

Chief US inspector admits Iraq had no WMD stockpiles

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The admission by the CIA's top weapons adviser in Iraq, David Kay, that the country possessed no stockpiles of so-called weapons of mass destruction (WMD) nor related production facilities is a devastating refutation of the lies used by the Bush administration to justify its illegal invasion and occupation. The comments are all the more damning coming from someone who was one of the most rabid advocates of ousting Saddam Hussein as the only means of ending the alleged threat posed by Iraqi weapons.

Last Friday Kay resigned his post as head of the Iraq Survey Group (ISG)—a collection of 1,400 special forces troops, intelligence officers and technical experts who have been scouring Iraq since Baghdad fell attempting to uncover evidence of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons. Kay was appointed by the CIA to head the team in May after it failed to find anything remotely resembling the masses of weapons that Bush and his top officials claimed existed prior to the US-led attack.

Kay was not chosen for the post because of any technical or scientific expertise—he has none—but because of his record of support for the Bush administration's actions. Prior to the invasion, Kay, who had served previously as a UN weapons inspector in Iraq, routinely appeared in the media lending his “expert” credentials to attack the credibility of the continuing UN weapons inspection efforts and to warn of the dangers posed by the Hussein regime and its alleged WMD stockpiles. The Bush administration picked Kaye as ISG head because it knew he could be trusted to stop at nothing in manufacturing a case.

Kaye and his team have spent nine months not only checking weapons dumps and possible production sites, but also interrogating hundreds of Iraqis to try and extract information about the country's WMD programs. Scores of Iraqi scientific experts have been held without charge or trial at a US base outside the Baghdad airport and subjected to months of questioning about their activities. Most have now been released—presumably because Kay concluded nothing useful could be learned from them.

Kay presented an interim report on his work to several US congressional committees last October in which he was forced to concede that he had found no stockpiles of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons—large or small—nor the production facilities or precursors necessary to manufacture them. The remainder of his report consisted of a lengthy and elaborate obfuscation—cobbling together assertions about Hussein's “intentions” with unsubstantiated claims concerning Iraqi scientific research into weapons or “weapons concepts.”

In comments over the past few days, Kay has declared he now believes there were no stockpiles of weapons prior to the US attack on Iraq. In an interview on National Public Radio on Sunday, he said: “I think there were stockpiles at the end of the first Gulf War and... a combination of UN inspectors and unilateral Iraq action got rid of them.” Asked whether he believed that Iraq destroyed its banned weapons just before the US-led invasion, Kay bluntly replied: “No. I don't think they existed.”

Nor, it appears, does the Pentagon or White House. Kay explained that he resigned—at least in part—because the military had insisted on reallocating elements of the huge ISG team from the costly and futile exercise of hunting down imaginary weapons of mass destruction to the more pressing task of combating the armed resistance against the US-led occupation. The ISG's focus has now shifted. Kay's replacement, Charles Deulfer, has been assigned to concentrate on Iraq's WMD programs, rather than any actual hoards of weapons.

Kay, however, remains completely unapologetic. During his National Public Radio interview, he was timidly asked about comments just months before he was appointed to the ISG that he was “absolutely confident” weapons would be found. Kay unabashedly declared that he felt no embarrassment at all. In an interview on NBC television yesterday he reiterated his view that the US invasion of Iraq was “absolutely prudent.”

Kay and other US spokesmen are at pains to invent new justifications for the US war on Iraq, now that it is obvious that no WMD stockpiles are going to be found. The old lies are to be replaced with new falsifications and diversions in an effort to contain the political damage not only to the Bush administration, but also to the Democratic Party and the media, which rubber-stamped the lies of the Bush White House and supported the invasion.

Kay placed the blame for the gulf between the pre-war claims about Iraq's weapons and the post-invasion reality on US intelligence agencies, rather than on the Bush administration. Asked on National Public Radio whether Bush owed the nation an explanation, Kay replied: “I actually think the intelligence community owes the president, rather than the president owing the American people.” It was a technical issue, not a political issue, he said.

Kay stands reality on its head. The US invasion of Iraq was never about the alleged threat posed by Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Rather, the September 11 attacks on the US were

seized upon by the Bush administration to press ahead with long-held ambitions to subjugate Iraq as a means of gaining control of the world's second largest reserves of oil and to position the US strategically to dominate the Middle East and Central Asia.

The threadbare lies about Iraq's WMD capacity and the Hussein regime's alleged links to Al Qaeda were aimed at stampeding public opinion in the face of opposition from close US allies in Europe and, more importantly, from the millions of people in the US and around the world who joined anti-war protests. It was not a matter, as Kay would have it, of the inadequate or mistaken character of US intelligence. Rather, the Bush administration was desperate for anything—even the most transparent falsifications—to bully the UN and the broader population into supporting an invasion that had been planned and prepared well in advance.

Kay's claim that the White House had brought no pressure to bear on intelligence agencies is a lie. Even the supine US media was compelled to report Vice President Richard Cheney's visits to CIA headquarters to browbeat officials into making a stronger case for war. Disenchanted with the CIA's efforts, the most militarist elements of the Bush administration—the so-called neo-conservatives in charge of the Pentagon—set up their own intelligence unit—the Office of Special Plans—which had no qualms about feeding the most dubious information to a compliant press.

In an article in the latest issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, Kenneth Pollack, a former CIA analyst and, like Kay, a supporter of the Iraq war, described the situation in the intelligence agencies in late 2002 and early 2003, based on numerous complaints he received from former colleagues. "Intelligence officers who presented analyses that were at odds with the pre-existing views of senior Administration officials were subjected to barrages of questions and requests for additional information... Reportedly, the worst fights were those over sources. The Administration gave greatest credence to accounts that presented the most lurid picture of Iraqi activities. In many cases intelligence analysts were distrustful of those sources, or knew unequivocally that they were wrong. But when they said so, they were not heeded; instead they were beset with further questions about their sources," he wrote.

To justify his claim of "intelligence failure," Kay also pointed to the fact that the Clinton administration, along with the intelligence agencies in Europe and elsewhere, assessed that Iraq had significant stocks of chemical and biological weapons. Far from proving the case, his comments simply highlight the complicity of the preceding Democratic administration in the US and all the major powers—including France, Germany and Russia—in using claims about Iraqi WMDs to justify repeated US air raids and a decade-long economic embargo which cost the lives of an estimated half million Iraqi men, women and children.

Kay ignores the fact that France, Germany and Russia were demanding that a new and even more onerous UN inspection regime imposed in late 2002 be given time to verify Iraqi claims that it had no prohibited weapons. At the time, Kay was part of an intensive media campaign to belittle and criticise UN activities as inadequate and useless, while claiming that Iraq had vast stores of weapons. As chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix noted recently, the US should have known the intelligence was flawed last year when leads followed up by UN inspectors didn't produce

any results. "I began to wonder what was going on. Weren't they wondering too?" he asked.

Some White House officials, most notably Vice President Cheney, as well as key US allies—the British and Australian prime ministers—are sticking to the original lie, claiming that more time is needed to find Iraq's chemical and biological weapons. Others, however, like Secretary of State Colin Powell, who was responsible for presenting the US fabrications to the UN last February, appear to be taking their cue from Kay. After insisting last year that Washington had incontrovertible evidence that Hussein had a vast arsenal of prohibited weapons, Powell admitted last weekend during his visit to Georgia that they simply may not exist. Like Kay, he now speaks of the Hussein regime's "intention" to reconstitute weapons programs in the future.

The general line of these officials, as well as the establishment media, is that the absence of Iraqi WMDs is irrelevant, because the war was justified on other grounds. Aside from the intrinsic obscenity of the claim that the subjugation and occupation of a weak and impoverished country by the world's most powerful military apparatus represents a victory for "democracy," this sophistry ignores the indisputable facts of recent history.

The Bush administration, as well as its satellite in London, did not consider the claims of Iraqi WMDs "irrelevant" when it was conducting its propaganda campaign in advance of the military assault on Iraq. On the contrary, it considered it politically essential to concoct a false picture of a hostile country bristling with deadly weapons that could at any time be utilised by terrorists to kill and maim thousands of American (or British) citizens.

This elaborate and deliberate lie was critical for several reasons. First, it was needed to spread fear and terror in the US, the better to drag a skeptical and reluctant population into an unprovoked war. Second, it was essential in fabricating a legal fig leaf for a war that was ultimately carried out in defiance of the UN Security Council and without any international legal sanction. That legal fiction was based on a claim of "self-defence."

The demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US and allied troops from Iraq must be linked to the call for a genuinely independent inquiry into the tissue of lies that preceded the war, leading to the impeachment and criminal prosecution of those responsible for war crimes.



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