

US officially ends hunt for Iraqi WMD

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Ever so quietly, the Bush administration acknowledged last week that it had officially abandoned its search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Thus, with only the most perfunctory notice in the US media, one of the greatest lies of modern politics limped to its ignominious end.

There was barely a mention that the dire warnings of Iraqi chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, backed by incontrovertible “intelligence,” had served as the pretext for a war that has already killed 100,000 Iraqis and nearly 1,400 Americans, and is costing billions of dollars every month.

Needless to say, the American press and broadcast media felt no responsibility to explain its own critical role in promulgating the administration’s war propaganda.

On January 12, the *Washington Post* published an article headlined “Search for Banned Arms in Iraq Ended Last Month,” which stated, “Four months after Charles A. Duelfer, who led the weapons hunt in 2004, submitted an interim report to Congress that contradicted nearly every prewar assertion about Iraq made by top Bush administration officials, a senior intelligence official said the findings will stand as the [Iraq Survey Group’s] final conclusions and will be published this spring.”

The preliminary report released by Duelfer in October concluded that any chemical and biological weapons Iraq possessed had been destroyed in 1991, and no WMD program had even been reconstituted. It also found “no indication that Iraq had resumed fissile material or nuclear weapons research and development activities since 1991.”

In other words, the government’s chief weapons hunter acknowledged that the claims used to justify an unprovoked war were entirely bogus, vindicating those, such as former US weapons inspector Scott Ritter, who accused the Bush administration of carrying out a

deliberate deception.

The Bush administration responded to the *Post* report by essentially dismissing the significance of its failure to find a single weapon of mass destruction. In an interview with Barbara Walters of ABC News, broadcast on January 14, Bush repeated his mantra that “Saddam was dangerous and the world is safer without him in power.” The war, he said, was “absolutely” worth the cost.

White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan said, “Based on what we know today, the president would have taken the same action because this is about protecting the American people.” McClellan did not explain why the overthrow of a regime that did not pose a threat to the United States was essential to protect the American people.

Nor did he explain—and the motley White House press corps did not press him to explain—why, if the existence or non-existence of Iraqi WMD was of so little consequence, Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, and other top administration officials placed so much emphasis on the issue in the run-up to the invasion.

All of them made definitive statements that the US possessed proof that Iraq possessed such weapons. Here, for example, is what Cheney had to say on August 26, 2002: “Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us.” Bush declared on October 7, 2002: “After 11 years, during which we have tried containment, sanctions, inspections, even selected military action, the end result is that Saddam Hussein still has chemical and biological weapons and is increasing his capabilities to make more.”

Then there was Rumsfeld’s statement on ABC

News' "This Week" program, made March 30, 2003, 10 days into the invasion: "We know where they [the Iraqi WMD] are."

If Bush and company feel they can escape any accountability for having gone to war on the basis of lies, it is because they know they will not be challenged either by the media or the Democratic Party.

Typical of the reaction of the liberal establishment was the editorial in the *New York Times*, "Bulletin: No WMD Found," published on January 13. Attempting to whitewash its own complicity, the newspaper wrote, "Fear of nonexistent WMD brought us a war." The *Times*, it seems, was a victim of government lies, not an accessory to the crime of propagating them.

"This proves once again the difficulties of debunking hard-held convictions," the newspaper continued. "Mr. Bush did such a good job selling the weapons-hunting nostrum that 40 percent of Americans recently said the weapons were there."

Several things need to be said about this attempt to shift the blame from the *Times*'s own shoulders. First, hundreds of millions of people in the US and around the world had no difficulty seeing through the administration's lies. Some 20 million of them marched and demonstrated on February 15, 2003 in the largest international anti-war protests ever held.

Second, if many Americans still believe there are WMD in Iraq, then the fault must lie with "news" sources like the *Times*, which did their best to keep the deception going and bury the revelations that disproved it.

In typical *Times* fashion, the editorial includes a dishonest gesture of contrition—"our own failures to deconstruct all the spin and faulty intelligence"—while failing to note the role of its own reporters and commentators, such as the notorious Judith Miller, in promoting the lies, which it euphemistically labels "faulty intelligence." Neither Miller nor any other journalist or editor at the newspaper has been fired for helping to perpetrate this fraud on the people of America and the world.

Why didn't the *Times*, which relentlessly investigated the Clintons' failed real estate deal in Arkansas (Whitewater) and mercilessly persecuted Los Alamos scientist Wen Ho Lee, bother to investigate the Bush administration's claims of Iraqi WMD, even after they were debunked by United Nations weapons inspectors?

There is no mystery here: the *Times*, along with the rest of the so-called liberal establishment, supported the unprovoked and illegal invasion of oil-rich Iraq.

The editorial concluded by noting that the members of the Iraqi Survey Group have abandoned their weapons-hunting activities to fight Iraqi insurgents. "We hope they succeed," the *Times* wrote. "If they do not, large swaths of Iraq could become a no man's land, where terrorists will be free to work on WMD projects and United Nations weapons inspectors cannot go to thwart them."

In other words, the final and official debunking of the government's lies must not become the occasion for opposing the war, but the very opposite: it should be used to justify more death and destruction.

The response from leading Democrats was similarly perfunctory and dishonest. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi called on Bush to "explain to the American people why he was so wrong, for so long, about the reasons for war." More to the point: when will she explain to the American people why her party nominated as its presidential candidate a man who voted to authorize the war, long after the WMD lies had been exposed, and why her party continues to support the occupation?

Senator Joseph Lieberman, the Democratic vice presidential candidate in 2000, refused even to concede that Iraq had no such weapons: "The fact that we didn't discover large stocks of weapons of mass destruction doesn't mean that Saddam Hussein didn't have them," he told Fox News.



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