked like this might have been an overwhelmingly clear case.)

So what else, Dear Juror, could you possibly need to convict? A confession, perhaps? Actually, those were already given to Herskowitz prospectively, but if you need one after the fact, we can thank the Bush administration for teaching us how to obtain those. I would imagine that a half-hour with those nice folks at Guantánamo would be quite sufficient to produce any statement you require from these chickenhawks.

And what should be the appropriate penalty, upon conviction, for this man who built his political career on the backs of indigent convicts on Texas' busy death row, as a passionate practitioner of capital punishment?

What does it take, Dear Juror – Dear Ms. Pelosi, Dear Mr. Conyers, Dear Mr. Reid – for you to do what is necessary and what is right, even at this late date?

And, having failed so dramatically in doing your duty, with so much evidence on the table, how do you possibly get to sleep at night?

**CT**

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