

Study documents nearly 1,000 lies from Iraq war propaganda campaign

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The systematic propaganda campaign waged by the Bush administration with the full collaboration of the mass media to drag the American people into a war of aggression has been newly documented by the Center for Public Integrity (CPI). The Washington-based, non-profit public policy journalism organization this week released a large database of the lies top government officials used to terrorize the US public into accepting the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

By the CPI's count, the 380,000-word searchable database (available to the public at <http://www.publicintegrity.org/WarCard/>) contains at least 935 demonstrably false statements made on 532 separate occasions by the following officials: President George W. Bush, Vice-President Richard Cheney, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, and press secretaries Ari Fleischer and Scott McClellan.

On these 935 separate occasions, the database's authors write in their introduction, officials "stated unequivocally that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (or was trying to produce or obtain them), links to Al Qaeda, or both. This concerted effort was the underpinning of the Bush administration's case for war."

These claims of Iraqi WMDs and links to Al Qaeda were all completely false, as US officials have acknowledged. Perhaps the most famous admission came on January 26, 2004, when, in Senate testimony, former US weapons inspections leader David Kay conceded that "we were all wrong"—a conclusion that followed from the October 2003 Iraq Survey Group (ISG) report, which Kay explained by telling Congress that, after months of searching US-occupied Iraq, "We have not found at this point actual weapons."

The database provides crucial historical evidence that the American people were led into a disastrous and criminal war based on a concerted campaign of falsehoods by all the top officials of the Bush administration. As the report notes, "The cumulative effect of these false statements amplified by thousands of news stories and broadcasts was massive, with the media coverage creating an almost impenetrable din for several critical months in the run-up to war."

Thus on July 30, 2002, Rumsfeld had a one-word answer to reporters asking whether Iraq had relations with Al Qaeda: "Sure." He then went on to say, "Well, are they [Al Qaeda] in Iran now? Yes. Are they in Iraq now? Yes." The very next day, Rumsfeld's own Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) would reach the conclusion that "compelling evidence demonstrating direct cooperation between the government of Iraq and Al Qaeda has not been established." The DIA had previously stated that "the nature of the regime's relationship with Al Qaeda is unclear."

On August 26, 2002, Cheney told the national convention of the

Veterans of Foreign Wars: "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."

In a September 2002 national radio address, Bush said, "The Iraqi regime possesses biological and chemical weapons, is rebuilding the facilities to make more and, according to the British government, could launch a biological or chemical attack in as little as 45 minutes after the order is given."

In January 2003, Wolfowitz described Iraqi weapons programs as "just a series of evil weapons unaccounted for, huge quantities of anthrax that can kill millions of people, huge quantities of botulinum toxin that can kill millions of people, ricin that can kill millions of people."

In his infamous February 5, 2003 speech to the United Nations Security Council, Powell called his allegations of Iraqi weapons programs—including "biological weapons factories on wheels and on rails," an "extensive clandestine network" to supply "its deadly biological and chemical weapons programs," and the obtaining of "sufficient fissile material to produce a nuclear explosion"—"facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence."

The information in the database refutes Bush administration claims, after the US occupation forces failed to find WMD and Al Qaeda activities in Iraq, that it was somehow misled by false information provided by the intelligence services.

The database includes press articles, interviews and government documents detailing how claims such as Powell's were in fact based on fraudulent intelligence and the deliberate manipulation by top officials of the US intelligence establishment. As the database's introduction somewhat cautiously notes, this "calls into question the repeated assertions of Bush administration officials that they were the unwitting victims of bad intelligence." In fact, the database paints the picture of an administration so desperate to start a war that it would do almost anything to force intelligence services to provide a casus belli.

For instance, it describes the "human sources" on which Powell based his UN speech. One was an Iraqi defector codenamed Curveball, an engineer who claimed to have seen mobile weapons labs in Iraq. A 2006 Senate report in the database quotes the CIA's analysis of Curveball: "[A foreign intelligence service] has discussed Curveball with US, but no one has been able to verify this information.... The source is problematical." The CIA's head of covert operations in Europe, Tyler Drumheller, who opposed the inclusion of Curveball's material in the UN speech, later remarked that "the policy was shaping the intelligence and not the other way around."

The other source was an alleged Al Qaeda detainee, Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi, who claimed the Iraqi government had helped train Al Qaeda operatives in biological and chemical warfare. The database quotes CIA analyst Paul Pillar, who described al-Libi's interrogation transcripts as "sketchy and ambiguous, almost James Joycean." These transcripts were provided to the CIA by Egyptian intelligence, which had tortured al-Libi.

Al-Libi apparently continued to provide such information to US intelligence after being transferred to the US. According to a 2004 US Senate investigation, al-Libi told the CIA he "decided he would fabricate any information interrogators wanted in order to gain better treatment and avoid being handed over to [a foreign government]."

Another example was the continuous pressure exerted by Cheney and his aides on the CIA to fabricate incriminating evidence linking the Iraqi government and Al Qaeda. After interviews with former CIA Directorate of Intelligence chief Jami Miscik, journalist Ron Suskind described these interviews between Cheney's and Rumsfeld's staffs and Miscik thus:

"Cheney's office claimed to have sources. And Rumsfeld's, too. They kept throwing them at Miscik and CIA. The same information, five different ways. They'd omit that a key piece had been discounted, that the source had recanted. Sorry, our mistake. Then it would reappear, again, in a memo the next week. The CIA held firm: the meeting in Prague between Atta and the Iraqi agent didn't occur."

Miscik told Suskind she reached that conclusion that "It wasn't about what was true, or verifiable. It was about a defensible position, or at least one that would hold up until the troops were marching through Baghdad."

The basic dishonesty of these proceedings is further underlined by the fact that, before the war, top US officials publicly implied that whether or not they could prove their allegations against Iraq was essentially irrelevant, as the potential of an Iraqi threat called for a US invasion anyway. Perhaps the most famous example was Condoleezza Rice's September 8, 2002 statement to CNN's Wolf Blitzer: "There will always be some uncertainty about how quickly [Saddam Hussein] can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud."

While no doubt useful in its compilation of evidence of such a massive campaign aimed at deceiving the American people, the CPI study falls far short of a political explanation of how this reactionary effort was able to succeed.

What it fails to examine is the way in which the Democratic Party fell into political lockstep with the administration in the months leading up to the war in Iraq. Omitted from the database are the lies told by the likes of the current Democratic presidential candidate Senator Hillary Clinton, who delivered a bellicose speech from the floor of the US Senate in October 2002, before joining the overwhelming majority of her colleagues in voting to authorize the Bush administration's launching of a war against Iraq. Indeed, Clinton proudly noted that her husband's administration had employed the same lies about Iraqi WMD as the pretext for launching cruise missile attacks on the country in the 1990s.

The Senate was then—as now—under the leadership of the Democratic Party. Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle declared at the time that America had to speak "with one voice" in threatening war against Iraq. Then senator and current presidential candidate John Edwards wrote in a *Washington Post* opinion column just weeks before voting for war: "America is united in its determination to eliminate forever the threat of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction."

The Democrats at the time had the leadership of the Senate intelligence, armed services and foreign affairs committees, yet none of them pressed for investigations into the blatant lies being used by the administration to prepare for war.

The reality is that both parties were quite conscious of both the phony character of the administration's propaganda campaign and of the administration's determination to manufacture a pretext for war no matter how contrived. They backed this campaign because the representatives of big business in both parties agreed on a strategy of invading and occupying Iraq with the aim of seizing control of the country's vast oil reserves and establishing US hegemony in a vitally strategic region.

Using US military power as a means of asserting American capitalism's dominance and thereby offsetting its relative decline on the world market was a consensus policy within the ruling elite. Among masses of working people, however, there existed intense opposition to war. The barrage of lies and propaganda about an imminent threat from nonexistent Iraqi weapons of mass destruction was unleashed in order to terrorize the American people into accepting a war.

The Democratic congressional leadership was not a victim of this lie campaign, but rather served as a willing accomplice.

Also missing from the picture provided by the Center for Public Integrity is the criminal role played by the mass media during the run-up to the Iraq war. The television networks and major newspapers acted collectively as a kind of privatized propaganda ministry for the Bush administration's war drive, amplifying and, in some cases, embellishing upon all of the lies catalogued in the CPI study. Meanwhile, all those who challenged the fraudulent official story promoted by the administration and the Democrats—not least among them the millions who took to the streets to oppose war—were systematically silenced and censored from the news.

There is no doubt that the 935 lies assembled in this study constitute a vital piece of evidence that would amply justify the impeachment and prosecution for war crimes of Bush, Cheney, Rice and others in the administration. The fact that there is no move to indict these officials for their crimes, however, only points to the continued complicity of the Democrats, the media and the predominant layers of the ruling political establishment in continuing a war of aggression that has claimed the lives of over 1 million Iraqis as well as nearly 4,000 American troops.



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