

Iraq WMD report proves Bush, Democrats lied to justify Iraq war

The Editorial Board
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The report released October 6 by Charles Duelfer, head of the Iraq Survey Group (ISG), is an indictment not merely of a president or an administration, but of an entire ruling elite. The report confirms that the claims about Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction, advanced by three US administrations, Democratic and Republican, and parroted uncritically by the American media, were outright lies.

The Iraqi government was telling the truth about its alleged stockpiles of WMD. UN inspectors Mohammed ElBaradei and Hans Blix were telling the truth about the lack of any evidence of WMD stockpiles or nuclear weapons activity. Former weapons inspector Scott Ritter was telling the truth when he said Iraq had long before dismantled its WMD capacity.

The hundreds of millions of people around the world who saw through the lies of the American government and demonstrated in dozens of countries against the US invasion were right. It is US imperialism that stands condemned for taking a page from the book of Goebbels and using the technique of the "Big Lie" to carry out a criminal conspiracy.

The Duelfer report found that Iraq's chemical and biological weapons were destroyed in 1991 and never reconstituted. The country did not possess a nuclear weapons program and was doing nothing to develop either the materials or the production techniques required to build nuclear weapons. On the contrary, under the impact of a devastating US-backed economic blockade—which caused the deaths of an estimated one million Iraqis, half of them children, for lack of food and medical supplies—the country's ability to sustain any sort of military establishment steadily deteriorated.

The Iraq Survey Group mobilized more than 1,200 inspectors under the direction of the CIA and searched the country for 15 months following the US invasion. It found none of the stockpiles, weapons factories, secret laboratories or other facilities claimed by the Bush administration. The evidence gathered by the ISG disproved all of the most-publicized declarations by officials of the White House, Pentagon, State Department and CIA during the runup to the invasion of Iraq.

* There was no active Iraqi nuclear weapons program. According to Duelfer, the ISG investigation "uncovered no indication that Iraq had resumed fissile material or nuclear weapons research and development activities since 1991."

* Iraq imported aluminum tubes to use in producing small military rockets, as Iraqi officials had said, not as parts for centrifuges to enrich uranium.

* Iraq did not try to buy uranium overseas after 1991, and even rejected an offer of uranium from an African businessman, citing UN sanctions.

* The trailers that US officials claimed were mobile biological weapons laboratories were actually being used to make hydrogen for weather balloons, as the Iraqis said.

* There was no "red line" south of Baghdad, where Iraqi troops armed with chemical weapons were supposed to unleash WMD on invading US troops.

Duelfer, who spent six years as the deputy head of the UN weapons

inspectors in Iraq, was selected to head the ISG by CIA Director George Tenet, and enjoyed the warmest relations with the Bush White House. Before taking the ISG post, he had said he was convinced that there was a connection between Iraq and the September 11 terrorist attacks. But when he appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee to present his report Wednesday, he told the panel, "We were almost all wrong" on Iraq.

Bush administration officials have combed the ISG report for anything they could use to justify their claims that Hussein's Iraq represented a threat to US national security. They have cited claims that Hussein retained the "capability and the intention" to possess dangerous weapons, as Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage put it. This is so much clutching at straws.

While Duelfer speculated that Hussein intended to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons in the event UN sanctions were lifted, he admitted that the ISG had found no actual plans or other evidence to substantiate such conjectures. As for the "capability," this only means that Iraq, like any other country with even a modest industrial base, had scientists and engineers who could have produced such weapons if given the resources and facilities to do so.

Perhaps the most important finding of the ISG is that Iraq's unconventional weapons programs were virtually abandoned after the 1991 Persian Gulf War. The Hussein regime originally developed chemical weapons for use in the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88, which Hussein initiated, at US instigation, and in which he functioned as a virtual US agent, attacking the Islamic fundamentalist regime that had overthrown the Shah, the principal US ally in the region.

US officials stepped up military, intelligence and diplomatic aid to Iraq even after the widespread use of chemical weapons against Iranian troops had been confirmed. Donald Rumsfeld, now secretary of defense, served as a special envoy to Iraq in 1983-84, visiting Baghdad twice to reassure Hussein of continued support from the Reagan administration.

In 1991, after US troops drove the Iraqi forces out of Kuwait, killing tens of thousands of virtually defenseless conscripts, Hussein accepted a strict regime of UN weapons inspection which quickly dismantled his chemical weapons facilities, as well as research programs on nuclear and biological weapons. The last research facility was destroyed in 1996, according to the ISG report.

Yet throughout the 1990s, Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction and its supposed refusal to cooperate with UN weapons inspectors were cited over and over by US officials as the basis for the continued economic strangulation of the country. The first Bush administration began this long-running fraud; the Clinton administration continued it for eight years (1993-2001); the second Bush administration took the matter to its conclusion, with the invasion and conquest of Iraq.

It is not an accident that the WMD fraud began in 1991; that was the year of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even during the Persian Gulf War, which ended in February 1991, the first Bush administration was constrained from marching on Baghdad and seizing full control of the oil-

rich country by the existence of the USSR, a potent military adversary with longstanding ties to the Ba'athist regime.

With the end of the USSR in December 1991, US imperialism no longer feared military retaliation or had to reckon with Soviet aid to Iraq. A consensus rapidly developed within the American ruling elite to seize control of the country's oil wealth and establish an American military and political foothold in the crucial region of the Middle East.

There were different shades of opinion over how best to accomplish this. The first Bush administration was wary of a US ground war and military occupation in the Middle East. It believed that the impact of military defeat, sanctions and US covert and overt actions would result in the fall of Saddam Hussein, and enable the US to install a more pliant regime. In the meantime, it backed Hussein against the Kurdish and Shi'ite uprisings, fearing these would lead to an Iraq aligned with Iran.

When the expected military coup against Saddam failed to materialize, factions that were dissatisfied with the results of the first war and determined to push for a US military invasion and occupation of Iraq stepped up their activities. In 1992, Paul Wolfowitz, working at the direction of Richard Cheney, then the secretary of defense, drew up the first plans for long-term US military intervention in the Middle East.

This document was the first draft of the program advocated by neo-conservatives in groups such as the Project for a New American Century, who called for worldwide American hegemony and a policy of "regime change" against any country that they deemed an obstacle to US foreign policy.

Clinton sought to pursue an intensified version of the strategy of the first Bush administration. His administration carried out repeated cruise missile strikes and two brief but bloody bombing campaigns, organized provocations by the UN inspectors, maintained the sanctions and the "no-fly" zones, and infiltrated CIA agents among the UN inspectors in order to plan the assassination of Saddam Hussein. Clinton also authorized several abortive coup attempts, as well as overt CIA terrorist actions, including those carried out in the mid-1990s by Ayad Allawi, now the US-appointed interim prime minister. Clinton also signed the Iraq Liberation Act, making "regime change" the official policy of the United States.

As the sanctions began to unravel, and US rivals such as France and Russia more aggressively pursued their political and oil interests in Iraq, the US ruling elite increasingly turned towards war as the desirable option. With the installation of the Bush administration, inaugurated in January 2001, the proponents of invasion and occupation came to power. Their plans for an invasion of Iraq were well under way when 9/11 occurred—under mysterious and still unexplained circumstances—and provided a pretext that they eagerly seized on to prepare the execution of their plans.

From the beginning, the US has used the WMD issue as a cover for its predatory aims. It was a convenient red herring, which was used to justify provocations and military strikes and provide an all-purpose pretext for destroying the country and asserting US domination. It also served to frighten and disorient the public, and condition it to accede to a "preemptive" war against Iraq.

But the WMD lie campaign never succeeded in creating mass support for the war, even in the aftermath of 9/11. The invasion was carried out in the teeth of mass opposition, both in the US and internationally. Millions of Americans knew in March 2003 that Iraq was no threat—imminent, gathering or grave.

What does this history signify? It means that the invasion of Iraq was not a sudden aberration on the part of George W. Bush. It arose out of a policy pursued for over a decade, under three administrations, both Republican and Democratic. Such a decision is not a "mistake," as Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry maintains. It is a monstrous crime: the criminal pursuit of a calculated policy, for which the entire US ruling elite must be held accountable.

The Duelfer report maintains that while there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, US officials nonetheless believed that there were, and acted accordingly. The last-ditch apologists for the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq, such as the editors of the *Washington Post*, embrace this view, declaring, in their editorial on the report's release, that even though Bush was wrong about WMD, given the intelligence information he received, he was obliged to make the decision for war.

This is yet another lie. The issue was never weapons of mass destruction—which did not exist—or a genuine fear on the part of the Bush administration that Iraq posed a threat. On the contrary, the conspirators who prepared the invasion of Iraq counted on the fact that the country was essentially defenseless.

The Bush administration chose to go to war with Iraq because it knew that the country was bled white, devastated by the sanctions, incapable of serious military resistance, and, consequently, ripe for the taking. It was an act of plunder, motivated by the desire to lay hold of Iraq's vast oil resources and position American troops at the center of the Middle East, a strategic position which would give US imperialism a decisive advantage over all its rivals, both European and Asian.

This is a war crime in the fullest sense of the word. Under the Nuremberg precedent, the planning and preparation of aggressive war is a crime against humanity. The record of such planning and preparation by those who today wield power is ample. In the months before September 11, 2001, for example, Cheney's closed-door energy task force, which included top US energy executives, pored over maps of Iraqi oilfields and discussed how they could be parceled out among the many claimants in the US and European oil industries.

For all of Kerry's current posturing as a critic of "the wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time," the Democratic Party has served as an accomplice and partner in the rape of Iraq, not an opponent. The Democratic administration of Bill Clinton helped starve the Iraqi people for eight years, bombing and killing, and perpetuating the myths that provided the basis for Bush's war propaganda. Since the invasion, Clinton and his wife, Senator Hillary Clinton, have been firm supporters of the conquest and continued occupation of Iraq.

Kerry himself, along with his running mate John Edwards, voted in October 2002 for the congressional war resolution, knowing full well that Bush intended to use it.

In the wake of the Duelfer report, there were new efforts by the Democrats to distance themselves from the war. The ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, John D. Rockefeller IV, called the report "devastating."

"The administration would like the American public to believe that Saddam's intention to build a weapons program, regardless of actual weapons or the capability to produce weapons, justified invading Iraq," Rockefeller said in a statement. "In fact, we invaded a country, thousands of people have died, and Iraq never posed a grave or growing danger."

The Democrats are caught in irreconcilable contradictions when they attempt to posture as critics of the war. They criticize the decision to invade, but pledge to continue the war. They declare the war a "mistake," but vow to carry it through to victory. They join with the Republicans in labeling the Iraqis who are fighting foreign occupation as "terrorists" and "enemy forces" who must be crushed.

The deepening disaster in Iraq has provoked an acute crisis with the ruling elite and its machinery of state. Hence the sudden shift of the Kerry campaign to a seemingly more critical stance on the war, and the barrage of reports—many of them generated from the highest levels of the military-intelligence apparatus—undermining one after another of Bush's lies. The harshly critical character of the Duelfer report—and the timing of its release, at the height of the US presidential campaign, when it will do the maximum damage to the Bush administration—indicates the depth and intensity of this conflict.

The American working class, however, cannot align itself with either faction in this struggle among the imperialists. Whether Bush or Kerry wins the presidency, the next occupant of the White House will be a loyal defender of imperialism, implacably committed to maintain US domination of Iraq and the entire Middle East.

The task of American working people is to build an independent mass political movement that opposes imperialist war and the US ruling elite of corporate bosses and multimillionaires whose interests are inseparably bound up with war. This is the perspective for which the Socialist Equality Party is fighting in the 2004 election campaign and in preparation for the mass political struggles that will inevitably follow.



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