

‘NYT’ Reporter Who Got Iraqi WMDs Wrong Now Highlights Iran Claims

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NEW YORK Saturday’s New York Times features an article, posted at the top of its Web site late Friday, that suggests very strongly that Iran is supplying the “deadliest weapon aimed at American troops” in Iraq. The author notes, “Any assertion of an Iranian contribution to attacks on Americans in Iraq is both politically and diplomatically volatile.”

What is the source of this volatile information? Nothing less than “civilian and military officials from a broad range of government agencies.”

Sound pretty convincing? Well, almost all the sources in the story are unnamed. It also may be worth noting that the author is Michael R. Gordon, the same Times reporter who, on his own, or with Judith Miller, wrote some of the key, and badly misleading or downright inaccurate, articles about Iraqi WMDs in the run-up to the 2003 invasion.

Gordon wrote with Miller the paper’s most widely criticized — even by the Times itself — WMD story of all, the Sept. 8, 2002, “aluminum tubes” story that proved so influential, especially since the administration trumpeted it on TV talk shows.

When the Times eventually carried an editors’ note that admitted some of its Iraq coverage was wrong and/or overblown, it criticized two Miller-Gordon stories, and noted that the Sept. 8, 2002, article on page one of the newspaper “gave the first detailed account of the aluminum tubes. The article cited unidentified senior administration officials who insisted that the dimensions, specifications and numbers of tubes sought showed that they were intended for a nuclear weapons program.”

This, of course, proved bogus.

The Times “mea-culpa” story dryly observed: “The article gave no hint of a debate over the tubes,” adding, “The White House did much to increase the impact of The Times article.” This was the famous “mushroom cloud” over America article.

Gordon also wrote, following Secretary of State Colin Powell’s crucial, and appallingly wrong, speech to the United Nations in 2003 that helped sell the war, that “it will be difficult for skeptics to argue that Washington’s case against Iraq is based on groundless suspicions and not intelligence information.”

Now, more than four years later, Gordon reveals: “The Bush administration is expected to

make public this weekend some of what intelligence agencies regard as an increasing body of evidence pointing to an Iranian link, including information gleaned from Iranians and Iraqis captured in recent American raids on an Iranian office in Erbil and another site in Baghdad." Gordon's unnamed sources throughout the story are variously described as "Administration officials," "intelligence experts" and "American intelligence."

Today, in contrast to the Times' report, Dafna Linzer in The Washington Post simply notes, "Yesterday, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said serial numbers and markings on some explosives used in Iraq indicate that the material came from Iran, but he offered no evidence."

For some perspective, here is how that "mushroom cloud" Gordon-Miller story of Sept. 8, 2002, opened:

"More than a decade after Saddam Hussein agreed to give up weapons of mass destruction, Iraq has stepped up its quest for nuclear weapons and has embarked on a worldwide hunt for materials to make an atomic bomb, Bush administration officials said today.

"In the last 14 months, Iraq has sought to buy thousands of specially designed aluminum tubes, which American officials believe were intended as components of centrifuges to enrich uranium. American officials said several efforts to arrange the shipment of the aluminum tubes were blocked or intercepted but declined to say, citing the sensitivity of the intelligence, where they came from or how they were stopped.

"The diameter, thickness and other technical specifications of the aluminum tubes had persuaded American intelligence experts that they were meant for Iraq's nuclear program, officials said, and that the latest attempt to ship the material had taken place in recent months.

"The attempted purchases are not the only signs of a renewed Iraqi interest in acquiring nuclear arms. President Hussein has met repeatedly in recent months with Iraq's top nuclear scientists and, according to American intelligence, praised their efforts as part of his campaign against the West.

"Iraq's nuclear program is not Washington's only concern. An Iraqi defector said Mr. Hussein had also heightened his efforts to develop new types of chemical weapons. An Iraqi opposition leader also gave American officials a paper from Iranian intelligence indicating that Mr. Hussein has authorized regional commanders to use chemical and biological weapons to put down any Shiite Muslim resistance that might occur if the United States attacks&hellip.

"The jewel in the crown is nuclear," a senior administration official said. 'The closer he gets to a nuclear capability, the more credible is his threat to use chemical or biological weapons. Nuclear weapons are his hole card. The question is not, why now?' the official added, referring to a potential military campaign to oust Mr. Hussein. 'The question is why waiting is better. The closer Saddam Hussein gets to a nuclear weapon, the harder he will be to deal with.'

"Hard-liners are alarmed that American intelligence underestimated the pace and scale of Iraq's nuclear program before Baghdad's defeat in the gulf war. Conscious of this lapse in the past, they argue that Washington dare not wait until analysts have found hard evidence

that Mr. Hussein has acquired a nuclear weapon. The first sign of a 'smoking gun,' they argue, may be a mushroom cloud."

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