

April 2, 2003

Warring Tribes, Here and There

By MAUREEN DOWD

WASHINGTON

The president and his war council did not expect so much heavy guerrilla resistance in Iraq. And they really did not expect so much heavy guerrilla resistance at home.

But you can't have transformation without provocation.

This was a war designed to change the nature of American foreign policy, military policy and even the national character — flushing out ambivalence and embracing absolutism.

As two members of the pre-emptive Bush doctrine's neo-con brain trust, Bill Kristol and Lawrence Kaplan, argued in a book-length call for battle, "The War Over Iraq": "Well, what is wrong with dominance, in the service of sound principles and high ideals?"

So it should not be a surprise that the troubled opening phase of the war has exacerbated territorial and ideological fissures in the administration and the Republican Party.

Democrats are muter than mute. But a dozen days of real war in the desert has turned the usually disciplined Bush crowd into a bunch of schismatics: there is internecine warfare between the "hold out a hand" Bush I team and the "back of the hand" Bush II team. There's a feud between Donald Rumsfeld and some of his generals and ex-generals, and animosity between the Pentagon — where Rummy, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle and Douglas Feith spin schemes for intimidating the world and remodeling the Middle East — and the State Department. Colin Powell and his deputies wince as old alliances shatter and the Arab world seethes, and mutter that there had to be a way to get rid of Saddam without making everyone on the planet despise America.

The Washington Post reported on Monday that moderate Republicans were trying to do an intervention with the president to show him that hawks were giving him "bum advice."

The article was clearly referring to the Bush I realpolitik crowd of James Baker, Brent Scowcroft, Lawrence Eagleburger and Mr. Powell and his acolytes at State. These pals of Poppy Bush are alarmed that the Hobbesian Dick Cheney — who has been down in his undisclosed locations reading books about how war is the natural state of mankind — the flamboyantly belligerent Rummy and the crusading neo-cons have mesmerized the president with their macho schemes.

"There is a behind-the-scenes effort by former senior Republican government officials and party leaders to convince President Bush that the advice he has received from Vice President Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz . . . has been wrong and even dangerous to long-term U.S. national interests," The Post said.

One former senior Republican official noted: "The only one who can reach the president is his father. But it is not timely yet to talk to him." This raised the odd specter of the president's being dragged off from running a war and taken to Kennebunkport for a Metternichian outing in the family cigarette boat. Mr. Scowcroft and Mr. Eagleburger could pin W. down while Bar steered and Poppy explained the facts of international life.

The Oedipal struggle of the Bushes — a father who was an ambassador to the U.N. and an envoy to China, a globe-trotting vice president and an internationalist president, and a son who was a Texas governor with little knowledge of the world — was bound to be aggravated by an invasion of Iraq not sanctioned by the U.N.

Here was a son acting to correct his father's "mistakes" in the first gulf war, when his father did not think he had made a mistake, but rather a great contribution to history.

The neo-cons egged on 43 to war in Iraq by writing, as Mr. Kristol and Mr. Kaplan did, that 41's foreign policy was "defective" and that Bush senior had urged Iraqi Shiites and Kurds to revolt and then, afraid that Iraq would break up, turned "a blind eye" when they did that after the war and were slaughtered by Saddam.

When the Iraqi Shiites did not greet U.S. soldiers with flowers and hugs last week, as the hawks had promised, the stung warriors once more blamed Bush 41. "We bear a certain responsibility for what we didn't do in 1991," a senior U.S. military commander at Central Command in Qatar told reporters. "We let them down once. We're not going to do it again."

Bush 43 is busy trying to do something his dad thought he'd done. The title of Bush 41's book: "A World Transformed."