

How History Will View Bush

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As George Bush prepares to leave office, he and his aides are trying desperately to rewrite history, especially on Iraq. Nearly six years after invading Iraq on the basis of lies that were manufactured inside the White House, the Bush Administration adamantly insists the lies were all innocent mistakes. Were they?

Originally, the invasion of Iraq was justified primarily on grounds that Iraq had substantial quantities of chemical and biological weapons and had “reconstituted” its nuclear weapons development program, and that it could give terrorists “weapons of mass destruction.”

But there was no actual evidence Iraq had such weapons, and the White House knew it.

In 1995, Saddam Hussein’s son-in-law Hussein Kamel informed U.S. and British intelligence officers that all Iraqi biological, chemical, missile, and nuclear weapons had been destroyed under his direct supervision. After U.N. inspectors left Iraq in 1998, Scott Ritter wrote, “The chemical, biological, nuclear, and long-ranged missile programs that were a real threat in 1991, had by 1998 been destroyed or rendered harmless.” Ritter’s conclusion was confirmed by the DIA in September 2002: “A substantial amount of Iraq’s chemical warfare agents, precursors, munitions and production equipment were destroyed between 1991 and 1998 ... [T]here is no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons.”

In September 2002, CIA Director George Tenet personally told President Bush that Iraq’s Foreign Minister Naji Sabri – whom the CIA had recruited and persuaded to remain in place – said Iraq had no WMD. That fall, the CIA sent Iraqi-Americans to visit Iraqi weapons scientists, and they reported all weapons programs had ended. In January 2003, Iraq’s intelligence chief Tahir Jalil Habbush told British intelligence the same thing.

Thus the evidence against Iraq’s possession of WMD’s was overwhelming. What was the evidence for WMD’s?

The source for biological weapons was the German informant “Curveball,” whose interrogators informed the Bush Administration that Curveball was not “psychologically stable,” was a heavy drinker, had had a mental breakdown, was “crazy,” and was “probably a fabricator.”

One source for nuclear weapons was a letter about an attempted Iraqi purchase of uranium from Niger that was given to the CIA in Rome in 2001, but the CIA quickly rejected it as a forgery. Ambassador Joe Wilson visited Niger in early 2002 and further discredited the claim of an Iraqi uranium purchase. The other source was the capture of aluminum tubes in Jordan in 2001, which Bush administration hardliners claimed were intended for uranium-enriching

centrifuges. But experts in the Energy and State Departments insisted the tubes were for conventional battlefield rocket launchers.

Thus the weight of evidence was solidly against Iraq WMD's; the evidence for WMD's lacked credibility. So who is responsible for the lies – the intelligence agencies or the White House?

In June 2008, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence blamed the White House and said the statements about WMD's made by Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld were not substantiated by evidence. According to Chairman Jay Rockefeller, "In making the case for war, the Administration repeatedly presented intelligence as fact when in reality it was unsubstantiated, contradicted, or even non-existent."

Moreover, the White House directly pressured intelligence agencies to twist the evidence. Cheney made several visits to the CIA to pressure analysts. Numerous intelligence officials have testified about White House pressure, including Robin Raphel and David Dunford of the State Department, Richard Kerr and Paul Pillar of the CIA, and former national security official Kenneth Pollack.

The elaborate White House scheme to manufacture WMD lies was best summarized by Sir Richard Dearlove, the head of Britain's MI6, upon his return from meeting with CIA director George Tenet in Washington in July 2002. According to minutes of Prime Minister Blair's cabinet meeting on July 23, Dearlove reported "Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy."

The invasion of Iraq was a catastrophe of historic proportions. George Bush and senior White House officials may never admit they deliberately lied about Iraq's weapons, but history has already concluded otherwise.

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