

US government lied about Iraqi weapons to justify war

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US government officials deliberately lied about Iraq's supposed stockpile of weapons of mass destruction in order to concoct a suitable pretext for war. That is the only politically serious conclusion that can be drawn from the revelations and admissions of the past week.

On Monday, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld addressed the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City, suggesting that one reason the Pentagon has been unable to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq is that they may no longer exist. "We don't know what happened," he told the group, "It is also possible that they decided they would destroy them prior to a conflict."

Rumsfeld did not explain how the weapons could have been destroyed so quickly, yet so thoroughly that no trace has been found. The Bush administration claimed before the war began that Iraq possessed as much as 500 tons of mustard gas and nerve gas, 25,000 liters of anthrax, 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin, and dozens of Scud missiles to deliver them.

On Wednesday, press accounts appeared of statements made by Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, in an interview with *Vanity Fair* to be published in the magazine's July issue. Wolfowitz discussed the conflicting views of the Pentagon, State Department and CIA in the run-up to the Iraq war.

The agencies were divided, not so much over whether to go to war, but over how best to justify it publicly and win international support. Various rationales were proposed, ranging from supposed Iraqi links to the Al Qaeda terrorists to the repressive character of Saddam Hussein's regime. In the end, Wolfowitz said, "For bureaucratic reasons we settled on one issue, weapons of mass destruction, because it was the one reason everyone could agree on."

Wolfowitz's comments created a storm, particularly in Europe, where they were taken as proof that the Bush administration deliberately chose the issue of weapons of mass destruction as the most salable rationale for a war whose real impetus was the US drive to seize Iraq's oil riches and dominate the strategic Persian Gulf region.

The following day Rumsfeld was compelled to go on the defensive over the issue, declaring in a radio interview with Infinity Broadcasting, "I can assure you that this war was not waged under any false pretext."

"We believed then and we believe now that the Iraqis have, had chemical weapons, biological weapons and that they had a program to develop nuclear weapons but did not have nuclear weapons," he said. "That is what the United Kingdom's intelligence suggested as well."

Rumsfeld's citation of British intelligence was a particularly weak reed to lean on, since the government of British Prime Minister Tony Blair is under increasing criticism because of evidence that it deliberately falsified intelligence reports in order to make the case for war with Iraq. [See "Britain: Blair caught in lies over Iraqi 'WMDs'"] The most notorious example was Blair's claim last fall—widely publicized in the US media—that Saddam Hussein could launch a chemical or nuclear attack on a chosen target "within 45 minutes."

On Friday, the commander of US Marine forces in Iraq admitted, "We

were simply wrong" about the danger that Iraq might use biological or chemical weapons against invading US troops. Pentagon officials had claimed that Saddam Hussein distributed chemical weapons to some Republican Guard units on the eve of the war. No such weapons have been found.

Lt. Gen. James Conway, in a teleconference with US-based journalists from his headquarters in Iraq, said, "It was a surprise to me then—it remains a surprise to me now—that we have not uncovered weapons in some of the forward dispersal sites.... Believe me, it's not for lack of trying. We've been to virtually every ammunition supply point between the Kuwaiti border and Baghdad, but they're simply not there."

Conway's admission underscores the fundamental problem for Washington's apologists: after more than a year of increasingly hysterical warnings that Saddam Hussein was threatening the United States and the American people with weapons of mass destruction—going back to Bush's "axis of evil" State of the Union speech—the US-British occupation forces have been unable to locate so much as a gram or a microbe from Iraq's allegedly vast stockpile.

The United States and Britain have had essentially uncontested control of Iraq's territory since April 9, but in those seven weeks they have found nothing—no weaponized chemicals or bacteriological agents, no delivery systems, no documentation that such weapons ever existed, no production facilities. Dozens of top Iraqi officials who would have been in a position to know about an unconventional weapons program have been captured and interrogated by US forces. Every single one has maintained that all such Iraqi operations were shut down in the 1990s under the UN inspection regime.

White House press spokesman Ari Fleischer said April 10, speaking of weapons of mass destruction, "That is what this war was about." But the US military's search for these has been a remarkably haphazard and lackadaisical affair, especially when contrasted with the alleged seriousness of the danger. The obvious conclusion is that the military did not look very hard because the top brass was well aware that the whole issue of WMD was concocted, and that no significant stockpiles of weapons were to be expected.

The Pentagon initially promised to flood Iraq with specialized NBC (nuclear/biological/chemical) warfare teams that would locate Iraq's stockpiles, destroy them and decontaminate adjacent areas. The actual number of troops deployed, however, was a small handful.

Key facilities, such as Iraq's huge nuclear research facility at Tuwaitha, a frequent target of both UN inspectors and US bombs, were not secured by US troops or seriously examined by the unconventional weapons teams. Many sites were looted by Iraqi citizens long before the arrival of US troops.

Nearly two months into the occupation, US weapons teams had searched only 200 sites out of 3,000 targeted by intelligence agencies, including the 19 locations identified as most important, but found nothing. Among the 19 highest-priority sites were a training facility for Iraq's Olympic

swimming and diving team, a liquor distillery and a factory making license plates and metal signs. On Friday, May 30, the Pentagon announced it was suspending these random searches for weapons of mass destruction.

The same indifference characterized the search for Iraq's key weapons scientists. Before the war, the Bush administration claimed that if only the UN would remove these scientists to other countries, along with their families, away from the grip of the Hussein regime, it would quickly get the information needed to locate banned weapons. But once the US was in a position to interrogate these scientists, it showed little desire to do so.

Gen. Amir Saadi, who headed Iraq's chemical weapons program in the 1980s and was the principal liaison to UN inspectors in the months before the war, waited at his home in Baghdad for a week after US troops occupied the capital city. No US personnel knocked on his door or sought to question him. Saadi finally tired of marking time and took the initiative to surrender to the occupation forces. The same story has been repeated for many other scientists who, with Saddam Hussein dead or in hiding, and in no position to retaliate, continue to maintain that Iraq's unconventional weapons programs had ceased to function by 1998.

Last week, for the umpteenth time since the war began March 20, there was a flurry of press reports claiming that the US military had finally discovered at least a production facility—two converted tractor-trailer trucks which were supposed to have served as mobile germ warfare laboratories.

On closer inspection, however, the evidence was unconvincing. There were no pathogens found in either of the trailers and the equipment, while apparently related to biological experimentation, showed no connection to weapons production. A six-page analysis made public by the CIA described the trucks as “the strongest evidence to date that Iraq was hiding a biological-warfare program.” This claim may be literally true, if only because no other evidence at all has yet been brought forward.

The failure to find any trace of evidence of chemical or biological weapons has begun to produce a reaction in official circles in Washington, where congressional Democrats, and a few Republicans, have demanded an investigation. Most of the Democratic Party critics have chosen to characterize the issue as an “intelligence failure,” suggesting that administration officials put undue pressure on the CIA, rather than saying what is, that the administration deliberately lied and fabricated evidence to overcome public opposition to an unpopular war.

That most establishment of Democrats, Senator John D. Rockefeller of West Virginia, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, spoke up for the first time May 29, objecting to claims by the Bush administration that it needed more time, months and perhaps years, to find the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. “You can't quite say that it's going to take a lot more time if the intelligence community seemed to be in general agreement that WMD was out there,” he said.

He called for the CIA to investigate itself on the issue of how estimates of Iraqi weapons stocks were developed, and he called for Congress to examine whether the White House intervened in the process to change the intelligence estimates. Whether the White House “intentionally overestimated” or “just misread it,” Rockefeller said, “In either case it's a very bad outcome.”

The senior Republican and Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, Porter Goss of Florida and Jane Harman of California, sent a joint letter to the administration asking for information on “how the intelligence picture regarding Iraqi WMD was developed.” Goss, a retired CIA agent, asked for a report from the CIA by July 1. Harman, wife of an electronics multimillionaire, said, “This could conceivably be the greatest intelligence hoax of all time. I doubt it, but we have to ask.”

Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware, the ranking Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee and a vociferous supporter of the war with Iraq, said in an interview on NBC, “I do think that we hyped nuclear, we hyped Al

Qaeda, we hyped the ability to disperse and use these weapons.” He added, touching on the real reason for his concern, “I think a lot of the hype here is a serious, serious, serious mistake and it hurts our credibility.”

Even sections of the CIA itself have demanded an investigation, with one group of retired agents writing to Bush to protest “a policy and intelligence fiasco of monumental proportions.” Former CIA officials were the source for an article by Seymour Hersh, published early this month in the *New Yorker*, which revealed that the Pentagon created a rival intelligence analysis unit, the Office of Special Plans, because Rumsfeld was unhappy that reports from the CIA failed to substantiate Iraq's alleged links to Al Qaeda.

The infighting in Washington revolves around concerns that the Bush administration's reckless disregard of international law and world public opinion is undermining the world position of American imperialism. Biden, Rockefeller, Harman & Co. are all for the conquest of Iraq, but they would have preferred more international support for this crime, and fear that flagrant lying will make the next war more difficult to sell to the American people.

There is almost no discussion in official circles of the deeper implications, both internationally and domestically, of the turn by the US government to a foreign policy based on gangsterism. One exception was the speech given May 21, to a nearly empty Senate, by the oldest member of that body, Democrat Robert Byrd of West Virginia. Byrd is no radical—he served as Senate majority leader in the 1970s—nor is his political record even particularly liberal—he opposed civil rights laws in the 1960s and supported the Vietnam War. His comments, ignored or disparaged in the media, were all the more remarkable.

Condemning the claims by the Bush administration that the conquest of Iraq is part of its war on terrorism, Byrd said, “The American people may have been lured into accepting the unprovoked invasion of a sovereign nation, in violation of longstanding international law, under false premises. There is ample evidence that the horrific events on September 11 have been carefully manipulated to switch public focus from Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda who masterminded the September 11 attacks, to Saddam Hussein who did not.”

The speed and ease of the conquest of Iraq by American forces refuted Bush's claims that Saddam Hussein was a threat to the United States, he continued. No evidence of weapons of mass destruction has been uncovered. Instead, “the Bush team's extensive hype of WMD in Iraq as justification for a preemptive invasion has become more than embarrassing. It has raised serious questions about prevarication and the reckless use of power. Were our troops needlessly put at risk? Were countless Iraq civilians killed and maimed when war was not really necessary? Was the American public deliberately misled? Was the world?”

The social conditions in postwar Iraq, with little electricity, food, water or medical care, with the looting of artistic and historical treasures while US troops guarded the oilfields, with Bush administration cronies raking in rebuilding contracts, belie the claims that Iraq is being liberated, he said: “The smiling face of the US as liberator is quickly assuming the scowl of an occupier. The image of a boot on the throat has replaced the beckoning hand of freedom.”

To all such protests, the Bush administration provides only the answer of brute force. The war was a military success, so don't challenge its rationale. When exposed as barefaced liars, they sit back and sneer, as if to say, “We lied. So what. We'll get away with it.” That is the secret of the smirk so characteristic, not only of Bush, but of his aides and his media apologists.

It speaks volumes for the future of the Democratic Party that an 85-year-old senator is the only one in Congress who can bring himself to speak passionately against a criminal government. Byrd's comments are a swan

song for American liberalism. Not a single prominent Democratic leader, whether in Congress or among the party's would-be presidential candidates, would subscribe to the sentiments he voiced on the Senate floor.

The struggle against the Bush administration—both against its foreign policy of worldwide war, and its domestic policy of social reaction—must be taken up by a new social force, the working class. In the place of moribund liberalism, it is necessary to build a new political mass movement based on the struggle against imperialist war and the defense of jobs, social services and democratic rights.



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