

Prepared for *Presidential Politics*, edited by George C. Edwards III (Belmont, CA: ThompsonWadsworth, 2005).

Do Presidents Lie?  
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The answer to the question posed in the title is, “of course, presidents lie,” just as virtually all human beings lie throughout our lives. We often engage in flattery when we compliment someone on a new haircut or new suit of clothes when we really think that they are tacky. As children most of us are taught to thank Aunt Minni for her gift of garish socks that she knitted for us. Often, telling the literal truth can get you in trouble -- at least in social relationships or diplomacy. But these “white lies” that smooth social relationships are most often not seen as breaches of honesty or integrity.

People do, however, occasionally tell serious lies, and politicians are often tempted to shade the truth when they try to knit together coalitions from opposing parts of the political spectrum. Nevertheless, politicians have a greater obligation to tell the truth when they speak of public policy because their statements may have broad public consequences. Democracy is based on the premise that citizens have the right to choose their governmental leaders. And the only way voters can make informed choices is if political leaders tell the truth. Thus lying about important matters of public policy is incompatible with democracy, except in narrow, special circumstances.

Just as most people lie, so do most presidents. But presidents are in a special position because of the power they wield in the name of the electorate and because of the far reaching consequences of their actions. They have the responsibility to make life and death decisions that affect millions of people throughout the world. Besides the duties of office, they also have the responsibility of the high expectations placed upon them by the American people; that is, they are seen by many as role models as well as decision makers. Because of the great power vested in them and the leadership responsibility entrusted to them, we have the right to expect a high level of ethical behavior by the presidents we elect. Telling the truth, particularly with respect to public policy, is an important ethical imperative for presidents. That presidents do not always tell the truth is evident, but that does not mean that all untruths are equally wrong.

This essay will examine a number of lies by presidents over the course of the modern presidency. It will argue that not all lies are equal; some are more serious than others, and in judging presidents, citizens ought to consider the context and consequences of presidential lies. The analysis will proceed from justifiable lies to lies to avoid embarrassment to more serious lies of policy deception.

### **Justifiable Lies [level 1 head]**

When Jimmy Carter was running for president in 1976, he wanted to remind voters of the deception and lies of President Nixon in the Watergate scandal, and he

stated, "I will never lie to you."<sup>1</sup> This may have been reassuring, and it may even have won him some votes, but if one takes a promise like this seriously, it should actually undermine one's confidence in the candidate. If the candidate is telling the truth, it must mean that he or she cannot conceive of a situation in which a president would be obligated to tell a public lie.

For instance, in April of 1980 the Carter administration had sent a secret team of special military forces to attempt to free U.S. hostages in Iran. If a reporter had asked President Carter at a press conference if U.S. troops were going to attempt a hostage rescue, the president would have been obligated to lie in order to protect the lives of the hostages and rescuers (a "no comment" to such a pointed question would have compromised the mission). But if the candidate were intelligent enough to imagine such a situation, the blanket promise never to lie would be disingenuous. That is, the candidate would be saying something he knew not to be true in order to win votes. Such a candidate would be either naïve or deceptive. Neither is reassuring in a presidential candidate.

It is not difficult to imagine situations in which a president might be obliged to lie in order to protect national security operations. But this is not a blanket pass for presidents to lie whenever national security is involved. The lies must be clearly justified by the circumstances and not merely used to avoid embarrassment. Thus protecting covert operations can justify lying. But covert policies almost never justify lying. Covert operations are secret actions meant to support legitimate, that is, constitutionally justified, foreign policies. Covert policies, on the other hand, include instances when the president says the government is doing X when in fact it is doing Y. This type of lie breaks the bonds of accountability in a democracy, for if the people do not know what policies the president is pursuing, they cannot make informed decisions about how to vote. For instance, if the government is publicly supporting opposition to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, secret operations (and lying about them) in support of this policy are justified. But if the government publicly opposes giving arms to Iran, it is not legitimate to give arms to Iran and lie to the American public about it, except in very narrow operational circumstances.

An example of a justified lie occurred during the 1960 campaign for the presidency. U.S. policy toward Cuba was an important issue, and John Kennedy was criticizing the Eisenhower administration for not giving enough support to the Cubans who opposed Fidel Castro and his revolutionary government. This put Nixon in a difficult situation. He knew that the government was actively involved in support of the Cuban exiles, but the operation was covert and could not be publicly acknowledged for fear of disclosing its existence and putting Castro on guard. So he could not come out and say that he agreed with Kennedy and that such operations were already under way. He had to preserve the secrecy of the operation, and so Nixon concluded that the only responsible action was for him to attack Kennedy's proposal as being reckless and irresponsible, which he did.<sup>2</sup>

Thus Nixon in this situation was telling a blatant lie, saying exactly the opposite of what he believed and covering up the actual actions of the Eisenhower administration. But from his perspective, his statement has to be seen as a legitimate, justified, and even necessary lie. The United States was undertaking a covert operation against what was seen as a Communist enemy, and disclosure of the operation could have led to its failure. Setting aside what we now know about the Cold War and the future consequences of U.S. actions toward Cuba, we have to admit that Nixon's lie was ethical, even courageous, since he may have jeopardized his chance of being elected.

### **Minor Lies and Lies to Avoid Embarrassment [level 1 head]**

A number of presidents have told minor lies, usually to embellish their own stature or reputation. For instance, Lyndon Johnson told audiences that his great grandfather had died at the Alamo (a touchstone of Texas history), and when this was shown to be untrue, he changed it to the Battle of San Jacinto. But this was not true either.<sup>3</sup> John Kennedy lied about his ability to speed read through documents (speed reading was a fad in the 1960s).<sup>4</sup> More importantly, Kennedy also lied when he denied that he had Addison's disease.<sup>5</sup>

Ronald Reagan told a number of untrue stories as a candidate and as president. He was fond of telling the story about a "welfare queen" who lived in Chicago and had defrauded the government of thousands of dollars. He continued to tell the story even after it had been shown to be grossly exaggerated.<sup>6</sup> Another story he often told was about his football-playing days at Dixon High School in which Reagan's honesty cost Dixon the game. The game was against Mendota, and Reagan recounted how he had committed an infraction of the rules that the referee did not see. When the referee asked Reagan whether he had broken the rules, Reagan recalled, "But truth-telling had been whaled into me . . . I told the truth, the penalty was ruled, and Dixon lost the game." The only time that Dixon lost to Mendota when Reagan was on the varsity team was in 1927, and Mendota won 24 to zero.<sup>7</sup> The ironic point here is that Reagan seems to have told the story to demonstrate how truthful he was; yet he was telling an untruth to make the point.

More serious lies by presidents concern public policy, often national security policy. Since national security often involves secrecy and can sometimes justify lying to the public, presidents are tempted to use the national security excuse to lie in order to save themselves from embarrassment.

#### *Eisenhower and the U-2 Incident [level 2 head]*

In the spring of 1960 President Eisenhower had proposed to negotiate with the Russians a test-ban treaty that would end the testing of nuclear weapons. Despite the potential risk to the talks, Eisenhower allowed the CIA to fly one last mission to photograph Soviet military installations, and Gary Powers took off in a U-2 the morning of May 1. When the plane did not return for several days, it was presumed to be destroyed and the pilot dead because of self-destruct mechanisms built into the plane and the likelihood that the pilot could not have survived.<sup>8</sup> According to Eisenhower, the CIA

had assured the White House that “in the event of a mishap the plane would virtually disintegrate,” and that it was highly unlikely that a U-2 pilot would survive.<sup>9</sup>

On May 5, Khrushchev announced that the Soviet Union had shot down an American spy plane and denounced the United States for “aggressive provocation.” Ike knew that the Soviets were aware of the U-2 overflights, but he presumed that Powers was dead and the plane destroyed. So he approved a statement by NASA that the plane was not a spy plane but instead a weather research plane that had been over Turkey “to obtain data on clear air turbulence,” and might have strayed into Soviet air space.<sup>10</sup> Then after the administration had lied about the plane, Khrushchev announced on May 7 that he had the pilot, Gary Powers, “alive and kicking,” as well as wreckage from the plane.<sup>11</sup> Faced with this incontrovertible evidence, Eisenhower compounded the lie by having the State Department say that the pilot could have lost consciousness from lack of oxygen and that the automatic pilot might have taken the plane “for a considerable distance and accidentally violating Soviet airspace.”<sup>12</sup>

Finally Eisenhower had to admit publicly that the United States had been spying on the Soviet Union and that the administration had authorized the flights. Eisenhower felt personally mortified and told his secretary, Anne Whitman, on the morning of May 9, “I would like to resign.”<sup>13</sup> Thus Eisenhower’s hopes for a test-ban treaty to crown his eight years in office were dashed, and he was severely disappointed.

The irony, as pointed out by historian Stephen Ambrose, was that the U-2 overflights were no secret to the Soviets whose frustration had been growing for four years because of their inability to shoot down the planes which were flying at an altitude of up to 70,000 feet, out of the range of their missiles or fighter planes (that is, until the Powers flight). Nor were the flights secret to U.S. allies in Britain, France, Norway, Turkey, or Taiwan. Those who did not know about the U-2 flights were members of Congress and the American people. Thus Eisenhower undermined his most important asset, his “reputation for honesty” and undermined the trust of the American people in their government because he thought that there was no evidence to prove the administration was lying.<sup>14</sup>

### *Nixon and Watergate [level 2 head]*

While Richard Nixon told Republican delegates in 1968 that “Truth will become the hallmark of the Nixon Administration,” his more realistic judgment was reflected in a statement to a political associate earlier in his career: “You don’t know how to lie. If you can’t lie, you’ll never go anywhere.”<sup>15</sup> Nixon lied numerous times concerning his knowledge of the coverup of the Watergate break-in in June of 1972. For instance, on May 21, 1973 he said in a public statement that he had “no part in, nor was I aware of, subsequent efforts that may have been made to cover up Watergate.”<sup>16</sup> He repeated similar statements often during 1973 and 1974 as he tried to avoid public disclosure of the Watergate coverup and other illegal activities sponsored by the White House.

Perhaps the most important lie was recorded on the “smoking gun” tape from June 23, 1972 in which Nixon told his chief of staff, H.R.Haldeman, to have the CIA call the FBI to tell them to stop pursuing the trail of Watergate money because it would make public a CIA covert operation. Nixon told Haldeman to tell Richard Helms, “. . . the president believes that it is going to open the whole Bay of Pigs thing up again. And. . . that they [the CIA] should call the FBI in and [unintelligible] don’t go any further into this case period!”<sup>17</sup> This order to the CIA to lie to the FBI, when disclosed to the House Judiciary Committee, was the turning point in the impeachment proceedings against Nixon. The committee voted impeachment articles, and Nixon resigned before the full House could vote on them.

### *Clinton and Lewinsky[level 2 head]*

In the late fall of 1995 President Clinton began a sexual affair with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. In 1998, when his affair came to public attention, he falsely denied his affair to the American public, but he also lied about it under oath in the Paula Jones sexual harassment case and in his grand jury appearance.

While Clinton was embarrassed about his affair, he was also calculating the political repercussions of any admission of an extramarital affair while he was in the White House. On January 21, 1998 the story of the Linda Tripp tapes of her conversations with Lewinsky’s became public, and the media began a feeding frenzy about all aspects of the scandal. Clinton adviser Dick Morris said that he told the president that his polls indicated that the public would not accept his lying about it under oath. President Clinton then made a strong statement, publicly denying that he had a sexual relationship with Lewinsky. “I want you to listen to me. I’m going to say this again. I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky. I never told anybody to lie — not a single time, never. These allegations are false. And I need to go back to work for the American people.”<sup>18</sup>

On August 17, 1998 President Clinton testified before a grand jury that was investigating his actions, and he again denied that he had engaged in a sexual relationship with Lewinsky. His testimony was under oath, compounding his lie. The House of Representatives impeachment managers made a powerful argument that our system of justice depends upon the assumption of truth telling under oath and that to lie under oath is therefore an offence serious enough to impeach the President, regardless of the subject of the lie. The House impeached Clinton in December 1998, and in the spring of 1999 the Senate voted not to remove him from office.

Clinton’s lie was wrong in several ways. Lying under oath undermines the assumptions upon which the judicial system is based and sends a message that the president thinks that he is not subject to the law. In addition, Clinton cynically used others in his lie by lying to his staff and cabinet with the expectation that they would innocently repeat his lies. This violation of the confidence of his friends led to their feelings of betrayal and to large legal fees for some. In addition, the president undermined his responsibility as a role model by his public lying.

Despite his many denials, President Clinton did lie under oath about his relationship with Monica Lewinsky; he lied in intent and spirit, as well as literally. In a statement issued on his last day in office, he said: “I tried to walk a fine line between acting lawfully and testifying falsely, but I now recognize that I did not fully accomplish this goal and that certain of my responses to questions about Ms. Lewinsky were false.”<sup>19</sup>

While we might argue that even presidents ought to have some privacy and we might deplore the tactics that Kenneth Starr used to obtain evidence of Clinton’s sexual affair with Lewinsky, the president did in fact lie about it, and the lie was wrong. Whether the lies rose to the level of high crimes and misdemeanors for which a president ought to be impeached and removed from office is a separate question.<sup>20</sup>

### **Lies of Policy Deception [level 1 head]**

At the most serious level are lies of policy deception in which a president deceives the public about important matters of public policy. The most basic premise of democratic government is that the government ought to do what the people want and that during elections the voters can choose whom they want to govern them. Misleading the public about government policy does not allow the electorate to make an informed choice and undermines the premise of democratic government. In the words of philosopher Sissela Bok, “Deception of this kind strikes at the very essence of democratic government. It allows those in power to override or nullify the right vested in the people to cast an informed vote in critical elections.”<sup>21</sup> “Policy deception” lies include Lyndon Johnson’s lies about U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, Richard Nixon’s secret bombing of Cambodia, Ronald Reagan’s statements about Iran-Contra, and some of George W. Bush’s statements in the run-up to the war in Iraq.

#### *LBJ and Vietnam [level 2 head]*

One of Johnson’s most far-reaching deceptions was his orchestration of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in August of 1964. On the stormy night of August 4 the *Maddox* reported that it had been attacked by North Vietnamese gun boats. But subsequent reports came in that there was serious doubt about whether there had been any attack. Nevertheless, Johnson pushed ahead by ordering retaliatory raids, addressing the American people, and getting Congress to pass a resolution of support for his reaction to the doubtful attack.

On August 6, 1964 Walt Rostow, Johnson’s national security advisor, said at a State Department luncheon that the supposed attack on August 4 probably did not take place.<sup>22</sup> Several days after the resolution passed, Johnson himself admitted to George Ball, “Hell, those dumb, stupid sailors were just shooting at flying fish!”<sup>23</sup> On September 18 Johnson said privately to McNamara, “When we got through with all the firing, we concluded maybe they hadn’t fired at all.”<sup>24</sup> In early 1965 Johnson said, “For all I know, our Navy was shooting at whales out there.”<sup>25</sup> But Johnson publicly continued to present

the second attack to Congress as completely true and confirmed and used the congressional resolution to justify his military actions in Vietnam.

Later, in the fall of 1964 in his campaign for election, Johnson downplayed any hint of an expanding U.S. involvement in Vietnam. He told a campaign audience on September 25, 1964, "We don't want our American boys to do the fighting for Asian boys. We don't want to get involved in a nation with seven hundred million people and get tied down in a land war in Asia." Later on October 21 in Akron, Ohio, he declared, "But we are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves."<sup>26</sup>

In December, after his election, Johnson authorized planning for airstrikes against the North. But he was also planning his Great Society legislative program for the next year, and he sought to conceal increasing U.S. involvement in Vietnam from the public. Johnson sent a memo to his national security advisors ordering that his decision to approve the military plans for escalation should be kept secret. Johnson said that it is "a matter of the highest importance that the substance of the decision should not become public except as I specifically direct" and that knowledge of the plans be kept "as narrowly as possible to those who have an immediate working need to know."<sup>27</sup> In December of 1964 General Harold K. Johnson predicted that it would take 500,000 men and five years to achieve victory in Vietnam, but Johnson did not allow this to become public.<sup>28</sup>

On January 21, 1965, Johnson's first full day as an elected president, he and McNamara met with a bipartisan group of members of Congress from both Houses. He misled them by presenting the bombing of Laos and covert operations against North Vietnam as being successful and misrepresented his military advisers' pessimistic judgment about the status of South Vietnamese military readiness.<sup>29</sup> Johnson told the congressional leaders that he had "decided that more U.S. forces are not needed in South Vietnam short of a decision to go to full-scale war . . . war must be fought by the South Vietnamese. We cannot control everything that they do and we have to count on their fighting their war."<sup>30</sup> He did not tell them of his plans to begin bombing North Vietnam. On March 8, 1965 the first combat troops, 3,500 Marines, arrived at Danang in South Vietnam.

These troops, although engaged in combat, were supposed to be assisting the South Vietnamese in defensive operations. But in April an increase of 18-20,000 in Marine forces was authorized, and their mission was changed by National Security Action Memorandum [NSAM] 328 which authorized the offensive utilization of U.S. ground troops against the Viet Cong. NSAM 328 stated explicitly that the change in mission was to be kept secret: ". . . premature publicity [should] be avoided by all possible precautions. The actions themselves should be taken as rapidly as practicable, but in ways that should minimize any appearance of sudden changes in policy. . . changes should be understood as being gradual and wholly consistent with existing policy."<sup>31</sup> Ambassador Maxwell Taylor sent a cable to Secretary of State Dean Rusk saying that ". . . we believe that the most useful approach to press problems is to make no, repeat, no

special public announcement to the effect that U.S. ground troops are now engaged in offensive combat operations. . . .”<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, the mission of the U.S. Marines had changed their mission to “offensive killing operations.”<sup>33</sup> And McNamara had requested a JCS schedule for deploying two or three divisions to Vietnam “at the earliest practicable date.”<sup>34</sup> On June 8 Johnson’s press secretary George Reedy stated, “There has been no change in the mission of U.S. ground combat units in Viet Nam in recent days or weeks.”<sup>35</sup>

By July 28 of 1965 authorized U.S. troop strength would be increased to 125,000 along a gradual escalation to a peak of 500,000 troops.<sup>36</sup> Johnson had succeeded in concealing from Congress and the American public the escalating military commitment of the United States in Vietnam. In the end, Johnson destroyed his presidency and put the United States through a divisive war during which 58,000 U.S. soldiers lost their lives, in addition to several million Vietnamese.

### *Nixon and the Secret Bombing of Cambodia [level 2 head]*

When President Nixon came to office in 1969, he decided that North Vietnamese supply routes through the jungles of Cambodia should be attacked. But he thought that publicly expanding the war would be politically dangerous, so he decided to proceed surreptitiously. The secret bombing of Cambodia in 1969 involved elaborate deception and falsification of reports.

Nixon decided to pursue a systematic bombing campaign to attack North Vietnamese supply routes in Cambodia. But in order to do this secretly, a dual reporting system had to be developed. Nixon ordered that a cable be sent to U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, Elsworth Bunker, saying that all discussion of possible bombing of North Vietnamese targets in Cambodia were suspended. At the same time he had a separate, backchannel message sent to the commander of American forces in Vietnam, General Creighton W. Abrams. Abrams was instructed to disregard the cable to Bunker and to plan for the Cambodian bombing campaign.<sup>37</sup>

The pilots of the B-52s were briefed on missions in South Vietnam, but a subset of the pilots were told that they would get special orders while they were in flight. Once on the mission, they would then be instructed to leave the other planes and deliver their bombs to specific coordinates in Cambodia. After dropping the bombs, they returned to their bases and reported as if they had been bombing in South Vietnam. These reports were the official reports that were recorded in the Air Force and Defense Department records. The secret reports of the actual bombings went through backchannels to the White House. Not even the Secretary of the Air Force knew of the secret bombings.<sup>38</sup> Official reports of the bombing targets were falsified at the president’s order. But the larger deception was that the United States was secretly bombing a neutral country without the knowledge of Congress, to which the Constitution gives the power to declare war.



The question arises as to the purpose of the secrecy. Originally Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird favored making the bombing public, but he was overruled by Nixon and Kissinger. After all, the North Vietnamese knew they were being bombed, the Cambodians knew bombs were dropping on their country, and the Communist allies of the North Vietnamese were informed of the bombing. The only implicated parties who did not know were the U.S. Congress and the American people. Nixon argued that diplomatically, if the bombing were acknowledged the Cambodian government might have felt compelled to protest or the North Vietnamese might have protested. But the real reason was probably revealed by Nixon in his memoirs: “Another reason for secrecy was the problem of domestic antiwar protest. My administration was only two months old, and I wanted to provoke as little public outcry as possible at the outset.”<sup>39</sup>

Nixon’s deception about the secret bombing of Cambodia was wrong because it was a significant (legally and militarily) expansion of the war into a neutral country (even though the North Vietnamese were not respecting its neutrality). The war at that point was controversial, and its expansion would have increased political opposition to it and President Nixon (as did the public invasion of Cambodia on May 1970). Thus the lies and secrecy were intended to pursue a significant foreign policy change without the knowledge of Congress or the American people.

#### *President Reagan and Iran-Contra [level 2 head]*

The Iran-contra affair consisted of two parts: the sale of arms to Iran for the purpose of freeing U.S. hostages held in Lebanon, and the diversion of funds from the sale of those arms to support the Contras in Nicaragua when public law forbade aid to the Contras. The sale of arms to Iran was first conducted through Israel in 1985 and later came directly from the United States. The secret sales were disclosed by the Lebanese newspaper Al-Shiraa on November 3, 1986 and became public. In December President Reagan issued an executive order (No. 12575) establishing a Special Review Board, known as the Tower Commission, to investigate the matter. The Commission interviewed President Reagan about various aspects of the Iran-contra affair.

Although the sale of arms to Iran was probably illegal under the Arms Export Control Act,<sup>40</sup> the largest political problem for President Reagan was that he did not want the American public to believe that he had traded arms for hostages. On November 13, 1986, after the arms deals had been revealed, President Reagan addressed the nation and said:

The charge has been made that the United States has shipped weapons to Iran — as ransom payment for the release of American Hostages in Lebanon. . . . Those charges are utterly false....Our government has a firm policy not to capitulate to terrorist demands. That ‘no-concessions’ policy remains in force in spite of the wildly speculative and false stories about arms for hostages and alleged ransom payments. We did not — repeat— we did not trade weapons or anything else for hostages.<sup>41</sup>

But as more information about the arms-for-hostages deal with Iran came out in congressional hearings and testimony, President Reagan reconsidered his position. Just as President Eisenhower was forced to admit the U-2 overflight after Khrushchev had the evidence, and President Clinton was forced to admit that he had sex with Monica Lewinsky when evidence proved that he had, President Reagan had to admit what the evidence showed. In a March 4, 1987 address to the nation he said: "I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that's true. But the facts and the evidence tell me it is not . . . What began as a strategic opening to Iran deteriorated in its implementation into trading arms for hostages."<sup>42</sup> President Reagan made two other untrue public statements during the Iran-Contra Affair.<sup>43</sup>

### *George W. Bush and the War in Iraq [level 2 head]*

After the War in Iraq, a number of pundits and political adversaries accused President Bush of lying in some of his statements.<sup>44</sup> These charges were often based on the failure of U.S. forces to find WMD in Iraq after the war of March-April 2003. The following discussion will examine several potential lies of President Bush and his administration concerning the war in Iraq.

In the run-up to the War in Iraq, the Bush administration claimed with some certainty that Iraq possessed chemical and biological weapons. President Bush said on September 26, 2002 that "the Iraqi regime possesses biological and chemical weapons. The Iraqi regime is building the facilities necessary to make more biological and chemical weapons."<sup>45</sup> That Iraq had chemical and biological weapons in the 1980s is certain, in part because some of the materials came from the United States and because Saddam used chemical weapons against Iran and against the Kurds in northern Iraq.<sup>46</sup> But serious questions about the administration's claims were raised when U.S. forces were not able to find evidence of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons after the war, despite the diligent searching of U.S. military forces and the 1200 member Iraq Survey Group headed by David Kay.<sup>47</sup>

Two other aspects of the president's claims turned out to be problematical: the implied connection between Saddam Hussein and the atrocities of 9-11, and the implications that Iraq had nuclear weapons.

### *A Saddam – al Qaeda Link? [level 3 head]*

On September 12, 2001 in the Situation Room in the White House, President Bush asked Richard Clarke to look for a link between Saddam and the terrorists attacks of the previous day. When Clarke replied that it was known that al Qaeda was responsible, though Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia or Yemen might have been implicated in minor ways, the President "testily" ordered: "Look into Iraq, Saddam."<sup>48</sup> After a meeting among intelligence agencies, "All agencies and departments agreed, there was no cooperation between the two," and a memorandum reporting the conclusion was sent to the president. Nevertheless, from 2002 to 2004, President Bush and his administration

strongly implied that there was a significant link between Saddam and the al Qaeda hijackers, despite Ossama bin Laden's contempt for Saddam as the head of a secular state.<sup>49</sup>

In early October 2002 President Bush was trying to convince Congress to pass a resolution to give him unilateral authority to go to war with Iraq. In a major address to the nation on October 7<sup>th</sup> he said "We know that Iraq and al Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back a decade. . . . We've learned that Iraq has trained al Qaeda members in bomb-making and poisons and deadly gasses." In the same speech the president closely connected the need to attack Iraq with the 9/11 attacks: "Some citizens wonder, 'after 11 years of living with this [Saddam Hussein] problem, why do we need to confront it now?' And there's a reason. We have experienced the horror of September the 11<sup>th</sup>." Thus the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were a major reason for attacking Iraq. Vice President Cheney said on "Meet the Press" in late 2001 that a meeting between Mohamed Atta and an Iraqi official in Prague in 2000 was "pretty well confirmed."<sup>50</sup>

The problem was that evidence for a connection between Saddam and al Qaeda was not very solid. Neither the FBI nor the CIA was able to establish that the 9/11 terrorist Mohamed Atta had been in Prague to meet with an Iraqi official as the Bush Administration had asserted.<sup>51</sup> And a U.N. terrorism committee could find no link between al Qaeda and Saddam.<sup>52</sup> Despite the lack of solid evidence, President Bush continued to connect the war in Iraq with al Qaeda and 9/11. In his victory speech on 1 May 2003 on an aircraft carrier off the coast of California, he said: "The battle of Iraq is one victory in a war on terror that began on September the 11, 2001. . . . We've removed an ally of al Qaeda, and cut off a source of terrorist funding. . . . With those attacks [of 9/11], the terrorists and their supporters declared war on the United States. And war is what they got."<sup>53</sup>

In a defense of the administration's policies in Iraq on September 14, 2003 Vice President Cheney said: "If we're successful in Iraq. . . then we will have struck a major blow right at the heart of the base, if you will, the geographic base of the terrorists who had us under assault now for many years, but most especially on 9/11."<sup>54</sup> But on September 18, 2003 President Bush conceded: "No, we've had no evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved with September the 11<sup>th</sup>."<sup>55</sup> He gave no explanation as to why the previously implied connection was abandoned.<sup>56</sup>

When the staff reports of the 9/11 Commission were released in June of 2004, the analysis further undermined the statements by the Bush administration implying that Saddam Hussein supported al Qaeda in its attacks on the United States. The staff report concluded that though in Sudan in 1994 Osama bin Laden had sought space for training camps and assistance with weapons procurement, "Iraq apparently never responded." Echoing the U.N. report on the same issue, they concluded, "We have no credible evidence that Iraq and al Qaeda cooperated on attacks against the U.S."<sup>57</sup> Thomas H. Kean, a Republican and chair of the 9/11 Commission, summarized the staff report's finding: "What our staff statement found is there is no credible evidence that we can

discover, after a long investigation, that Iraq and Saddam Hussein in any way were part of the attack on the United States.”<sup>58</sup>

How can we judge this systematic pattern of implication and the sudden reversal by the president? It is difficult to show that there was an outright lie in the president’s rhetoric, because his use of language was too careful. Some of his early statements might have been based on claims that he thought were true when he implied the connection between Saddam and 9-11 was serious. But as it became clear that the evidence was dubious, the president continued to imply that the connection was significant. But as time went by, there was enough coverage in the press of the failure of intelligence agencies to substantiate the claim, that the president could not credibly claim ignorance.

It thus seems that President Bush did exploit and encourage the common public belief that Saddam was connected to the attacks of 9/11, and his strong implications served his purpose of achieving public support for war with Iraq. We can conclude that his statements were misleading and deceptive, though not outright lies.

### *Nuclear Claim [level 3 head]*

In 2002 President Bush and his administration also made a number of assertions about Saddam Hussein’s potential nuclear capacity. The claim was that Saddam Hussein had reconstituted his nuclear weapons program and was potentially less than a year away from possessing nuclear weapons. This was a powerful argument that deposing Saddam Hussein was important for U.S. national security. Even those who thought that Saddam could be deterred from using chemical and biological weapons (as he had been in 1991) might be persuaded that an attack was necessary if they were convinced that Saddam was closing in on a nuclear weapons capability. Thus the claim about Saddam’s nuclear capacity was one of the strongest argument that President Bush could make for war with Iraq.

Before the president’s campaign to convince Congress of the necessity of war with Iraq, the White House asked the CIA to prepare a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iraq, that is, an authoritative statement of the consensus of intelligence agencies about the potential threat from Iraq.<sup>59</sup> This NIE was used as a basis for President Bush’s speech in Cincinnati on October 7, 2002 to convince Congress to give him the authority to go to war with Iraq and convince the nation of the immediacy of the threat from Saddam Hussein. In the speech President Bush said:

We agree that the Iraqi dictator must not be permitted to threaten America and the world with horrible poisons and diseases and gasses and atomic weapons. . . .The evidence indicates that Iraq is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program. . . .he could have a nuclear weapon in less than a year. . . .Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof, the smoking gun that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.

Then in his State of the Union Speech on January 28, 2003, President Bush said: “The British Government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.” The African country in question was Niger.

The problem with these statements was that the evidence upon which the president’s claims were based turned out to be questionable. Two claims of evidence for Saddam’s nuclear capacity that the administration relied upon were of dubious authenticity: the claim that Iraq sought large amounts of uranium oxide, “yellowcake,” from Niger and that aluminum tubes shipped to Iraq were intended to be used as centrifuges to create the fissile material necessary for a nuclear bomb.

But the British claim that Saddam sought uranium oxide from Niger turned out to have been based on forged documents. The CIA had serious doubts about the accuracy of the claim, and even had convinced NSC aides to take the claim out of the president’s October 7, 2002 speech to the nation.<sup>60</sup> How it got into the 2003 State of the Union address was not clear.

In addition to the Niger yellowcake claim, the administration also adduced as evidence for Iraq’s reconstituting its nuclear program reports of large numbers of aluminum tubes purchased by Iraq. President Bush said in his September 12, 2002 speech to the United Nations: “Iraq has made several attempts to buy high-strength aluminum tubes used to enrich uranium for a nuclear weapon. Should Iraq acquire fissile material, it would be able to build a nuclear weapon within a year.”<sup>61</sup>

The evidence of the aluminum tubes was also featured in the National Intelligence Estimate issued in early October 2002 which played an important role in convincing members of Congress to vote for the resolution giving the President the authority to take the United States to War with Iraq. The State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), however, registered its dissent in the NIE itself: “. . . INR is not persuaded that the tubes in question are intended for use as centrifuge rotors. . . . INR considers it far more likely that the tubes are intended for another purpose, most likely the production of artillery rockets.”<sup>62</sup> The physical characteristics of the tubes — diameter, length, composition, coating — matched closely the dimensions of aluminum tubes used in Medusa Rockets, but did not track as closely with the dimensions of centrifuge rotors.<sup>63</sup> The State Department concluded: “The activities we have detected do not, however, add up to a compelling case that Iraq is currently pursuing what INR would consider to be an integrated and comprehensive approach to acquire nuclear weapons.”<sup>64</sup>

In his interim report to Congress in the fall of 2003, David Kay told Congress that Iraq’s nuclear program was in “the very most rudimentary” state, “It clearly does not look like a massive, resurgent program, based on what we discovered.”<sup>65</sup> According to Kay’s report, Iraqi scientists said “to date we have not uncovered evidence that Iraq undertook significant post-1998 steps to actually build nuclear weapons or produce fissile material.”<sup>66</sup>

The Bush administration's inference that Saddam Hussein was continuing his previous weapons programs was not an unreasonable conclusion. The problem was that there was little evidence to support their conclusions about Saddam's nuclear capacity, and they used claims of dubious validity to make their case to the American people about nuclear weapons and a connection between Saddam and the atrocities of 9/11.

*"No War Plans On My Desk" (level 3 head)*

In the spring of 2002 President Bush did come close to lying when he publicly said several times that he had no war plans on his desk. President Bush was concerned with Iraq from the beginning of his administration.<sup>67</sup> Immediately after the terrorist attacks on 9/11 President Bush resolved to do something about Iraq and on September 17, 2001 he directed the Department of Defense to begin general planning for a possible war with Iraq.<sup>68</sup> The President decided to take more concrete action on November 21, 2001 when he told Secretary Rumsfeld to develop operational plans for a possible war with Iraq.<sup>69</sup> Rumsfeld ordered General Tommy Franks to work on the plans, and Franks presented his first formal plans to Rumsfeld on December 4, 2002. After two more iterations of the plans, on December 12 and 19, Franks went to Crawford, Texas to present his plans to the President, and after that meeting, Franks set up top-secret planning teams in the Pentagon to further develop the plans. On January 17, 2003 Franks presented the fourth iteration of the plans to Secretary Rumsfeld and the fifth on February 1. On February 7, General Franks presented to President Bush the formal plan that was in operational form, that is, rather than a working draft, it was an operational set of plans that could be carried out.<sup>70</sup>

After the elaborate planning for war in Iraq at the President's orders, it is striking that on the weekend of April 6-7 at Crawford, Texas when he was hosting Tony Blair, President Bush told a British news reporter, "And I have no plans to attack on my desk." Later, on May 23 and 26, he repeated at press conferences, "I have no war plans on my desk."<sup>71</sup>

In what way might these statements be considered not to be lies? One might take a literalist approach and say that at the time the president made the statements that in fact there were no physical documents on his desk in the Oval Office or in Crawford that included plans for war. In this literalist sense, the truthfulness of the president's statement depends on the meaning of the word "desk."<sup>72</sup> But President Bush was clearly using a metaphor and clearly meant to convey that although he was considering going to war with Saddam, that his intention was not firm enough to have drawn up serious plans for an attack. It is ironic that the president could easily have avoided lying and evaded the question by saying something like 'all of my options are open, and I have made no final decision.' But he chose not to do that and instead several times made the categorical statement that was not true.

One might argue that the consequences of this lie were not serious. In retrospect, there were many signs that President Bush intended to go to war to depose Saddam Hussein, beginning publicly with his 2002 State of the Union Speech that included Iraq in

what he termed an “Axis of Evil.” One might also argue that this lie was not as consequential as the administration’s misleading references to Saddam’s nuclear capacity or the connection between Saddam and 9/11 in its arguments for war with Iraq. Nevertheless, these statements were not true, and the President knew that they were not true when he said them. It seems reasonable to conclude that the president intended to deceive the public about the level of planning that he was doing in preparation for war.

*Assessing Bush’s Statements (level 3 head)*

In trying to assess the truthfulness of President Bush in his arguments for the war in Iraq, we must take into account what he himself believed as well as the evidence for the accuracy of his claims. With respect to Iraq’s chemical and biological weapons capacity, President Bush’s statements were incorrect, but he cannot be fairly be accused of deliberately lying. There was no convincing evidence that the weapons Iraq had used in the 1980s were destroyed during the 1990s, and there was an international consensus among the intelligence agencies of Western Europe as well as the United States and the United Nations that Saddam still had them. In light of this almost universal consensus that Saddam had a chemical and biological weapons capacity, President Bush cannot be blamed for coming to the same conclusion, even if the conclusion was factually incorrect.

With respect to the implied link between Saddam and 9/11, the president was surely aware that there was little direct evidence available. Neither the FBI nor the CIA had been able to verify the alleged Prague meeting between Mohammad Atta, the leader of the hijackers, and an Iraqi intelligence agent. The president’s statement of August 17, 2003 shows that he did not believe there was a direct link. Thus we can conclude that the systematic series of statements by him and his administration before and after the war were intentionally misleading in implying the link, but did not constitute direct lies.

With respect to Saddam’s possession of nuclear weapons, the deliberate rhetorical conjuring of “mushroom clouds” and claims about the immediate potential for an Iraqi nuclear capacity can also be considered systematically misleading. The president may have believed that Saddam was close to possessing a nuclear capacity, but he ignored conflicting arguments and evidence presented by the Departments of State and Energy in the National Intelligence Estimate of October 2002. If the president did not fully understand the tenuousness of the evidence, he should have.<sup>73</sup> Thus again, the president and his administration were systematically misleading in their public arguments for war by strongly implying that Saddam was close to having a nuclear capacity despite the lack of compelling evidence and the considered opinions of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the U.S. Departments of State and Energy.

With respect to his statement, “I have no war plans on my desk,” however, it seems that President Bush made a statement that he knew to be untrue. His probably intention was to reassure the American public and other nations that war with Iraq was neither imminent nor inevitable. But given the series of plans, promises, and assurances that the administration had given to allies, war was becoming increasingly probable.

If the president had wanted to avoid the issue or give a reassuring statement, he could have chosen another formulation but he did not choose to take a truthful way to evade the question. But even though this direct statement (repeated) can be considered to be a direct lie, the consequences of it were considerably less momentous than his misleading statements about Saddam's nuclear capacity and the link between Saddam and 9/11. Thus a concerned citizen might be more legitimately upset about the misleading statements than the direct lies.

### **Conclusion [level 1 head]**

Presidential lying undercuts the democratic link between citizens and their government; it undermines trust in government and all public officials; and it sets a bad example that may lead others to justify their own lying. But not all lies are equal; that is, some are worse than others. The argument that "they all do it," so there is no point in evaluating lies, is insidious and undermines moral responsibility. So we must avoid this cynical approach. But we must also avoid the relativism excuse that moral judgments are hopelessly subjective and that we ought not to judge others' behavior at all.

When Presidents tell lies for reasons of state, they often justify their lies by arguing that their deception is intended for hostile foreign governments. The problem is that such lies may also be intended to deceive the American public. Presidential deception tends to undermine democracy, and thus the threshold for justifying lies ought to be quite high. It is the argument of this essay that presidential deception of the American public is only justified in exceptional circumstances, such as when legitimate national security interests are at stake. Otherwise, the presumption must be against lying.

We must also keep presidential lying in perspective. Lies are not the most important aspect of what presidents do, either in a negative or a positive sense. Lyndon Johnson's lies about Vietnam were not as damaging as the broader, flawed policies that got us into a land war in Asia. President Nixon's lies about Watergate were not as insidious as the broader aspects of his lack of scruples (e.g., using the IRS to harass his enemies, campaign "dirty tricks," creating the "Plumbers," wiretaps on citizens without warrants, the Huston plan, etc.). President Reagan's lies or misstatements about Iran-contra were not as bad as the deliberate breaking of the law by his administration. President Bush's misleading statements in the run-up to the War in Iraq were less important than his strategic decisions that took the United States into that war, whether or not one thinks that those were wise decisions.

From the evidence presented here, it is clear that presidents do occasionally lie about important issues of public policy. When one is evaluating presidential performance or deciding for whom to vote, one should take into account presidential lies, but one should also keep lying in perspective.

### **ENDNOTES**

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<sup>1</sup> Jules Witcover, *Marathon: The Pursuit of the Presidency* (NY: Viking Press, 1977), p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> Nixon, *Six Crises*, p. 355.



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- <sup>3</sup> Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (NY: New American Library, 1976), p. 15.
- <sup>4</sup> Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), p. 280. Reeves cites page 35 of Hugh Sidey's oral history statement at the Kennedy Library.
- <sup>5</sup> Reeves, *President Kennedy*, p. 24.
- <sup>6</sup> See Lou Cannon, *The Role of a Lifetime*, pp. 518-520. During his 1976 campaign Reagan said that a Chicago woman "has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards and is collecting veterans' benefits on four nonexisting deceased husbands....Her tax-free cash income alone is over \$150,000." But the woman was convicted in 1977 for having two aliases and receiving unauthorized benefits of \$8,000. For another account to Reagan's Welfare Queen stories, see David Zucchino, *Myth of the Welfare Queen* (NY: Scribner, 1997), pp. 64-65.
- <sup>7</sup> The account of Reagan's often used story is in Lou Cannon, *Reagan* (NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1982), p. 36. In the account, which Cannon got from the *Rockford Morning Star*, Reagan said: "I finally wrote a story about it [the football incident he just related] and sold it to a national boys magazine. That sale just about turned the tide for me away from professional sports and coaching on the one hand and acting on the other." Cannon's account continues: "There are no contemporary accounts of any incident of this sort, and Dixon High lost to Mendota only once when Reagan was a member of the varsity team. In that game, when Reagan was a senior in 1927, Mendota won 24-0."
- <sup>8</sup> See the account by Fred Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency* (NY: Basic Books, 1982), p. 253.
- <sup>9</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace, 1956-1961* (NY: Doubleday, 1965), p. 546.
- <sup>10</sup> Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, p. 548.
- <sup>11</sup> James Bamford, *Body of Secrets* (NY: Doubleday, 2001), p. 52.
- <sup>12</sup> Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, p. 549. See also Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, p. 510.
- <sup>13</sup> Michael R. Beschloss, *Mayday: Eisenhower, Khrushchev and the U-2 Affair* (NY: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 254.
- <sup>14</sup> When asked about the reason for Eisenhower's actions, General Andrew Goodpaster, one of his top aides, said that they had prepared a "cover story" based on the premise that the plane and pilot would have been destroyed if the mission went amiss. Their mistake, he said, was to use the cover story. Conversation with the author, 21 March 2000, Washington, D.C.
- <sup>15</sup> Quoted in Stanley I. Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 619. Also quoted in Fawn M. Brodie, *Richard Nixon: The Shaping of His Character* (NY: W.W. Norton, 1981), p. 504.
- <sup>16</sup> Quoted in Stanley I. Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 347.
- <sup>17</sup> The selection from the tape is reprinted in Michael Nelson, *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to the Presidency* (Washington: CQ Press, 1989), p. 1389. Also, see the discussion in Kutler, *Wars of Watergate*, pp. 534-535.
- <sup>18</sup> Quoted in Jeffrey Toobin, "Circling the Wagons," *The New Yorker* (6 July 1998), p. 29.
- <sup>19</sup> Quoted in John F. Harris and Bill Miller, "In a Deal, Clinton Avoids Indictment," *Washington Post* (20 January 2001), p. 1.
- <sup>20</sup> For an argument that Clinton's lies did not constitute the "high crimes or misdemeanors" necessary for impeachment, see James P. Pfiffner, *The Modern Presidency*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (NY: Bedford St. Martin's, 2000), Chapter 8; and Pfiffner, "President Clinton's Impeachment and Senate Trial," in James P. Pfiffner and Roger Davidson, *Understanding the Presidency* (NY: Addison Wesley Longman, 2000).
- <sup>21</sup> Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life* (NY: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 182.
- <sup>22</sup> Edwin E. Moise, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 243.
- <sup>23</sup> George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (NY: W.W. Norton, 1982), p. 379. For an analysis sympathetic to Johnson see Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, pp. 147-156; for a critical account see Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (NY: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 367-375; Joseph Goulden, *Truth is the First Casualty: The Gulf of Tonkin Affair* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969); Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie* (NY: Vintage Books, 1988). See also Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (NY: W.W. Norton, 1982), pp. 31-34; and H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (NY: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 107-108, 121-123.
- <sup>24</sup> Michael Beschloss, *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2001), pp. 37-39. At this point Johnson wanted to resist Barry Goldwater's calls for more aggressive military action in Vietnam.

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- <sup>25</sup> Joseph C. Goulden, *Truth is the First Casualty: The Gulf of Tonkin Affair* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), p. 160. The context of this quote was that Johnson was implying that he was misled by the Pentagon.
- <sup>26</sup> Both quotes from David Wise, *The Politics of Lying* (NY: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 65-66.
- <sup>27</sup> Quoted in Logevall, *Choosing War*, p. 273.
- <sup>28</sup> H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (NY: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 247.
- <sup>29</sup> See Logevall, *Choosing War*, p. 315.
- <sup>30</sup> H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (NY: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 211.
- <sup>31</sup> Quoted in Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy* (NY: W.W. Norton, 1982), p. 57.
- <sup>32</sup> Quoted in Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy* (NY: W.W. Norton, 1982), p. 57.
- <sup>33</sup> Quoted in H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (NY: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 261.
- <sup>34</sup> H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (NY: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 263.
- <sup>35</sup> H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (NY: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 291.
- <sup>36</sup> Berman, *Planning a Tragedy*, p.xii.
- <sup>37</sup> This analysis is based on Seymour Hersh, *The Price of Power* (NY: Summit Books, 1983), pp. 60-65.
- <sup>38</sup> Robert Seamans was Secretary of the Air Force and was not told of the bombing missions in Cambodia. His morning briefing indicated that the bombs were dropped in Vietnam. He signed documents about the location of the bombing targets based on his misunderstanding of the actual location of some of the targets. Conversation with the author, 4 September 1991, Washington, D.C.
- <sup>39</sup> Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (NY: Grosset and Dunlop, 1978), p. 382.
- <sup>40</sup> See George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph* (NY: Charles Scribners, 1993), p. 811.
- <sup>41</sup> *Washington Post* (16 July 1987), p. A15.
- <sup>42</sup> *Washington Post* (16 July 1987), p. A15.
- <sup>43</sup> See James P. Pfiffner, *The Character Factor* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), pp. 56-60.
- <sup>44</sup> For polemical books, see Al Franken, *Lies (and the Lying Liars Who Tell them)* (NY: Dutton, 2003); and David Corn, *The Lies of George W. Bush* (NY: Crown, 2003). For more carefully argued and sourced books, see: John W. Dean, *Worse than Watergate* (Boston: Little Brown, 2004); and John Prados, *Hoodwinked* (NY: New Press, 2004). For a scholarly analysis, see James P. Pfiffner, "Did dPresident Bush Mislead the Country in His Arguments for War with Iraq?," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol. 34, No. 1 (March 2004), pp. 25-46.
- <sup>45</sup> Dana Priest and Walter Pincus, "Bush Certainty on Iraq Arms Went Beyond Analyst's Views," *Washington Post* (7 June 2003), p. 1, A17.
- <sup>46</sup> In the 1980s the U.S. Department of Commerce authorized the sale to Iraq of biological agents such as anthrax and bubonic plague. According to a memo to Secretary of State George Shultz in 1983 the Iraqis were using chemical weapons against the Iranians on an "almost daily basis." The Commerce Department also approved the sale by Dow Chemical of insecticides that were thought to be used for chemical weapons. Reported by Michael Dobbs, "U.S. Had Key Role in Iraq Buildup," *Washington Post* (30 December 2002), p. 1, A12. See also Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm* (NY: Random House, 2002), pp. 20-21, 170.
- <sup>47</sup> Walter Pincus and Dana Priest, "Iraq Weapons Report Won't Be Conclusive," *Washington Post* (25 September 2003), p. 1, A24.
- <sup>48</sup> Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies* (NY: Free Press, 2004), p. 32.
- <sup>49</sup> In a tape urging Muslims to fight against the United States, Osama bin Laden said that the fighting should be for God, not for "pagan regimes in all the Arab countries, including Iraq. . . .Socialists are infidels wherever they are, either in Baghdad or Aden." Transcript posted on website: [www.indybay.org](http://www.indybay.org), accessed 10 April 2003).
- <sup>50</sup> Dana Milbank and Claudia Deane, "Hussein Link to 9/11 Lingers in Many Minds," *Washington Post* (6 September 2003), p. 1.
- <sup>51</sup> Dana Milbank and Walter Pincus, "Cheney Defends U.S. Actions In Bid to Revive Public Support," *Washington Post* (15 September 2003), p. 1, A19. Dana Milbank and Claudia Deane, "Hussein Link to 9/11 Lingers in Many Minds," *Washington Post* (6 September 2003), p. 1.
- <sup>52</sup> Associated Press, "U.N. Panel Finds No Evidence to Link Iraq, Al-Qaeda," on line version 6/26/03; TruthOut.org.
- <sup>53</sup> Quoted in Milbank and Deane, "Hussein Link to 9/11 Lingers," p. 1.

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- <sup>54</sup> Dana Milbank and Walter Pincus, "Cheney Defends U.S. Actions In Bid to Revive Public Support," *Washington Post* (15 September 2003), p. 1, A19.
- <sup>55</sup> Dana Milbank, "Bush Disavows Hussein-Sept. 11 Link," *Washington Post* (18 September 2003), p. A18; David E. Sanger, "Bush Reports No Evidence of Hussein Tie to 9/11," *New York Times* (18 September 2003), p. A18.
- <sup>56</sup> For a full analysis of the misleading statements of President Bush on the link between Saddam and 9/11 and Saddam's nuclear capacity, see James P. Pfiffner, "Did President Bush Mislead the Country in his Arguments for War with Iraq?," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 34, no. 1 (March 2004).
- <sup>57</sup> "Overview of the Enemy: Staff Statement No. 15," Commission Investigating the September 11 Attacks (The 9/11 Commission), Quoted in *The New York Times* (17 June 2004), p. A15.
- <sup>58</sup> Dana Milbank, "Bush Defends Assertions of Iraq-al Qaeda relationship," *Washington Post* (18 June 2004), p. A9.
- <sup>59</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. 2003. Key Judgments [from October 2002 NIE] Iraq's continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass destruction. Declassified excerpts published on the CIA website: [www.odci.gov/nic/pubs/research](http://www.odci.gov/nic/pubs/research). Accessed 10/10/03. Pages 5-6.
- <sup>60</sup> Associated Press, "White House Official Apologizes for Role in Uranium Claim," *New York Times* (22 July 2003), nytimes.com (accessed 22 July 2003).
- <sup>61</sup> President Bush's Address to U.N., printed in the *New York Times* (13 September 2003), p. A31.
- <sup>62</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. 2003. Key Judgments [from October 2002 NIE] Iraq's continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass destruction. Declassified excerpts published on the CIA website: [www.odci.gov/nic/pubs/research](http://www.odci.gov/nic/pubs/research). Accessed 10/10/03. Pages 9.
- <sup>63</sup> Barton Gellman and Walter Pincus, "Depiction of Threat Outgrew Supporting Evidence," *Washington Post* (10 August 2003), p. 1, A9.
- <sup>64</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. 2003. Key Judgments [from October 2002 NIE] Iraq's continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass destruction. Declassified excerpts published on the CIA website: [www.odci.gov/nic/pubs/research](http://www.odci.gov/nic/pubs/research). Accessed 10/10/03. Pages 8-9.
- <sup>65</sup> Dana Priest and Walter Pincus, "Search in Iraq Finds No Banned Weapons," *Washington Post* (3 October 2003), p. 1.
- <sup>66</sup> David Kay, "Report on the Activities of the Iraq Survey Group to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Defense and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," p. 7. The page reference is to the unclassified report published on the CNN website, <http://cnn.allpolitics> (accessed 10/10/03), p. 7.
- <sup>67</sup> Ronald Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2004), pp. 82-86; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 1-3, 9-10, 26 and Woodward, *Bush at War* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2003), pp. 84-91.
- <sup>68</sup> Glen Kessler, "U.S. Decision on Iraq has Puzzling Past," *Washington Post* (12 June 2003), p. 1, A20. President Bush wanted to keep his decision secret because public knowledge of it would engender "enormous international angst and domestic speculation. I knew what would happen if people thought we were developing a potential [sic] or a war plan for Iraq." Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p. 3.
- <sup>69</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 30-31.
- <sup>70</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 77, 80, 96, 98. On March 21, 2003 General Franks told his top commanders who would be waging the war that the United States was going to war with Iraq, unless Saddam left the country. To emphasize his seriousness, he said: "You know, if you guys think this is not going to happen, you're wrong." CIA Director George Tenet in March also told Kurdish leaders that there would be a military attack in Iraq. Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 115, 117.
- <sup>71</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp. 120, 127. General Franks also stated on May 21 that "... my boss has not yet asked me to put together a plan to do that" [attack Iraq], p. 130.
- <sup>72</sup> This might bring to mind President Clinton's convoluted reasoning when he denied that he had had sex with Monica Lewinsky, "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is."
- <sup>73</sup> On December 21, 2002, CIA Director George Tenet and his deputy John McLaughlin, went to the Oval Office to brief the president on Iraq's WMD. After McLaughlin had presented the strongest evidence they had, the president was not enthusiastic. His response was, "Nice try," but "I don't think this is quite - it's not something that Joe Public would understand or would gain a lot of confidence from. . . . I've been told all this intelligence about having WMD and this is the best we've got?" Then Tenet reassured the president, "Don't worry, it's a slam dunk." The president left Tenet with the instructions: "Make sure no one stretches to make our case." After this briefing it is not obvious that the evidence for WMD in Iraq

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ever improved. The vice president's staff collected a lot of allegation and threads of evidence, but Colin Powell rejected most of them before his 5 February 2003 presentation to the United Nations of the U.S. case for war with Iraq. See Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2004), pp. 249-250, 299-301.