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ON THE WEB

January 2, 2002

## Let's Roll

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

**A**ll hail to President Bush for how he has conducted the war against Osama bin Laden. Mr. Bush has emerged a far better commander in chief than anyone predicted. In the war on terrorism he has shown steely resolve, imagination, leadership and creativity. Thank you, Mr. Bush.

And now, I wish Al Gore were president.

Why? Quite simply because instead of showing resolve, imagination, leadership and creativity on the domestic front, Mr. Bush has done just the opposite. He has tried to use the tremendous upsurge in patriotism, bipartisanship and volunteerism triggered by the tragedy of Sept. 11 to drive a narrow, right-wing agenda from Sept. 10 into a Sept. 12 world. It's wrong. It won't work. It sells the country short and it will ultimately sell the Bush presidency short.

I have no problem with nation- building in Afghanistan, but what I'm really interested in is nation- building in America — using the power of Sept. 11 to make our country stronger, safer and a better global citizen in the world of Sept. 12, beginning with how we use energy.

But so far, all that's happening is that we've made the world safer for Saudi Arabia and OPEC to raise oil prices again. In case you missed it, last Friday the Saudi-led cartel cut production by 6.5 percent to boost oil prices, while the world is struggling to get out of a recession induced in part by the terrorism of Osama bin Laden and 15 Saudi hijackers.

Frankly, the thought that U.S. taxpayers, who have had to bail out the airline industry (which was devastated by Sept. 11 and by higher gas prices) and to finance the \$1 billion-a- month war against bin Laden, will now have to pay more for oil because the Middle East regimes we're protecting want to hike the price, is an outrage.

You'd think maybe the king of Saudi Arabia would say: "America, we're as upset as you that Osama bin Laden and 15 Saudi youth were involved in the terrible attack on your shores. So we want to help America — the engine of the global economy — recover, as well as the developing world. As such, we're going to keep oil prices extremely low for the next six months, then we'll slowly lift them back to the \$24-\$28 range. It will cost us, but that's our tax cut for the world."

Is that too much to ask? Well, it seems so — which leads me back to President Bush.

The most obvious bold national project that Mr. Bush could launch now — his version of the race to the moon — would be a program for energy independence, based on developing renewable resources, domestic production and energy efficiency. Not only would every school kid in America be excited by such a project, but it also would be Mr. Bush's equivalent of Richard Nixon going to China — the Texas oilman weaning America off of its dependence on Middle East oil. That would be a political coup!

It would also be Mr. Bush's best response to foreigners who are enraged by America's refusal to

join the Kyoto treaty to stop global warming. Mr. Bush could say that by weaning America away from oil gluttony he would be doing more for the environment than Kyoto ever would, which would greatly improve America's standing as a global good citizen.

There are lots of ways Mr. Bush could go. "Today one out of every seven barrels of oil produced in the world is consumed on American highways," says the respected oil consultant Philip Verleger. "We could cut that by a third in five years if Washington were to offer tax incentives for manufacturers to produce more efficient vehicles and for consumers to buy them. Such tax cuts could be paid for with a higher gas tax, gradually phased in. Then we could replace all those American flag bumper stickers with ones that read: `I cut my oil use by a third, how about you?' "

I don't want to be dependent on Mideast oil anymore. Countries in that region haven't had a good century in 700 years — and they're not going to soon. Oil is their curse, as well as ours. It's corrupted their rulers, enabled them to keep their women backward and out of the work force, and prevented them from developing innovative economies that make things instead of just take things from the ground. They have a lot of homework to do before they will be stable allies.

We will all benefit if they succeed, but for now we have to look after ourselves. So, Mr. Bush, "Let's roll." Ultimately, presidential greatness is measured by what you do at home. If this war on terrorism ends with nation-building only in Afghanistan and not in America, it will be no victory at all.

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