

Rice and Rumsfeld “discover” Al-Qaeda in Baghdad

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Ten days before the date Hitler had set for the planned invasion of Poland, he told a meeting of military commanders and chiefs of staff that the regime would find a “propaganda pretext” for war. “It will make no difference whether the reasons will sound convincing or not,” the Fuehrer declared. “After all, the victor will not be asked whether he spoke the truth or not. We have to proceed brutally. The stronger is always right.”

What brings these words to mind is last week’s announcement by Defense Secretary Donald von Rumsfeld, supporting a claim made by National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, that there existed “bullet-proof” evidence of close ties between Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda members.

These allegations were reported on the evening news, though it was difficult for the correspondents covering the story to even pretend that they or anyone else actually believed the statements to be true. The declarations that the Hussein government is working, or has worked, with Al Qaeda flies in the face of oft-quoted statements by US intelligence that there exists no evidence of such a connection.

Moreover, an Iraqi-Al Qaeda alliance is politically improbable at best. As Daniel Benjamin, who served as the US National Security Council’s director of transnational threats in the 1990s, wrote in the *New York Times*: “Iraq and Al Qaeda are not obvious allies. In fact, they are natural enemies. A central tenet of Al Qaeda’s jihadist ideology is that secular Muslim rulers and their regimes have oppressed the believers and plunged Islam into a historic crisis. Hence, a paramount goal of Islamist revolutionaries for almost half a century has been the destruction of the regimes of such leaders...”

It was precisely this political hostility that earned

such movements extensive support from the US, which sought to undermine secular nationalist regimes bent on nationalizing oil wealth. And, unlike the alleged links between Iraq and Al Qaeda, those between Osama bin Laden and US intelligence are thoroughly documented. House-Senate hearings on the curious series of actions taken to suppress proposed investigations of those involved in the hijackings raise serious questions about whether ties continued between Al Qaeda and at least some in US intelligence agencies right up to September 11 itself.

Had the Bush administration’s central goal in the wake of September 11 been that of preventing further Al Qaeda terrorist attacks, it might well have been able to obtain tactical assistance from Saddam Hussein. After all, Washington had enjoyed close relations to his regime in the early 1980s, aiding it in its bloody war against Iran. Hussein himself had issued a statement of condolence after the attacks and would in all likelihood have seized upon an opportunity for rapprochement with Washington.

It is clear, however, that for the US government prosecuting a “war on terrorism” took a back seat to utilizing the September 11 attacks as a pretext for carrying out a long-planned war to seize control of Iraq’s oil fields.

The timing of the orchestrated statements alleging Iraq-Al Qaeda ties reflected the Bush administration’s difficulties in making a credible case for such a war based on its key claim that Iraq poses a threat to international security based on its alleged development of “weapons of mass destruction.”

Earlier in the week, British Prime Minister Tony Blair had released his government’s 50-page dossier, which he presented as an authoritative summary of the case for war, without making any claim of a link

between Iraq and al-Qaeda. While centered on the alleged threat from Iraqi weapons programs, the dossier provided no fresh evidence, merely repeating the claims of the Bush administration that Baghdad could obtain the capability to use such weapons in the future. Having failed to convince anyone through Blair's effort, Washington decided to float the allegations about an Al Qaeda link.

At the beginning of the last week, administration officials were seeking to terrify the country with frantic warnings that terrorists might use vials of smallpox to kill millions of Americans. For one day, the news media was full of reports of government plans to inoculate millions of health care workers who would be treating the victims of the looming epidemic. By the next day, the story had more or less disappeared as government spokesmen prepared for their next "bombshell"—which turned out to be the Iraq-Al Qaeda connection.

Neither Rumsfeld nor Rice offered any evidence to substantiate their claims. The defense secretary even alleged that Iraq had provided Al Qaeda with chemical weapons training, but then acknowledged that the source of the charge was highly "unspecified," and cynically told reporters "don't print it."

In a later appearance before a Chamber of Commerce luncheon he stated: "If our quest is for proof positive, we probably will be left somewhat unfulfilled. We're not going to have everything beyond a reasonable doubt." The standard of evidence for convicting a single individual and sentencing him or her to prison or death, in other words, cannot be demanded of a government that is preparing to rain death and destruction upon hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians. For that, any disinformation will suffice.

Rice, meanwhile, hinted at where the Bush administration's meandering trail of baseless allegations is headed: "No one is trying to make an argument at this point that Saddam Hussein somehow had operational control of what happened on September 11, so we don't want to push this too far," she said. "But this is a story that is unfolding and is getting clearer, and we're learning more."

What exists in Washington is a regime of lies and provocations. It will say anything at any time to further its predatory aims. Like the German Fuehrer in 1939, it has little concern about whether its "propaganda

pretext" for war is credible or not.



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