

Senate report on Bush war lies: Another cover-up of war crimes

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The Senate Intelligence Committee report issued Thursday on the Bush administration's use of phony intelligence in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq is yet another exercise in damage control, aimed at concealing the full scope of the criminal conspiracy to drag the American people into a war of aggression.

The 170-page report was released a full five years after the Senate committee began its investigation into prewar intelligence claims. While acknowledging the well-established fact that Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, then-National Security Adviser and current Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, then-Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and other top aides knowingly misled American and world public opinion, it minimizes the scale of this deception and draws no conclusions about its implications for democratic rights in the United States.

The Senate report, endorsed by all eight Democrats on the committee and two Republicans, proposes no follow-up investigations or sanctions against Bush and company. Even before the Democrats took control of Congress following the Republican rout in the 2006 midterm elections, Democratic congressional leaders ruled out any effort to impeach Bush, Cheney, or any of the other officials involved in the war plot.

This is in no small measure because the Democratic Party was itself entirely complicit in the drive to war on the basis of lies, echoing the fear-mongering claims about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and Iraqi-Al Qaeda ties and supplying Bush with the votes he needed to authorize an invasion. Since gaining control of Congress, the Democrats have continued to supply the administration with the funding it has requested to prosecute and even escalate the war.

The report essentially exonerates Bush and other administration officials for their lurid prewar assertions about Iraqi chemical and biological weapons and their claims that Iraq was actively pursuing the development of nuclear weapons. It declares that such claims were generally "substantiated" by the intelligence estimates at the time, and merely charges Bush officials with "exaggerating" the intelligence on WMD and failing to note contradictory and dissenting intelligence assessments.

It seeks to draw a distinction between the prewar propaganda on WMD and the administration's claims of intimate operational ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda and its chilling warnings that the Iraqi regime, if not overthrown, would hand over weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear bombs, to Al Qaeda or other terrorist groups to launch attacks on the American people.

These included repeated assertions by Cheney that 9/11 hijacker Mohamed Atta had met with an Iraqi intelligence agent in Prague and

Bush's claim in a key speech, given in Cincinnati in October 2002, that Hussein "could provide one of his hidden weapons to terrorists, or help them develop their own." Such claims, the report states, were "contradicted by available intelligence information."

Despite its various caveats, the Senate report cites a host of false statements by Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and other officials which, in objective terms, demonstrate a systematic and criminal conspiracy to terrorize the American people into backing an unprovoked war against a relatively defenseless country that posed no real threat to their security.

In a statement issued in conjunction with the report, Democratic Senator John D. Rockefeller IV, the committee chairman, wrote: "The president and his advisers undertook a relentless public campaign in the aftermath of the attacks to use the war against Al Qaeda as a justification for overthrowing Saddam Hussein..."

"Representing to the American people that the two [Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda] had an operational partnership and posed a single, indistinguishable threat was fundamentally misleading and led the nation to war on false premises."

At a news conference, he added, "In making the case for war, the administration repeatedly presented intelligence as fact when it was unsubstantiated, contradicted or even nonexistent. As a result, the American people were led to believe that the threat from Iraq was much greater than actually existed."

Such statements, regardless the intentions of Rockefeller and his fellow Democrats, meet the standard established at the Nuremberg Tribunal for prosecution for war crimes. That body asserted that the most fundamental war crime is plotting to wage aggressive war.

On the issue of alleged Iraqi WMD, the report largely adheres to the line of an earlier report issued by the Senate Intelligence Committee in July of 2004, when the committee was under Republican control. The Republicans were obliged to conduct an investigation into the prewar WMD claims when US troops and inspectors were unable to find a single piece of evidence of the existence of such weapons following the US invasion in March of 2003.

The earlier report placed the entire onus for the false WMD claims on "faulty intelligence" provided by the CIA and other intelligence agencies. It was a flagrant whitewash of the Bush administration, portraying Bush and his top aides as unwitting victims of a supposed intelligence failure for which they bore no responsibility.

The second phase of the committee investigation, to examine whether Bush and others distorted or misused intelligence reports to promote their war agenda, was blocked by the Republican majority for three years, and it took the Democrats on the committee eighteen months to produce the current report after the Democratic-led

Congress took office in January of 2007.

The claim in the new report that Bush administration assertions on Iraqi WMD were in keeping with the intelligence estimates at the time is entirely sophistic. It ignores well-established facts that demonstrate the administration aggressively solicited and directly concocted phony reports on supposed weapons of mass destruction.

In the first place, Cheney and some of his top aides made numerous visits to CIA headquarters to browbeat CIA analysts into cranking out reports that justified the administration's claims.

Secondly, Rumsfeld, with Cheney's support, set up his own operation at the Pentagon to fabricate "intelligence" of Iraqi WMD stockpiles.

Moreover, administration claims of Iraqi WMD were publicly rejected by Hans Blix, the head of the United Nations weapons inspection operation in Iraq, and Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

There is at least one well-documented case in which Bush ignored the advice of the CIA and used phony WMD claims to promote his war plans. Then-CIA Director George Tenet warned Bush in October of 2002 that reports of Iraqi attempts to secure uranium from Niger were baseless and should not be used. Nevertheless, Bush cited these reports in his January 2003 State of the Union address to argue that Saddam Hussein was developing nuclear weapons.

Finally, it has since been well documented that Bush and his top advisers began discussing war plans against Iraq soon after taking office in January of 2001. The September 11, 2001 attacks provided the administration with the pretext it desired and needed to stampede the American people into such a war.

Nor does the Senate report note the depth and scope of public sentiment in the US and internationally in the run-up to the war rejecting the administration's war propaganda. The tens of millions who demonstrated in February 2003 against the impending war in the largest international protest against war in history had little difficulty discerning the mendacity of the US government.

The Democrats decided to essentially give Bush a pass on the WMD issue, largely because they utilized the same canard for eight years under the Clinton administration to justify the brutal sanctions and repeated air attacks on Iraq carried out by Clinton.

Five of the seven Republicans on the committee issued a dissenting report that labeled the majority's findings a partisan attack and declared them to be "irrelevant." (Republicans Olympia Snowe of Maine and Chuck Hagel of Nebraska joined the Democrats in endorsing the report). The Republican dissenters, led by Senator Christopher S. Bond of Missouri, were able to exploit the complicity of leading Democrats, including Senator Hillary Clinton and Rockefeller himself, both of whom voted to authorize the invasion, to charge the committee majority with hypocrisy.

The minority report quotes statements by Clinton, Rockefeller and other leading Democrats echoing the lies of the Bush administration. It cites an October 2002 speech by Rockefeller in the Senate in which he said he had arrived at the "inescapable conclusion that the threat posed to America by Saddam's weapons of mass destruction is so serious that despite the risks... we must authorize the president to take the necessary steps to deal with the threat."

A separate report issued by the committee on Wednesday describes early covert moves by the administration to prepare for war against Iran. It cites secret meetings in Paris and Rome in 2001 and 2003 by Defense Department officials with Iranian dissidents seeking to overthrow the Islamic regime. Administration participants included

Wolfowitz and Stephen Hadley, the current national security adviser to Bush.

Their main interlocutor was Manucher Ghorbanifar, an Iranian exile the CIA had labeled as a fabricator based on his role in the 1980s Iran-Contra affair. The committee concluded that the Bush officials had the "authority" to hold the meetings, but scolded the administration for concealing them from the CIA and the State Department.

The aspect of cover-up is underscored by the way the Intelligence Committee report has been downplayed by the press. Of the major newspapers, only the *New York Times* gave it front-page coverage and published an editorial comment. The *Washington Post* relegated the story to page three and the *Wall Street Journal* failed to even publish an article on the report.

The *Times* editorial follows the Senate report in combining damning acknowledgments with apologetics and failing to call for any action or draw any serious conclusions about the implications of the war conspiracy.

It begins by stating: "It took just a few months after the United States invasion of Iraq for the world to find out that Saddam Hussein had long abandoned his nuclear, biological and chemical weapons programs. He was not training terrorists or colluding with Al Qaeda."

It later declares: "Over all, the report makes it clear that top officials, especially Mr. Bush, Mr. Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, knew they were not giving a full and honest account of their justifications for going to war."

At the same time, it makes the incredulous claim that "President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and other administration officials were told that Iraq still had chemical and biological weapons and did not learn that these reports were wrong until after the invasion." And while charging Bush with leading the American people "to believe things that he knows are not true to justify the invasion of another country," it declares, "We cannot say with certainty whether Mr. Bush lied about Iraq."

This double-talk from the most prominent organ of American liberalism comes as no surprise, given the critical role played by the *Times* in promoting Bush's lies in the run-up to the war, with leading reporters such as Judith Miller serving as conduits for administration war propaganda and the newspaper's foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman justifying the war as a crusade for democracy.

Neither the *Times* nor the Democrats dare broach the real aims that underlie the war—the attempt to establish US hegemony in the oil-rich Middle East and transform Iraq into a platform for further military aggression in the region. Nor do they acknowledge the criminal character of the war, which has killed more than 1 million Iraqis and over 4,000 American soldiers, and the conspiracy that launched it.



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