



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on April 20, 2011

British Paper Reports: Big Oil Companies Encouraged Invasion of Iraq

In Great Britain, in the days prior to the invasion of Iraq, government ministers and oil industry executives spoke about how best to exploit the rich oil reserves in that country, according to an article in the UK newspaper *The Independent*. The paper reports that there were at least five meetings among representatives of BP, Shell, and the British government, taking place near the end of 2002. The invasion of Iraq began on March 20, 2003.



The [article](#) reveals disturbing details of the discussions between oil interests and officials of Her Majesty's government. Specifically, documents made available to the British newspaper suggest there was a deeper, more commercial purpose propelling Britain's entrance into Iraq, something completely unrelated to weapons of mass destruction.

While such revelations are nothing new, to have such theories confirmed in black and white is jarring, even to the jaded. It is disconcerting to read selections from frank dialogues that included Tony Blair (pictured above) and indicated that his cabinet was only finally persuaded to sign off on the military attack on Saddam Hussein after Blair and others raised the specter of WMDs.

The article tells of "minutes of a series of meetings between ministers and senior oil executives... at odds with the public denials of self-interest from oil companies and Western governments at the time."

Not surprisingly, the multinational oil concerns mentioned in the piece (and, more importantly, in the cache of documents obtained by *The Independent*) deny such sinister dealings, calling such insinuations "the most absurd." The very notion that that there were talks between the oil companies (principally Shell and BP) and Downing Street regarding the divvying up of Iraq oil is "highly inaccurate," say the petroleum giants.

The paper and the documents that inform the article outline a different version of the events leading up to the invasion. As the story goes:

Five months before the March 2003 invasion, Baroness Symons, then the Trade Minister, told BP that the Government believed British energy firms should be given a share of Iraq's enormous oil and gas reserves as a reward for Tony Blair's military commitment to US plans for regime change.

The papers show that 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.



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The name of Lady Symons, 59, is likely unfamiliar to Americans. Elizabeth Conway Symons was made a "life peer" in the House of Lords in 1996. Her professional life has been spent in politics, including serving on the boards of the very secretive British American Project, as well as the Ditchley Foundation.

The Independent records that after serving in the Foreign Office and as Minister of State for the Middle East, Symons:

later took up an advisory post with a UK merchant bank that cashed in on post-war Iraq reconstruction contracts. Last month she severed links as an unpaid adviser to Libya's National Economic Development Board after Colonel Gaddafi started firing on protesters. Last night, BP and Shell declined to comment.

Later, minutes of meetings obtained by *The Independent* paint a vulgar picture of the crass considerations being bandied about by the oil companies. For example:

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.

Even in those early days, "regime change" was a mantra repeated often by those already counting the barrels of crude and viewing Saddam Hussein as a substantial impediment to that fortune-producing flow.

To wit:

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."

And:

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."

The contradictions of public declarations and private confabs are brought into the light, as well.

For example, while BP was proclaiming its lack of "strategic interest" in Iraq, behind the scenes it was informing the British government that the resources that could be made available in a "liberated" Iraq were "more important than anything we've seen for a long time."

The more than 1,000 documents detailing these clandestine chats were obtained after the fulfilling of a Freedom of Information request.

Regardless of the secrecy that has shrouded them for nearly a decade, these meetings would be meaningless were their goals unachieved. That wasn't the case, however.

As the article describes the fruit borne by the wink-and-nod agreements:

The 20-year contracts signed in the wake of the invasion were the largest in the history of the oil



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industry. They covered half of Iraq's reserves — 60 billion barrels of oil, bought up by companies such as BP and CNPC (China National Petroleum Company), whose joint consortium alone stands to make £403m (\$658m) profit per year from the Rumaila field in southern Iraq.

The reportedly revolutionary uprisings breaking out recently in the Middle East, called collectively the “Arab Spring,” and the disruptions in the flow of oil from that rich region, serve to confirm the long-term viability of the deals hammered out in those 2002 deliberations.

Last week, Iraq raised its oil output to the highest level for almost [a] decade, 2.7 million barrels a day — seen as especially important at the moment given the regional volatility and loss of Libyan output. Many opponents of the war suspected that one of Washington's main ambitions in invading Iraq was to secure a cheap and plentiful source of oil.

Finally, the record of official comments made prior to the war by the parties inculpated by the piece in *The Independent* makes their recent universal denials even more despicable and unbelievable.

Foreign Office memorandum, 13 November 2002, following meeting with BP: "Iraq is the big oil prospect. BP are desperate to get in there and anxious that political deals should not deny them the opportunity to compete. The long-term potential is enormous..."

Tony Blair, 6 February 2003: "Let me just deal with the oil thing because... the oil conspiracy theory is honestly one of the most absurd when you analyse it. The fact is that, if the oil that Iraq has were our concern, I mean we could probably cut a deal with Saddam tomorrow in relation to the oil. It's not the oil that is the issue, it is the weapons..."

BP, 12 March 2003: "We have no strategic interest in Iraq. If whoever comes to power wants Western involvement post the war, if there is a war, all we have ever said is that it should be on a level playing field. We are certainly not pushing for involvement."

Lord Browne, the then-BP chief executive, 12 March 2003: "It is not in my or BP's opinion, a war about oil. Iraq is an important producer, but it must decide what to do with its patrimony and oil."

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