

*astrological-cultural-spiritual-political
views & commentary...*

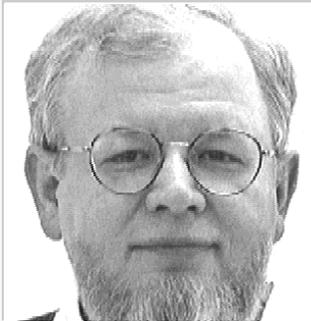
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THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



Thoughts, dates, & reminders about our lives as members of the craziest species on this lovely planet. Like a message in a bottle washing up on the sandy shores of consciousness...

website www.billherbst.com
email bill@billherbst.com
voicemail 612.207.4486



Dear friends,

The first of three Mercury retrogrades in 2005 occurs this month. The setup phase begins on March 6th, with the actual retrograde from March 20th through April 12th. Mercury will be moving backwards from 14∞ to 1∞ of the sign Aries, so anyone whose natal chart contains significant positions in the first half of any cardinal sign will be more affected.

This five-week period is likely to be a time of turning inward, of experiencing reversals where life boomerangs us from an external focus back into more interior and introspective awareness. It may be a difficult time for task-oriented accomplishments. Situations that seem to call for simple and direct action may backfire into bewildering psychological complexity. Our impacts on others, and their subsequent reactions, may be very different from what we expect. So prepare to be surprised, and don't leap at life. Wait a little before acting, and even then, move cautiously.

BUSH'S NEXT WAR

In the run-up to the American military invasion of Iraq, amidst all the saber-rattling about Saddam Hussein's (imaginary) weapons of mass destruction, at least one mainstream voice stood out in consistent protest against the government's bellicose hysteria and mendacity. Scott Ritter, a former U.S. Marine and U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq after the first Gulf War, bravely stood his ground while most politicians, journalists, and others who should have known better collapsed into faux-patriotic acquiescence. Time and again, Ritter spoke out loudly, insisting that Saddam had no weapons of mass destruction, and that the rationale for invading Iraq was, at best, a mistaken assumption or, at worst, an outright lie.

Ritter was right, of course, and hundreds of millions of us around the world agreed with him. Sadly, his voice of sanity, like ours, went unheeded by an administration that lives in its own insulated bubble of ideological evangelism; believes in expansion of the American Empire; and condones the use of violence, torture, and murder as means of achieving its ends.

Ritter has continued to speak out. On February 19th, in the Capitol Theatre in Olympia, Washington, during a presentation on U.S. foreign policy and the need to end the occupation of Iraq, Ritter told the audience that plans for bombing Iran's nuclear facilities had already been approved by President Bush and that the aerial attack was scheduled for June, 2005.

Investigative reporter Seymour Hersh—who describes the neocons in the administration as a “cult” that has “grabbed the government,”—wrote about urgently updated Pentagon plans for attacks on Iran in a January article in *The New Yorker*. Numerous reports indicate that aerial drones and special forces teams already inside Iran are identifying potential target sites.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq have nearly bankrupted the U.S. treasury via deficit spending, caused untold destruction and suffering, and stretched the American military to the breaking point. Is it possible that our government might soon launch an attack on Iran as the next phase in Bush's crusade to “root out evil?” Viewed from the political perspective, the answer is yes, that agenda is well-documented. Despite every common sense view that would discourage another military misadventure, the Bush administration and the Pentagon now have Iran squarely in their crosshairs.

Can astrology shed further light on this possibility? What's upcoming in George W. Bush's chart? Let's look back first, then forward.

When he initially took office in 2001, Mr. Bush seemed emotionally unprepared for the presidency, but subsequent events provided an epiphany that transformed him. In the final phase of his first life-purpose cycle (called the “balsamic” phase in astrology), George W. was ripe for a dream, a vision of the future, and the 9-11 attacks were the perfect trigger, answering neocon prayers for an event that would make the American populace putty in their hands.

Now, having survived the pressures of a Saturn-Sun conjunction in 2004, which kicked off the spring phase of his second 29-year cycle of life-purpose development, Bush's dream-vision is coalescing, concentrating into a deep emotional commitment. Put simply, Bush is striving to become a mythic figure in history. He feels called by God to become a prophet—a prophet of “freedom.”

I would argue that the ideals President Bush now embraces so passionately are not merely wrong-headed, but delusional as well. To the degree he is able to put his goals into practice, America and the world are in for a very bad time. However, while I personally disagree with everything Bush has done, I have no doubt that he believes fervently in his policies, both domestic and foreign. While Bush has no qualms about the cynicism of politics, his core beliefs are sincere. That combination—slick lies and simple religious faith—is very convincing to a large percentage of a very gullible American public.

Mr. Bush is approaching the third watershed period of his reign in office. The first peak phase was extended, stretching from 9-11 in 2001 all the way through the summer of 2003. That period was triumphant for Bush and included the creation of the so-called “War on Terror,” “Homeland Security,” and the military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Astrologically, that time was marked in Bush's chart by active Jupiter and Neptune cycles, which indicated increased confidence, bold optimism, and deepened religious convictions, as well as immersion into various illusions and deceptions. That's when the dream-vision took root inside Mr. Bush.

The second major period occurred from October 2003 through the election in November 2004. This phase was intensely difficult and challenging for Mr. Bush as he encountered the quagmire of insurgency in Iraq, revelations of scandal (Valerie Plame, Abu Ghraib, etc.), and the rigors of an exhausting campaign for a second term in office. Astrologically, that was the time of Saturn's passage over Bush's natal Sun and the start of his second Saturn return, which remains in effect until June. In many ways, Mr. Bush was almost undone by this middle phase, but he survived to claim re-election.

The upcoming third watershed, as defined by astrology, unfolds over 16 months, from April 2005 through July 2006. Unlike the first period, which was uplifting for Bush, and the second, which nearly crushed him, this third phase of striking portent brings contradictory indications.

In my September 2004 pre-election newsletter commentary, I wrote about Bush's upcoming transits for 2005. To my credit, I discussed with some alarm the dangers that lay ahead. Less sagely, I also predicted that, if he were reelected, the cautioning effect of Bush's continuing Saturn transits might cause him to rein in some of his militant extremism. Boy, was I wrong. Nothing that's happened since the election indicates that Bush has pulled back one inch from his previous stance of rabid, feral belligerence.

So, chastened by my own predictive fallibility, allow me to go over once again Bush's upcoming transits with an eye toward potential conflict with Iran. Are the grim portents of another war, reports of which now squeeze through the cracks of an otherwise compliant corporate news media, reflected in George W. Bush's chart?

Starting in April of 2005 and continuing through January, 2006, Uranus in the heavens will be precisely opposite the position Mars occupied at President Bush's birth. That transit—Uranus oppose Mars—is as provocative and combative an event as exists in astrology.

All Uranian cycles involve sudden, shocking, and “unpredictable” changes of direction (meaning that even astrologers can't nail down the specific manifestation in advance). Whatever the status quo of a given life, Uranus provides a radical impetus to upset the existing order, either from an unexpected welling-up of inner willfulness or in response to unforeseen changes in outer circumstance. Drama ensues. The applecart is overturned. Self-restraint becomes oppressive or even intolerable, and caution is often thrown to the winds. We are definitely not our normal selves.

Over the period of a typical Uranian transit (usually about a year), sporadic moments of frenzied excitement alternate with much longer periods of expectant waiting. In fact, only three to four peak outbursts are likely, but those brief episodes can be doozies.

When Uranus moves opposite any natal symbol, the disruptions that follow emerge out of our relationships. These upsets take shape in both directions—out of us at others, or toward us from others. In either direction, diplomatic efforts toward negotiation, cooperation, and compromise cease. Separations occur. Loyalties shift. We insist on unfettered independence.

When Mars is the planet being disrupted by Uranus, all the classical “male” qualities are strikingly activated. Desire, self-assertion, aggression, or even violence manifest in sudden outbursts toward the goal of revolutionary change. Surprise, upheaval, and chaos are inherent to the process. Explosions are imminent as the motivation toward dramatic action takes center stage. We want to provoke others.

In addition to Uranus-Mars, President Bush has a gaggle of significant Jupiter transits. Jupiter is the trailing planet in the bundle pattern of Bush's chart. Its natal position conjunct the Moon near his Lower Heaven reveal that George W. is indeed the scion of a “royal” and privileged family, which anchors his philosophy and shields him from the harsher realities of life.

Active Jupiter cycles indicate buoyancy, optimism, a sense of enlarged permission, and a moral righteousness that can overflow into arrogance. During the eight months that followed 9-11-2001, Jupiter made its most powerful contacts in George W. Bush's chart. So Bush didn't simply decry the criminal behavior of the attacks. He climbed astride his moral high-horse: “We're good, they're evil, and you're either with us or against us.” His simplistic stance of moral rectitude was sown right there, at the beginning of his twelve-year Jupiter-Sun cycle.

All Jupiter cycles progress in roughly three-year quarters. So those same cycles are again active in Bush's chart, from December 2004 through August 2005, taking the confidence and moral high-ground he claimed in 2001-02 to its next emboldened phase. The emotional attitude of superiority has hardened into official policy.

Given these impulses from Uranus-Mars and Jupiter-Sun, we can expect rash decisions and brash behavior from the President, including hostile reactions to any person or state he considers “evil.” Bush will likely become visibly more impulsive, impatient, and confrontational with others.

A 12th-house Cancer Sun and Libra Moon would normally be considered indicators of a sensitive and gentle temperament in a peaceful personality, but Bush's chart as a whole suggests otherwise. With Uranus as his leading planet in the 11th house, Mr. Bush has a radical orientation concerning cultural values and social change, and he doesn't care one whit what others think about his attitudes.

Bush's unsuspected 2nd-house Mars in Virgo sheds light on the darker sides of his character, specifically his lack of empathy where violence is concerned. All of us have disturbed shadows in our psyches; some of us, however, don't act out the way Bush has. From the child who blew up frogs with firecrackers in Midland, Texas, to the governor who sarcastically mocked the pitiful pleas of a woman on death row whom he ordered executed, to the President who oversees bombing of innocent Iraqi citizens in Baghdad and approves the torture of prisoners in Guantanamo—it's all cut from the same cloth. When Uranus opposes Bush's Mars, look for further outbursts from America's Commander-in-Chief. More war, more killing, more needless suffering, and more tragic consequences down the road.

The repercussions will begin almost immediately, when Saturn crosses Bush's Ascendant and conjoins his 1st-house Mercury and Pluto. These potent Saturn transits, beginning in September 2005 and lasting through June 2006, indicate a heavy weight of responsibility descending on Mr. Bush. In anyone's chart, Saturn's passage of the Ascendant into the first quadrant implies a period of necessary and forced self-reflection, where everything done for the previous two decades comes up for review. It is one of the most somber "Ah-Ha!" moments in astrology. We are pressured to see and understand the results of our actions, especially those that had been hidden from us by our own forgetfulness or unconsciousness. Whether we get it or not depends on our character and maturity.

So far, President Bush has gotten away with murder (whether literally or figuratively depends on one's politics). Bush's actions from April through August—especially if imprudent or rash—could result in consequences over the fall of 2005 and winter 2006 that will pressure the president to grapple with profoundly serious decisions.

A slim chance exists that Uranus' meaning of "reversal" might signal a turning away from the path of belligerence that George W. Bush has followed up to now. But don't bet on it. Bush's self-esteem is based on aggression (Mars in the 2nd), and his plans for social reform on a global scale (leading planet Uranus in the 11th) are firmly in place.

Geopolitics may shift unpredictably between now and the summer. Perhaps North Korea, Syria, or some new hot spot will turn out to be the surprise target rather than Iran. Whatever events unfold, however, as informed citizens we need to realize that, quite probably, Bush's next war is around the corner.



Bill Herbst resides in Minneapolis, Minnesota. To schedule an astrological session, either in-person locally or long-distance via telephone, email bill@billherbst.com

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