

Bush's Iraq commission and the "intelligence failure" fraud

Part Three

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This is the concluding part of a three-part article. Part one was posted Saturday, February 7. Part two was posted Monday, February 9.

The third major link in the chain of lies underlying the "intelligence failure" cover story was enunciated by former US weapons inspector David Kay, who told the Senate Armed Services Committee on January 28: "It turns out that we were all wrong."

German intelligence, French intelligence, the Clinton administration all agreed that Iraq possessed dangerous weapons of mass destruction, Kay declared before the Senate committee and in a series of media interviews. Kay suggested that this fact (actually, a self-serving and oversimplified characterization of intelligence estimates abroad and under the Clinton administration) exonerated Bush of any particular blame and proved that any misstatements on the part of his administration were "honest" mistakes.

In considering this argument, it is necessary first to place the "mistakes" of the Bush administration in perspective. Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Powell, et al were not wrong on details, or in matters of degree. They repeatedly declared that they had positive proof that Saddam Hussein possessed hundreds of tons of chemical weapons, hundreds of thousands of liters of biological weapons, and a nuclear program capable of constructing a bomb in as little as a year.

Powell went before the UN Security Council on February 5, 2003 and argued, with the assistance of slides of alleged weapons sites and facilities, that Iraq not only possessed these weapons, but the means—including scud missiles and long-range aerial drones—to deliver them against targets in the Middle East and possibly even the US. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld declared categorically in March of 2003 that US officials knew the location of Iraq's WMD. "We know where they are," he said.

The fact that UN weapons inspectors, who had returned to Iraq in November of 2002, had found no evidence of such weapons despite weeks of intensive on-the-ground investigations, only underscored, according to the US government, the uselessness of such inspections or any other diplomatic approach. The danger of an Iraqi regime bristling with weapons of mass destruction was so acute and imminent that war was the only solution.

As recently as January 23 of this year, one of the chief perpetrators of this deadly fraud, Vice President Dick Cheney, was insisting on the reality of Saddam Hussein's mythical arsenal of WMD. Interviewed on National Public Radio, Cheney said the discovery of two semi-trailers in Iraq provided "conclusive evidence" that Saddam Hussein "did, in fact, have programs for weapons of mass destruction."

Every one of these claims has proven to be completely false. The banned weapons hoards, the nuclear programs, the mobile bio-weapons labs, the magnets and aluminum tubes for enriching uranium, the long-

range drones, the scud missiles—all add up, in round numbers, to zero. To attribute such a colossal fraud to mere incompetence or ineptitude is to insult the intelligence of the public.

As for the role of the European imperialist powers and the Clinton administration, their complicity in promulgating the Iraqi WMD lie in no way implies an absence of calculated deception. Rather, it underscores the fact that all of the imperialist powers, its instruments such as the United Nations, and both the Democratic and Republican parties for more than a decade used the phony charge of Iraqi WMD as the pretext for crushing Iraq, destroying its sovereignty and bleeding it dry.

The Clinton administration insisted on the maintenance of sanctions that took the lives of an estimated 1.5 million Iraqi civilians, and repeatedly bombed the country. Its role underscores the fundamental agreement between the two parties of American big business, notwithstanding tactical differences, on the US imperialist strategy of global domination and its corollary—the control of strategic international oil resources.

As with the other, related lies—"There was no pressure" from the Bush administration on US intelligence agencies, and "Bush was misled" by faulty intelligence—the "We were all wrong" canard is flatly contradicted by the factual record.

Those governments and international bodies that had any degree of independence from Washington expressed either skepticism toward the wild claims of the Bush administration, or outright disagreement. To assert that France and Germany solidarized themselves with the Bush's administration's pre-war description of Iraqi WMD is absurd. Their spokesmen both inside and outside the UN Security Council openly questioned the picture drawn by Bush, Cheney, Powell and other US officials, and in large part justified their opposition to the US-British demand for a resolution authorizing war in Iraq on the grounds that many of the key US and British claims had not been proven.

The United Nations officials in charge of the resumed weapons inspections were even more blunt. Hans Blix, the executive chairman of UNMOVIC, the UN weapons inspections unit that scoured Iraq from late November 2002 until the eve of the US invasion, told the Security Council on February 14, 2003, nine days after Powell's presentation to the council, that although some weapons and agents were not accounted for, "One must not jump to the conclusion that they exist."

Blix cited improved cooperation on the part of Iraq, including private interviews with Iraqi weapons scientists and permission for the UN to operate U-2 spy plane flights across Iraq's territory. Iraq was continuing to give full access to UN inspectors to visit whatever site in the country they chose, he said. He explicitly rebutted several of the charges Powell had made the previous week in his address to the Security Council. He further noted that Iraq had voluntarily supplied the information that its Al Samoud 2 missile was in violation of a Security Council ban on

possession of missiles with a range exceeding 93 miles. (The missiles traveled 110 miles in a test firing. Iraq subsequently began dismantling these missiles, and was continuing to do so when the US and Britain invaded.)

Blix noted that UN inspectors had investigated all of the alleged WMD sites provided to them by the US, and found no evidence of banned weapons. He chided the US for refusing to hand over what it claimed was further intelligence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction—in effect, calling Washington’s bluff.

UNMOVIC’s 13th Quarterly Report to the UN Security Council, issued after the war on May 30, 2003, was even more categorical, stating that the inspections it carried out between November 27, 2002 and March 18, 2003 did not reveal any “evidence of the continuation or resumption of programs of weapons of mass destruction or significant quantities of proscribed items.”

In his report to the UN Security Council on February 14, 2003, Mohamed ElBaradei, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said, “We have to date found no evidence of ongoing prohibited nuclear or nuclear-related activities in Iraq.” In a further report to the Security Council delivered on March 7, 2003, ElBaradei repeated that there was “no indication of resumed nuclear activities... nor any indication of nuclear-related prohibited activities at any inspected sites.” He went on to specifically discount the major claims made by the US of Iraqi nuclear weapons activity. He declared: “There is no indication that Iraq has attempted to import uranium since 1990... There is no indication that Iraq has attempted to import aluminum tubes for use in centrifuge enrichment... [There is] no indication to date that Iraq imported magnets for use in a centrifuge program.”

David Kay and other apologists for the Bush administration who declare, “We were all wrong,” conveniently overlook the judgment of the UN inspectors. They also ignore the statements of Robin Cook, the former British foreign secretary who resigned on the eve of the war to protest Prime Minister Tony Blair’s war policy. Cook was quoted in the June 18, 2003 *Guardian* newspaper as saying: “I think it would be fair to say that there was a selection of evidence to support a conclusion. I fear we got into a position in which the intelligence was not being used to inform and shape policy, but to shape policy that was already settled.”

The perpetrators of the “intelligence failure” story also ignore the substantial and, in some cases, vehement dissent of elements within the US intelligence establishment. The most outspoken, and courageous, of these is Scott Ritter, the former UN weapons inspector who repeatedly declared in the months leading up to the war that the Bush administration was lying and that no serious evidence existed of Iraqi WMD.

Even some of the official reports of US intelligence agencies contradicted the categorical claims of the Bush administration. Bush and company were embarrassed in September of 2002, when their propaganda campaign for war was well underway, by the publication of a Defense Intelligence Agency estimate that said: “There is no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons or where Iraq has—or will—establish its chemical warfare agent production facilities.”

The report issued in January 2004 by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace focuses much attention on the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) issued in September 2002 by the CIA. This document, more than any other, was used by the Bush administration to bolster its claims about Iraqi WMD and justify its drive to war. As the Carnegie study makes clear, the NIE marked a clear shift in both the substance and tone of US intelligence assessments of alleged proscribed weapons in Iraq.

The Carnegie report states that “the consensus of the intelligence agencies in early 2002 was that:

* The 1991 Gulf War, UN inspections and subsequent military action had destroyed most of Iraq’s chemical, biological, nuclear and long-range

missile capability.

* There was no direct evidence that any chemical or biological weapons remained in Iraq, but agencies judged that some stocks could still remain and that production could be renewed.”

The report continues: “Beginning in mid-2002, however, the official statements of the threat shifted dramatically toward greater alarm regarding certainty of the threat and greater certainty as to the evidence. This shift does not appear to have been supported by new, concrete evidence from intelligence community reports—at least those now publicly available.”

In other words, there was no basis in US intelligence estimates for the alarming claims of Iraqi WMD that began to pour out of the Bush administration in August of 2002. On the contrary, from that point forward, the intelligence was manipulated to conform to the policy that had been adopted for an unprovoked war against Iraq.

The NIE of September 2002 was the finished expression of this politically-driven manipulation and falsification of intelligence. The pressure on the intelligence agencies to produce such a report did not come only from the Bush administration. In fact, it was the Democratic congressional leadership that was most vociferous, in the late summer of 2002, in demanding a new NIE on Iraq.

The motives of the Democrats were crassly political and cynical. They had already agreed to the demand of the Bush administration for a vote in Congress, prior to the November 2002 congressional elections, on a resolution authorizing the use of force, and were preparing to supply the Republicans with the votes they required to pass such a measure. But they wanted a hawkish report from the intelligence agencies to provide them with political cover.

Whereas previous intelligence estimates had been full of qualifiers and caveats, the September 2002 NIE made categorical statements affirming the existence of Iraqi WMD. According to a report in the February 4, 2004 *USA Today*, CIA Director George Tenet “pushed [the men who drafted the NIE] to avoid wishy-washy conclusions.”

The NIE for the first time affirmed categorically that Iraq had restarted its nuclear program after UN inspectors left the country in late 1998. It said that Iraq would “probably have a nuclear weapon during this decade.” It included the charge that Iraq had imported aluminum tubes and high-strength magnets for uranium enrichment, as well as the claim that Iraq had begun “vigorously trying to procure uranium ore and yellowcake.”

Whereas previous intelligence estimates said Iraq “may have” hidden stocks of chemical weapons, the NIE declared with “high confidence” that Iraq had such weapons, “probably between 100 and 500 metric tons.” While previous estimates would only confirm that Iraq had rebuilt parts of its chemical production infrastructure for industrial and commercial use, the NIE declared that Iraq had “begun renewed production” of chemical agents, including mustard, sarin, cyclosarin and VX.

Whereas previous reports had expressed “concern” that Iraq might be once again producing biological weapons agents, the NIE claimed with “high confidence” that Iraq had, in fact, begun to do so. It said Iraq had an active bio-weapons program larger than that which existed prior to the 1991 Gulf War, and raised, for the first time, the claim of Iraqi mobile biological agent laboratories.

An NIE is supposed to represent the considered consensus of all of the major intelligence and intelligence-related agencies, including the CIA, the Pentagon’s Defense Intelligence Agency, the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (commonly referred to as State/INR) and the Department of Energy. But as the Carnegie report notes, the September 2002 NIE was cobbled together with unprecedented haste. Moreover, it included an unusual number of dissenting views from various agencies that refused to sign onto certain of the estimate’s conclusions.

In October of 2002, CIA Director Tenet released an unclassified version

of the NIE, entitled *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs*. This public version, however, omitted the dissenting views of entire agencies concerning some of the most lurid and dramatic of the NIE's conclusions. (The Carnegie report documents this on the basis of more accurate and complete declassified excerpts of the NIE released in July of 2003, after the war.)

For example, the State Department's INR wrote that it considered "the available evidence inadequate to support the judgment" that Iraq had restarted its nuclear weapons programs. The Department of Energy rejected the claim that Iraq was importing aluminum tubes to produce centrifuge rotors for enriching uranium. And the INR called the claim that Iraq was pursuing uranium in Africa "highly dubious."

These dissents, highly damaging to the government's case for war, were suppressed, as were two other key NIE findings, against which there were no dissenting opinions. The public version of the NIE released in October 2002 omitted the conclusion that there was no link between Saddam Hussein and the September 11 attacks or any other terrorist attack on the US, and the finding that Saddam Hussein was unlikely to hand over weapons of mass destruction to terrorists.

In his March 17, 2003 address to the nation declaring war on Iraq, President Bush said, "The security of the world requires disarming Saddam Hussein now." Now even Bush's supporters admit there was nothing to disarm.

In fact, the edifice of lies began to crumble from the first days of the US invasion—when the US and British troops encountered fierce resistance, instead of a grateful populace throwing flowers at these "liberators," as had been promised. The monstrous deception concerning weapons of mass destruction began to collapse when US government warnings that Iraq would use biological or chemical weapons against American troops as they approached Baghdad failed to materialize.

The most substantial discovery made by David Kay's weapons inspectors in the aftermath of the war, as Kay himself has acknowledged, is a number of Iraqi documents proving that the regime of Saddam Hussein did, in fact, destroy what was left of its chemical and biological weapons during the 1990s. In other words, on the issue of WMD, Saddam Hussein and other Iraqi officials were telling the truth. It was the American government that was issuing lie after lie.

Now, the politicians, Democratic and Republican alike, the media and press, "liberal" as well as conservative, shake their heads in shock and consternation, and spin out articles and commentaries on the inevitable pitfalls of the intelligence game. What an absurd, cynical and filthy charade!

The fact is: they all knew the government was lying, that it had decided to go to war, and for reasons that had nothing to do with terrorist threats or weapons of mass destruction.

None other than former NATO commander Wesley Clark—who knows something about imperialist war, having supervised the 1999 air war against Serbia—admitted as much in the heat of a Democratic presidential debate last month in South Carolina. "I heard from the Pentagon two weeks after 9/11 that the administration was determined to go into Iraq," he said, "whether or not there was any connection with 9/11; that they were going to use it as a pretext for invading Iraq. And this was common knowledge in Washington."

The fact that the Bush administration and the entire political establishment are presently engaged in concocting new lies to cover up the old ones highlights the central role of the lie in the political life of contemporary America. This phenomenon has deep roots, far deeper than the shallow recesses of the vindictive mind of George W. Bush. It is an expression of the profound and irreversible decay of American democracy, and the accelerating crisis of American imperialism.

Government by conspiracy and lies, war, militarism, the ruthless subordination of the interests of working people to the oligarchy's drive

for profit and personal enrichment—these scourges will not be ended by the replacement of one bourgeois politician or party by another. They can be seriously addressed only by the development of an independent mass political movement of the working class, fighting for the revolutionary reconstruction of society on socialist foundations.



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