

Did President Bush Mislead the Country in His Arguments for War with Iraq?

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President Bush has been accused by some in the popular press of lying in his arguments for taking the United States to war with Iraq in 2003. This article examines several sets of statements by President Bush and his administration: first, about the implication that there was a link between Saddam Hussein, al Qaeda, and the terrorist attacks of 9/11; second, about Iraq's nuclear weapons capacity; and third, about Saddam Hussein's chemical and biological weapons and his ability to deliver them. Although the record at this early date is far from complete, the article concludes that from publicly available evidence, the president misled the country in important ways, potentially undermining the trust of the citizenry.

President Bush has been accused by some in the popular press of lying in his arguments for taking the United States to war with Iraq in 2003. But in order to make judgments about the accuracy of the president's statements, the claims must be analyzed separately. This article examines several sets of statements by President Bush and his administration: first, about the implication that there was a link between Saddam Hussein, al Qaeda, and the terrorist attacks of 9/11; second, about Iraq's nuclear weapons capacity; and third, about Saddam's chemical and biological weapons and his ability to deliver them. The possibility that the intelligence process was politicized is also examined.

Although the record at this early date is far from complete, the article concludes that from publicly available evidence, the president misled the country in implying that there was a connection between Saddam and 9/11. The administration's claims about

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: A number of friends and colleagues made helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper, though none of them should be associated with my conclusions, with which not all of them agreed: David Armor, Douglas Brook, David Crockett, Robert Dudley, Frank Fukuyama, Jack Goldstone, Nguyen Hung, Don Kasb, Ronald Moe, Arnauld Nicogossian, Patrick Pfiffner, Russell Riley, Colleen Sbogán, and Clyde Wilcox.

Iraq's nuclear capacity were based on dubious evidence that was presented in a misleading manner. Claims about chemical and biological weapons were based on legitimate evidence that was widely accepted internationally, despite the failure to find the weapons by late 2003. Claims of Saddam's ability to deliver these weapons, however, were exaggerated. Finally, there was circumstantial and inconclusive evidence that in 2002 the intelligence community may have been under unusual pressure to support the administration's goals.

A Link between Saddam Hussein, al Qaeda, and 9/11

Two days after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, a Time/CNN poll found that 78 percent of respondents thought that Saddam Hussein was involved with the attacks on the twin trade towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington.¹ From that time to the beginning of the war and into the summer of 2003, President Bush and his administration strongly implied that there was a link between Saddam and the al Qaeda hijackers, despite Osama bin Laden's contempt for Saddam as the head of a secular state (Fisher 2003).² Although Bush probably knew that the evidence was quite sketchy at best, he used the implied link to bolster support for war with Iraq in Congress before the authorizing resolution and more generally with the American public before and after the war.

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, 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." He also said that a "very senior al Qaeda leader" received medical treatment in Baghdad. 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 11th." 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 2001 was "pretty well confirmed."³ On September 27, 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld argued that the link between Saddam and al Qaeda was "bulletproof."⁴ National Security Adviser

1. Dana Milbank and Claudia Deane, "Hussein Link to 9/11 Lingers in Many Minds," *Washington Post*, September 6, 2003, p. 1. For an analysis of the early Bush presidency and the transformation that 9/11 caused, see Pfiffner (2004). For an analysis of arguments for and against war with Iraq, see Pfiffner (2003).

2. 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 is posted on <http://www.indybay.org>, retrieved April 10, 2003. See also Fisher (2003).

3. Milbank and Deane.

4. Eric Schmitt, "Rumsfeld Says U.S. Has 'Bulletproof' Evidence of Iraq's Links to Al Qaeda," *New York Times*, September 28, 2002.

Condoleezza Rice said on September 25, 2002, "There clearly are contacts between al Qaeda and Iraq. . . . There clearly is testimony that some of the contacts have been important contacts and that there's a relationship there."⁵

The problem was that evidence for a connection between Saddam and al Qaeda was never very solid. The administration based part of its argument on a claim that 9/11 leader Mohamed Atta met with an Iraqi official in Prague in April 2001. An investigation by the FBI, however, concluded that there was no convincing evidence that Atta was in Prague at the time of the meeting and the CIA was doubtful about any meeting of Atta and an Iraqi official.⁶ A congressional report said that "The CIA has been unable to establish that [Atta] left the United States or entered Europe in April [2001] under his other name or any known alias."⁷

The "very senior al Qaeda leader" to whom Bush referred was Abu Mussab Zarqawi, a Jordanian who was not in al Qaeda, though he was a terrorist and had had contacts with al Qaeda.⁸ A UN terrorism committee did not find any link between al Qaeda and Saddam. According to the chief investigator, Michael Chandler, "Nothing has come to our notice that would indicate links between Iraq and al-Qaeda."⁹ But even if there were some evidence that al Qaeda members had been in Iraq at some time, it would not constitute proof that Iraq was connected to the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

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 May 1, 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."¹⁰

On September 7, 2003, in his speech announcing the administration's request for an additional \$87 billion for the occupation of Iraq, President Bush continued to connect Iraq and 9/11.

Nearly two years ago, following deadly attacks on our country, we began a systematic campaign against terrorism. . . . And we acted in Iraq, where the former regime sponsored terror. . . . And for America, there will be no going back to the era before September the 11th, 2001, to false comfort in a dangerous world. . . . We are fighting that enemy in Iraq and Afghanistan today so that we do not meet him again on our own streets, in our own cities.¹¹

5. Quoted in Judis and Ackerman (2003).

6. Dana Milbank and Walter Pincus, "Cheney Defends U.S. Actions in Bid to Revive Public Support," *Washington Post*, September 15, 2003, p. 1, A19.

7. Milbank and Deane.

8. Walter Pincus, "Report Casts Doubt on Iraq-Al Qaeda Connection," *Washington Post*, June 22, 2003, p. 1, A19. For a detailed analysis of German police records that undercut the link between Zarqawi and al Qaeda, see Michael Isikoff, "Distorted Intelligence?" *Newsweek*, June 25, 2003, online version.

9. Associated Press, "U.N. Panel Finds No Evidence to Link Iraq, Al-Qaeda," online version, retrieved June 26, 2003, from <http://www.truthout.org>.

10. Quoted in Milbank and Deane.

11. The president's speech was printed in *The New York Times*, September 8, 2003, p. A10.

The implication was still that there was a link between al Qaeda and Iraq. 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."¹²

But on September 18 President Bush conceded: "No, we've had no evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved with September the 11th."¹³ He gave no explanation as to why the previously implied connection was abandoned.

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 the statements by Bush might have been based on claims that he thought were true when he implied the connection between Saddam and 9/11. The problem is that as it became clear that the evidence was dubious, the president continued to imply that the connection was real. 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. The careful phrasing of administration statements implying a link between Saddam and 9/11 suggests that they knew there was no compelling evidence. If there was, they would have made an outright claim for the link, and the argument for war would have been much easier to make.

President Bush did exploit and encourage the general 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. Though we might not be able to conclude that the president lied directly about the connection, he did encourage and further the mistaken public belief because it supported his policy goals. We can conclude that his statements were misleading and deceptive, though not outright lies.

Nuclear Weapons in Iraq

In 2002, President Bush and his administration made a number of claims about Saddam Hussein's potential nuclear capacity, allegations that culminated in a statement in the president's State of the Union speech on January 29, 2003. Throughout the build-up to the war with Iraq, the administration consistently conflated biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons as "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD). As horrible as chemical and biological weapons are, they pale in comparison with the potential destructiveness of nuclear weapons. As Kenneth M. Pollack, a proponent of war with Iraq, put it, "A successful attack with VX could kill thousands; with a BW agent, tens of thousands; and with a nuclear weapon, hundreds of thousands or even millions" (Pollack 2002, 179).

12. Milbank and Pincus.

13. Dana Milbank, "Bush Disavows Hussein-Sept. 11 Link," *Washington Post*, September 18, 2003, p. A18; and David E. Sanger, "Bush Reports No Evidence of Hussein Tie to 9/11," *New York Times*, September 18, 2003, p. A18.

In addition, chemical and biological weapons are difficult to maintain and deliver effectively.¹⁴

The claim that Saddam Hussein had reconstituted his nuclear weapons program and was potentially “less than a year” away from possessing nuclear weapons 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.¹⁵ Thus, the claim of Saddam’s nuclear capacity was one of the strongest arguments that President Bush could make for war with Iraq.

In his speech on August 26, 2002 laying out the administration’s argument for war with Iraq, Vice President Cheney said, “Many of us are convinced that Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon. . . . There is no doubt he is amassing [WMD] to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us.”¹⁶ Condoleezza Rice said in September 2002, “There will always be some uncertainty about how quickly [Saddam] can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.”¹⁷

On September 7, 2002 at Camp David, President Bush told reporters on the issue of Iraqi nuclear capacity, “I would remind you that when the inspectors first went into Iraq and were denied, finally denied access, a report came out of the Atomic—the IAEA—that they were six months away from developing a weapon. I don’t know what more evidence we need” (Fisher 2003).¹⁸ The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report did say that in 1991 Iraq had been 6 to 24 months away from the capacity to produce a nuclear bomb, but that capacity had been destroyed by UN inspectors before 1998. When the inspectors left Iraq in 1998, the report said: “Based on all credible information to date, the IAEA has found no indication of Iraq having achieved its program goal of producing nuclear weapons or of Iraq having retained a physical capability for the production of weapon-usable nuclear material or having clandestinely obtained such material.”¹⁹ It is possible, though unlikely, that the president was consciously misleading the press in order to present a strong case for going to war with Iraq. More likely, it was mere confusion, but if so, it was confusion about a crucial element in the decision of going to war.

14. According to Kenneth M. Pollack, “It is actually quite difficult to use chemical or biological weapons to kill large numbers of people. The agents have to be properly prepared in a form that remains airborne for some time and can be disseminated in the right dosages to actually kill people. Atmospheric conditions have to be just right, or the agent may be dissipated or destroyed. The attackers have to know when and where to disseminate the agent and to do it in a way that will actually allow it to have its maximum effect. The agent also has to be stored properly so that it does not lose its potency before it can be used. For all of these reasons, previous terrorist attacks using CW and BW have not killed very many people. In fact, on just about every occasion when terrorists did employ WMD, they undoubtedly would have killed far more people if they had employed conventional explosives instead” (Pollack 2002, 179).

15. For an analysis that Saddam was deterred from using chemical and biological weapons in the 1991 Gulf War, see Pollack (2002), 243.

16. “Remarks by the Vice President to the Veterans of Foreign Wars 103rd National Convention,” August 26, 2002. Available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov>.

17. Judis and Ackerman, 6; and Dana Milbank and Mike Allen, “Iraq Flap Shakes Rice’s Image,” *Washington Post*, July 27, 2003, p. 1, A18.

18. Dana Milbank, “For Bush Facts Are Malleable,” *Washington Post*, October 22, 2003, p. 1, A22.

19. Ibid.

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 on Iraq. According to the CIA, "A National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) is the most authoritative written judgment concerning a national security issue prepared by the Director of Central Intelligence. . . . NIEs are addressed to the highest level of policy making—up to and including the President."²⁰

The National Intelligence Estimate of early October 2002 stated:

How quickly Iraq will obtain its first nuclear weapon depends on when it acquires sufficient weapons-grade fissile material.

If Baghdad acquires sufficient fissile material from abroad it could make a nuclear weapon within several months to a year.

Without such material from abroad, Iraq probably would not be able to make a weapon until 2007 to 2009 . . . (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, 5-6).

The 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. . . . Satellite photographs reveal that Iraq is rebuilding facilities at sites that have been part of his nuclear program in the past . . . *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 [emphasis added].

On January 23 Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz said: "Disarming Iraq and the war on terror are not merely related. Disarming Iraq of its chemical and biological weapons and dismantling its nuclear weapons program is a crucial part of winning the war on terror."²¹

Then, in his State of the Union speech on January 28, 2003, President Bush said the 16 words that would become the center of controversy: "The British Government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa." Immediately before the war, on March 16, Vice President Cheney declared: "We know [Saddam Hussein] has been absolutely devoted to trying to acquire nuclear weapons. And we believe he has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons."²² Then on March 17, on the eve of the war, President Bush said: "Using chemical, biological or,

20. Steven Mufson, "Forget WMD. What's an NIE?" *Washington Post*, July 20, 2003, p. B3.

21. Barton Gellman and Walter Pincus, "Depiction of Threat Outgrew Supporting Evidence," *Washington Post*, August 10, 2003, p. 1, A9.

22. Ibid. Cheney retracted his statement on September 14, 2003 on "Meet the Press", when he said, "Yeah. I did misspeak. I said repeatedly during the show weapons capability. We never had any evidence that he had acquired a nuclear weapon." But the real claim was that Saddam had reconstituted his nuclear program rather than that he had workable weapons. Cheney was quoted in a letter to the vice president from Representatives Dennis Kucinich, Carolyn Maloney, and Bernie Sanders, published on <http://www.truthout.org>, September 17, 2003.

one day, nuclear weapons obtained with the help of Iraq, the terrorists could fulfill their stated ambitions. . . .”²³

The problem with this series of 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 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. Each of these claims will be examined separately.

The Niger Claim

The claim in the 2003 State of the Union address that the British had learned about an attempt by Iraq to procure nuclear material from Niger was based in part on a British intelligence report in September 2002 that Iraq was seeking yellowcake from Niger. The administration was going to use the claim in the president’s October 7 speech, and one draft of the speech said, “The [Iraqi] regime has been caught attempting to purchase substantial amounts of uranium oxide from sources in Africa.”²⁴ CIA Director George Tenet had warned the British that the Niger claim published in their September 24 dossier was probably not true, but they used it anyway. Before the president’s speech, on October 5 and 6, Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley received two memoranda from the CIA expressing the CIA’s reservations about the Niger claim. In addition, Tenet personally called Hadley and told him that the claim was not sound. Tenet was successful in convincing the White House to delete the claim from the president’s speech.²⁵

The report about Niger and yellowcake may have originated in several letters obtained by Italian intelligence sources. On October 11, 2002, Italian journalist Elisabetta Burba gave copies of the Niger letters to the U.S. Embassy in Rome. In response to the question of why she did not publish the letters herself, she said, “The story seemed fake to me. . . . I realized that this could be a worldwide scoop, but that’s exactly why I was very worried. If it turned out to be a hoax, and I published it, it would have ended my career.”²⁶ The letters were distributed to U.S. intelligence agencies with the caveat that they were of “dubious authenticity.”

The CIA was doubtful about the Niger claim because after the reports arose, the vice president’s office requested that the CIA investigate the claim. So in February 2002, the CIA sent former ambassador Joseph Wilson to Niger to investigate the question. Wilson had been a career foreign service officer, was appointed ambassador by George

23. Gellman and Pincus.

24. Walter Pincus, “Bush Team Kept Airing Iraq Allegation,” *Washington Post*, August 8, 2002, p. A10.

25. Associated Press, “White House Official Apologizes for Role in Uranium Claim,” *New York Times*, July 22, 2003. Retrieved on July 22, 2003, from <http://www.nytimes.com>.

26. Dana Priest, “Uranium Claim Was Known for Months to Be Weak,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 2003, p. A22; Dana Priest and Dana Milbank, “President Defends Allegation On Iraq,” *Washington Post*, July 15, 2003, p. 1, A11; and Walter Pincus and Dana Priest, “U.S. Had Uranium Papers Earlier,” *Washington Post*, July 18, 2003, p. 1, A12.

H. W. Bush, and had served as a diplomat in Niger's capital (Niamey) in the 1970s. He met with the U.S. ambassador to Niger who had herself "debunked" in reports to Washington the rumors of Iraqi attempts to buy yellowcake in Niger. After his investigation, Wilson concluded that the rumored efforts were not true and reported this back to the CIA (Wilson 2003).²⁷ In addition, on February 24, General Carlton W. Fulford, Jr. and the U.S. ambassador to Niger visited Niger's president and reported to the State and Defense Departments that the supply of uranium ore was secure. He said he was "assured" that the yellowcake was being kept secure by the French consortium that controlled it.²⁸

Despite these reports, the National Intelligence Estimate of October 2002 stated, "A foreign government service reported that as of early 2001, Niger planned to send several tons of 'pure uranium' (probably yellowcake) to Iraq. As of early 2001, Niger and Iraq reportedly were still working out arrangements for this deal, which could be for up to 500 tons of yellowcake. We do not know the status of this arrangement" (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, 25). In an annex to the NIE, however, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research concluded: "Finally, the claims of Iraqi pursuit of natural uranium in Africa are, in INR's assessment, highly dubious" (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, 84).

The United States gave copies of the Niger-related documents (12 pages) to the IAEA Director, General Mohamed ElBaradei.²⁹ After a search through Google, Jacques Baute, head of the IAEA inspection section, found that the letterhead of one letter was from the military government that had been replaced before the 1999 date on the letter, and the signature on the letter indicated the name of a foreign ministry official who had left the position in 1989.³⁰ The forgery was made public on March 7, 2003 by Mohamed ElBaradei, who reported the findings to the UN Security Council.³¹

Given that the basis for the claim for the Niger yellowcake was known by the CIA to be dubious, how did the claim make it into the president's State of the Union address?³² When the State of the Union speech was being prepared, NSC official Robert

27. Though Wilson strongly supported the 1991 Gulf War, he was critical of the Bush administration's claims about Iraq's WMD in 2003. After the public account of his mission to Niger, journalist Robert Novak reported that "two senior Administration officials" told him that Wilson's wife was a CIA agent, and he revealed her name in his column. Mrs. Wilson had been a CIA non-covered agent; that is, her claimed cover was not as a U.S. government official but as a private businessperson. Exposure of her identity potentially jeopardized all of her previous contacts throughout the world and any operations in which she was involved. In September 2003, CIA Director Tenet asked the Justice Department to investigate the disclosure of the secret agent's identity. Mike Allen and Dana Priest, "Bush Administration Is Focus of Inquiry," *Washington Post*, September 28, 2003, p. 1, A.

28. Priest and Milbank.

29. Pincus and Priest.

30. Michael Isikoff and Evan Thomas, "Follow the Yellowcake Road," *Newsweek*, July 28, 2003, pp. 23-25. Also Dana Priest, "Uranium Claim Was Known for Months to Be Weak," *Washington Post*, July 20, 2003, p. A22. Priest and Milbank, 1, A11; Pincus and Priest, 1, A12; and Judis and Ackerman (2003), 10.

31. Dana Priest and Karen DeYoung, "CIA Questioned Documents Linking Iraq, Uranium Ore," *Washington Post*, March 22, 2003, p. A30; and Seymour M. Hersh, "Who Lied to Whom?" *New Yorker*, March 31, 2003, pp. 41-43.

32. The administration also used the Niger claim in a number of other forums before the State of the Union speech, for example, in reports to Congress and in speeches by Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Rumsfeld. Walter Pincus, "Bush Team Kept Airing Iraq Allegation," *Washington Post*, August 8, 2003, p. A10. See also Condoleezza Rice, "Why We Know Iraq Is Lying," *New York Times*, January 23, 2003. Available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov>.

Joseph faxed a paragraph on uranium from Niger to CIA official Alan Foley. Foley told Joseph that the reference to Niger should be taken out. Joseph insisted that a reference remain in the speech, so they compromised: Niger was changed to Africa; they did not include any specific quantity; and the source was attributed to the British rather than to U.S. intelligence.³³ Thus, there was high-level doubt about the wisdom of including the dubious claim about Niger in the president's State of the Union message, particularly because the same claim had been deleted from the president's October 7, 2002 speech in Cincinnati.

Although knowledge of the forged letters was made public in February 2003, the sentence did not arouse public controversy until, in the wake of the U.S. war with Iraq, no evidence of weapons of mass destruction, much less nuclear weapons, could be found. In explaining why the president might not have known that the claim was not accurate, a high-level White House official said, "The president of the United States is not a fact-checker."³⁴ This type of response trivializes the role of the president. The issue was not a minor detail; it was a question of a potential nuclear threat to the United States and the possibility of going to war. The president has an obligation to get the facts as right as they can be in such situations.

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice minimized the problem by saying: "It is 16 words, and it has become an enormously overblown issue."³⁵ She denied that any doubts were evident to her or the president. On July 11, 2003 she said: "All that I can tell you is that if there were doubts about the underlying intelligence on the NIE, those doubts were not communicated to the president. The only thing that was there in the NIE was a kind of a standard INR footnote, which is kind of 59 pages away from the bulk of the NIE. . . . So if there was a concern about the underlying intelligence there, the president was unaware of that concern, as was I." Even though the State Department's INR dissent was placed toward the end of the document, the "Key Judgments" section near the front called attention to the "INR alternative view at the end of these Key Judgments" (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, 5).³⁶

If what Rice said was true, it would mean that on the crucial issue of Iraqi nuclear weapons: she was not aware that the CIA sent two memos and director Tenet called her deputy in order to get the Niger claim out of the president's October 7 speech; she was not aware that the State Department had serious reservations about the claim; she was not aware that the CIA had sent, at the vice president's request, Joseph Wilson to Niger to investigate the claim; and she was not aware that Robert Joseph negotiated with the CIA a change in wording in the State of the Union speech. If, as Rice said, no one communicated any of these reservations about something as crucial as nuclear weapons in Iraq to the president, the president was not being well served. Even though the presi-

33. Matthew Cooper, "Pinning the Line on the Man," *Time*, July 28, 2003, p. 31. See also Pincus and Priest.

34. Dana Milbank and Dana Priest, "Warning in Iraq Report Unread," *Washington Post*, July 19, 2003, p. 1, A13.

35. Dana Milbank, "Intelligence Dispute Festers as Iraq Victory Recedes," *Washington Post*, July 17, 2003, p. A15.

36. Mufson. See also Priest and Milbank; and Milbank and Allen.

dent and his national security adviser are deluged with intelligence information, and the State of the Union preparation is an elaborate process, the stakes on this particular issue could not have been much higher: Iraq with a possible nuclear weapon and taking the nation to war.

After intensive press inquiry about how the sentence got into the State of the Union address, on July 11, 2003, CIA Director George Tenet took responsibility for the inclusion of the inaccurate sentence. "I am responsible for the approval process in my agency. And . . . the President had every reason to believe that the text presented to him was sound. These 16 words should never have been included in the text written for the President."³⁷ Later, on July 21, Rice's deputy, Stephen Hadley, said that he was at fault for the reference to uranium because he had been the one whom Tenet had called to get it removed from the October 7 speech. "I should have recalled [the issue] at the time of the State of the Union address. . . . If I had done so, it would have avoided the entire current controversy."³⁸ Finally, on July 30, the president said, "I take personal responsibility for everything I say, of course. I also take responsibility for making decisions on war and peace. And I analyzed a thorough body of intelligence, got solid, sound intelligence that led me to come to the conclusion that it was necessary to remove Saddam Hussein from power."³⁹

In the summer of 2003, the administration argued that the president's words were technically truthful because he referred to British intelligence as the source of the conclusion about the Niger connection. Condoleezza Rice said, "The statement that he made was indeed accurate. The British government did say that." Donald Rumsfeld said, "It turns out that it's technically correct what the president said, that the U.K. does—did say that—and still says that."⁴⁰ The legalistic parsing of the president's words was reminiscent of President Clinton's statement about the meaning of the word "is." But President Bush's statement was not literally or technically true. He did not say that the British "claimed" or "asserted" or "said" or "stated" that Saddam had sought yellowcake from Africa. He said that they "learned" of it. Is it possible to learn something that is false? The president clearly indicated by his use of the word "learned" rather than another word that he believed the statement to be true (Kinsley 2003).

The Aluminum Tubes

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 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

37. Michael Duffy and James Carney, "A Question of Trust," *Time*, July 21, 2003, pp. 23-26.

38. Associated Press, *New York Times*, July 22, 2003.

39. Richard W. Stevenson, "Bush Denies Claim He Oversold Case for War," *New York Times*, July 31, 2003, *New York Times* website, no page number. Retrieved July 31, 2003, from <http://www.nytimes.com>.

40. James Risen, "Bush Aides New Say Claim on Uranium Was Accurate," *New York Times*, July 14, 2003, no page. Available from <http://www.nytimes.com>.

able to build a nuclear weapon within a year.”⁴¹ Condoleezza Rice also said in September, “We do know that there have been shipments going . . . into Iraq, for instance, of aluminum tubes that really are only suited for nuclear weapons programs, centrifuge programs.”⁴²

The evidence of the aluminum tubes was also featured in the National Intelligence Estimate issued in early October, 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 NIE stated:

Most agencies believe that Saddam’s personal interest in and Iraq’s aggressive attempts to obtain high-strength aluminum tubes for centrifuge rotors . . . provide compelling evidence that Saddam is reconstituting a uranium enrichment effort for Baghdad’s nuclear weapons program. . . . [DOE agrees that reconstitution of the nuclear program is underway but assesses that the tubes probably are not part of the program.] All agencies agree that about 25,000 centrifuges based on tubes of the size Iraq is trying to acquire would be capable of producing approximately two weapons’ worth of highly enriched uranium per year (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, 6).

The State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research, however, dissented from the argument of the rest of the National Intelligence Estimate:

In INR’s view Iraq’s efforts to acquire aluminum tubes is central to the argument that Baghdad is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program, but INR is not persuaded that the tubes in question are intended for use as centrifuge rotors. INR accepts the judgment of technical experts at the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) who have concluded that the tubes Iraq seeks to acquire are poorly suited for use in gas centrifuges to be used for uranium enrichment and finds unpersuasive the arguments advanced by others to make the case that they are intended for that purpose. INR considers it far more likely that the tubes are intended for another purpose, most likely the production of artillery rockets (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, 9).

The State Department’s skepticism was based on a number of factors that made claiming the aluminum tubes as evidence of Iraq’s attempt to obtain a nuclear capacity questionable.

The physical characteristics of the tubes matched closely the dimensions of aluminum tubes used in Medusa rockets, but did not track closely with the dimensions of centrifuge rotors:

1. The tubes were narrower and longer (910 mm versus 500-600 mm) than a centrifuge rotor. The Medusa rocket fuselage is 910 mm in length.
2. They were made of aluminum, which since the 1950s has not been used for centrifuge rotors.

41. President Bush’s Address to UN, printed in the *New York Times*, September 13, 2003, p. A31.

42. Gellman and Pincus. In an interview, an intelligence analyst who had taken part in the internal debate over the aluminum tubes issue said, “You had senior American officials like Condoleezza Rice saying the only use of this aluminum really is uranium centrifuges. She said that on television. And that’s just a lie.” Quoted in Judis and Ackerman (2003), 7.

3. The tubes had an anodized coating, which was right for rocket tubes but would have to be removed for use as centrifuges for nuclear material.
4. The diameter of the tubes was 81 mm, the same as would be used for a Medusa rocket, but the usual diameter for gas centrifuges is 145 mm.
5. The thickness of the tubes was 3 mm, while the thickness of a centrifuge rotor is 0.5 mm.⁴³

One of the foremost living experts on centrifuge physics, Houston G. Wood III, who founded the Oak Ridge National Laboratory centrifuge physics department (run by the Department of Energy), said, "It would have been extremely difficult to make these tubes into centrifuges. It stretches the imagination to come up with a way. I do not know any real centrifuge experts that feel differently."⁴⁴ The director of the inspections unit for the IAEA, Jacques Baute, convened a team of experts (two from England, two from the U.S., and one from Germany) who examined the available evidence from Iraqi front companies and military facilities and concluded that "all evidence points to that this is for the rockets."⁴⁵

Nuclear Weapons Summary

There is no doubt that Iraq sought nuclear weapons in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1976, Iraq bought a nuclear reactor from France that it assembled at Osiraq, but just before it was to come on line in 1981 the Israelis launched an air attack that destroyed it. By the Gulf War in 1991, Iraq had made great progress in its nuclear program, lacking only fissile material necessary for nuclear bombs. After the war, however, UN inspectors destroyed most, if not all, of the physical capacity to construct nuclear bombs, though engineers and scientists remained in Iraq (Pollack 2002, 169-75).

In addition to the destruction of weapons by the UN inspectors before they left in 1998, the economic sanctions severely limited the materials that could be brought into the country for potential use for WMD. U.S. enforcement of the no-fly zones also limited what the Iraqis could do, and satellite surveillance was used extensively to monitor the country. The effectiveness of the UN inspectors before 1998, and the sanctions and the no-fly zones after 1998, was reflected in remarks by Colin Powell when he visited Egypt on February 24, 2001:

... the sanctions exist—not for the purpose of hurting the Iraqi people, but for the purpose of keeping in check Saddam Hussein's ambitions toward developing weapons of mass destruction. . . . And frankly they have worked. He has not developed any significant capability with respect to weapons of mass destruction. He is unable to project conventional power against his neighbors.⁴⁶

But in spite of the lack of evidence, some U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that Saddam's nuclear program had been reconstituted.

43. Gellman and Pincus.

44. Ibid.

45. Judis and Ackerman (2003), 10.

46. From Press Release: U.S. State Department, "Colin Powell Remarks with Egypt FM February 24 '01." Retrieved September 25, 2003, from <http://www.scoop.co.nz>.

The National Intelligence Estimate of October 2002 stated that “. . . in the view of most agencies, Baghdad is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program” (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, 5). It also said, “. . . if left unchecked, it probably will have a nuclear weapon during this decade [see INR alternative view at the end of these Key Judgments]” (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, 5). The alternative view of the State Department assistant secretary for intelligence and research (INR) was enclosed in a lined box around the type and stated that in its judgment, Saddam wanted nuclear weapons and was pursuing “at least a limited effort” to acquire them.

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. . . . INR is unwilling to speculate that such an effort began soon after the departure of UN inspectors or to project a timeline for the completion of activities it does not now see happening (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, 8-9).

Greg Thielmann, former director of the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research’s program on strategic proliferation and military affairs said: “During the time that I was office director, 2000-2002, we never assessed that there was good evidence that Iraq was reconstituting or getting really serious about its nuclear weapons program.”⁴⁷

After the war, the CIA sent into Iraq the Iraqi Survey Group, headed by David Kay, to search the country for weapons of mass destruction. In his interim report to Congress in October 2003, 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.”⁴⁸ According to Kay’s report, Iraqi scientists said that Hussein “remained firmly committed to acquiring nuclear weapons” and “would have resumed nuclear weapons development at some future point.” But “to date we have not uncovered evidence that Iraq undertook significant post-1998 steps to actually build nuclear weapons or produce fissile material” (Kay, 7).

If the administration had compelling evidence that Saddam was reconstituting his nuclear capacity, why did it rely on the two dubious claims analyzed above? And if the United States knew of the efforts, why were the UN inspectors unable to find any evidence before the war or U.S. forces able to find any evidence after the war? In September 2003, the ranking majority and minority members of the House Select Committee on Intelligence concluded that the administration did not have any compelling evidence that it could not make public that supported its claims about Iraq’s WMD programs. “The absence of proof that chemical and biological weapons and their related development programs had been destroyed was considered proof that they continued to exist. . . . We have not found any information in the assessments that are still classified that was any more definitive.”⁴⁹

47. Judis and Ackerman (2003), 3.

48. Dana Priest and Walter Pincus, “Search in Iraq Finds No Banned Weapons,” *Washington Post*, October 3, 2003, p. 1.

49. The letter to CIA Director Tenet was quoted by Dana Priest, “House Probers Conclude Iraq War Data Was Weak,” *Washington Post*, September 28, 2003, p. 1, A9.

Chemical and Biological Weapons, UAVs, and Intelligence

The Bush administration claimed with some certainty that Iraq possessed chemical and biological weapons as well as unpiloted aerial vehicles (UAVs) that were capable of delivering them. This section takes up these claims as well as the question of whether the intelligence process was politicized by the administration. That is, was there pressure on intelligence agencies to produce reports that supported the administration's policy goals rather than reports that reflected the best intelligence judgment of the analysts?

Chemical and Biological Weapons

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. Thus, it was surprising that little evidence of these programs was found by U.S. troops in the aftermath of the war, especially because the United States devoted considerable manpower and expertise to the effort to discover them.⁵⁰

Although Iraq purchased most of its chemical and biological weapons materials from Europe and a few other regions, significant materials came from the United States in the 1980s. When it began to look like Iran might be able to defeat Iraq in the war Iraq had initiated in September 1980, the United States moved to open diplomatic relations with Iraq and in February 1982 removed it from the list of terrorist countries that U.S. companies could not trade with. Despite reports that the Iraqis were using chemical warfare weapons against the Iranians, the Reagan administration moved aggressively to support Iraq, sending Donald Rumsfeld as a special envoy to meet with Saddam Hussein in December 1983.⁵¹

The United States supported Iraq during the war in a number of ways, including economic aid in Commodity Credit Corporation guarantees of more than \$1 billion from 1983 to 1987 and regular intelligence help that reached the liaison level of relationship between the two countries' intelligence agencies (Pollack 2002, 18-19). But more importantly, the United States encouraged its allies, particularly France and Germany, to allow sale of weapons to Iraq, where Iraq got much of its chemical and biological weapons capacity.⁵²

The Reagan administration also, through policy changes in the Departments of State and Commerce, allowed U.S. companies to export dual-use materials (such as chemical precursors to weapons and steel tubes for artillery) to Iraq, which were expected to

50. Judith Miller, "A Chronicle of Confusion in the U.S. Hunt for Hussein's Chemical and Germ Weapons," *New York Times*, July 20, 2003, p. 12.

51. Michael Dobbs, "U.S. Had Key Role in Iraq Buildup," *Washington Post*, December 30, 2002, p. 1, A12.

52. For data on where Iraq purchased much of the ingredients, equipment, and munitions for its chemical weapons program, see Gary Milhollin and Kelly Motz, "The Means to Make the Poisons Came from the West," *New York Times*, April 13, 2003, p. wk5.

be used for its biological and chemical programs. Biological agents sold to Iraq from the United States during this period included several strains of anthrax and bubonic plague. Despite the killing of 200,000 Kurds with chemical weapons and high explosives from 1987 to 1989 and the destruction of the Kurdish town of Halabja on March 15, 1988, the United States did not stop U.S. companies from continuing to sell insecticides and other chemical components of chemical weapons to Iraq. In 1988, Iraq purchased \$1.5 million worth of pesticides from Dow Chemical (Pollack 2002, 20-21, 171).⁵³ The United States benefited from its support of Iraq by being allowed to purchase Iraqi oil at lower than world market prices.⁵⁴

Saddam's chemical and biological warfare capacity formed much of the basis for the Bush administration's argument that Saddam's weapons of mass destruction were a threat to the United States. Often the president's remarks were modified by words such as "likely" or "possible," but sometimes his words and those of other administration officials were more categorical. 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."⁵⁵

A report by the Defense Intelligence Agency from September 2002, however, voiced some skepticism about the recent status of Iraq's chemical and biological production capacity. The report stated, "A substantial amount of Iraq's chemical warfare agents, precursors, munitions, and production equipment were destroyed between 1991 and 1998 as a result of Operation Desert Storm and UNSCOM [United Nations Special Commission] actions. There is no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons, or where Iraq has—or will—establish its chemical warfare agent production facilities."⁵⁶

When the president was in Krakow, Poland on May 30, 2003, he announced that U.S. troops had discovered firm evidence of biological weapons labs when they found two trailers that seemed to have been used for biological weapons production. The president said, "But for those who say we haven't found the banned manufacturing devices or banned weapons, they're wrong. We found them."⁵⁷ The CIA, however, found no pathogens in the trailers, and some U.S. defense scientists felt that there was a rush to conclude that the trailers were mobile germ warfare labs. William C. Patrick III, a former senior official in U.S. germ warfare programs, said that a key component, the capacity for steam sterilization, was missing from the trailers. Another senior U.S. analyst said, "I have no great confidence that it's a fermenter."⁵⁸ In addition, a majority of the engineering team of the Defense Intelligence Agency came to the conclusion that the

53. Pollack (2002), 20-21, 170; and Dobbs.

54. Pollack (2002), 21.

55. Dana Priest and Walter Pincus, "Bush Certainty on Iraq Arms Went Beyond Analyst's Views," *Washington Post*, 7 June 7, 2003, p. 1, A17.

56. Judis and Ackerman (2003), 3-4; and Priest and Pincus, "Bush Certainty on Iraq Arms Went Beyond Analyst's Views."

57. Mike Allen, "Bush: 'We Found' Banned Weapons," *Washington Post*, May 31, 2003, p. 1.

58. Judith Miller and William J. Broad, "Some Analysts of Iraq Trailers Reject Germ Use," *New York Times*, June 8, 2003, p. 1, B14.

trailers were not for making weapons but rather for producing hydrogen, probably for balloons.⁵⁹

The most 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 1,200-member Iraq Survey Group headed by David Kay.⁶⁰ Kay reported that with respect to chemical weapons, ". . . Iraq's large-scale capability to develop, produce, and fill new CW munitions was reduced—if not entirely destroyed—during Operations Desert Storm and Desert Fox, 13 years of UN sanctions and UN inspections" (Kay, 6). With respect to biological weapons, the Iraq Survey Group found evidence of various "biological warfare activities" and one "vial of live *C. botulinum* Okra B. from which a biological agent can be produced" (Kay, 5). But they found no biological weapons. With respect to the two trailers, Kay reported, "We have not yet been able to corroborate the existence of a mobile BW production effort" (Kay, 5).

Most experts were perplexed at the inability of the Iraq Survey Group to find the chemical and biological weapons that were expected to be found. After the war, many Iraqi scientists denied that they existed, and no evidence was found that they did. It is possible that Saddam cleverly hid them or destroyed them. It is also possible that before the war Saddam's scientists exaggerated their success in producing such weapons because they were afraid to tell him the truth if they had failed to produce them (Fukuyama 2003).

Unpiloted Aerial Vehicles

One of the keys to broad public support for an invasion of Iraq was the fear that the U.S. mainland could be attacked. Thus, the possibility of unmanned, drone airplanes armed with chemical or biological weapons could provoke serious concern. President Bush brought up in his October 7 speech in Cincinnati Iraq's potential to deliver chemical and biological weapons that could threaten the United States and its allies. "We have also discovered through intelligence that Iraq has a growing fleet of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles that could be used to disperse chemical or biological weapons across broad areas. . . . We are concerned that Iraq is exploring ways of using these UAVs *for missions targeting the United States* [emphasis added]." This claim was based in part on the National Intelligence Estimate's conclusion that "Baghdad . . . is working with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which allow for a more lethal means to deliver biological and, less likely, chemical warfare agents" (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, 5). The NIE later stated, "Baghdad's UAVs could threaten Iraq's neighbors, U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf, *and if brought close to, or into, the United States, the U.S. Homeland* [emphasis added]" (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, 7).

59. Douglas Jehl, "Iraqi Trailers Said to Make Hydrogen, Not Biological Arms," *New York Times*, August 9, 2003, no page number. Available from <http://www.nytimes.com>.

60. Walter Pincus and Dana Priest, "Iraq Weapons Report Won't Be Conclusive," *Washington Post*, September 25, 2003, p. 1, A24.

Several lines below that statement, however, the Air Force voiced its disagreement: "The Director, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance, U.S. Air Force, does not agree that Iraq is developing UAVs primarily intended to be delivery platforms for chemical and biological warfare (CBW) agents. The small size of Iraq's new UAV strongly suggests a primary role of reconnaissance, although CBW delivery is an inherent capability" (Central Intelligence Agency 2003, 7). President Bush seemed to be relying on the NIE conclusion in his statements about the danger to the United States from Iraqi UAVs, and the thought of planes spraying chemical or biological agents in the United States brought back visions of the 9/11 terrorists seeking training on crop-dusting planes. But his advisers seemed to give little weight to the considered judgment of the U.S. Air Force in coming to the conclusion that UAVs were likely threats to the homeland.

As it turned out after the war, the Air Force seemed to be correct. After examining the captured UAVs in Iraq, Robert S. Boyd, the senior intelligence analyst of the Air Force explained why the Air Force voiced its dissent from the NIE of October 2002. He said that the aircraft that Iraq was using had wingspans of 12 to 16 feet and that they were not configured to carry chemical or biological warfare agents. "What we were thinking was: Why would you [the Iraqis] purposefully design a vehicle to be an inefficient delivery means? . . . Wouldn't it make more sense that they were purposefully designing it to be a decent reconnaissance UAV? . . . Everything we discovered strengthened our conviction that the UAVs were to be used for reconnaissance."⁶¹

Politicizing Intelligence

One possible explanation for the administration's inaccurate claims about Iraq's WMD was that the intelligence-gathering capacities of the government were subject to pressure to suit their analyses to the policy goals of the administration. Allegations centered around the vice president's visits to CIA headquarters, the creation of the Office of Special Plans in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and the use of the Defense Policy Board.

Richard Cheney and his aide Scooter Libby made a number of personal visits to CIA Langley headquarters to question the CIA judgment that Iraq did not pose as immediate a threat as the administration was arguing it did. While it is appropriate for the vice president and other high administration officials to ask tough questions and challenge intelligence agencies, and it is understandable that career civil servants may see this as pressure, the interventions in the intelligence process seemed to be different in 2002 with respect to Iraq. These visits were perceived by some CIA veterans as political pressure for the agency to come to the conclusions that the administration wanted.⁶² Ray McGovern, who had been a CIA analyst from 1964 to 1990 and had briefed Vice President George H. W. Bush in the 1980s, said, "During my 27-year career

61. Bradley Graham, "Air Force Analysts Feel Vindicated on Iraqi Drones," *Washington Post*, September 26, 2003, p. A23. See also Dafna Linzer and John J. Lumpkin, "Experts Doubt U.S. Claim on Iraqi Drones," Associated Press, August 24, 2003), online version. Available from <http://www.truthout.org>.

62. Judis and Ackerman (2003), 5.

at the Central Intelligence Agency, no vice president ever came to us for a working visit.”⁶³

In addition to close attention from the vice president, CIA analysis was also treated with suspicion in the Department of Defense because the CIA was not coming to the conclusions about Iraq’s WMD capabilities that the secretary and deputy secretary of defense expected. A number of CIA analysts perceived this as pressure.⁶⁴ In the Pentagon, according to a former official who attended the meetings, “They were the browbeaters. In interagency meetings Wolfowitz treated the analysts’ work with contempt.”⁶⁵ From the perspective of some CIA veterans, the administration was undermining the objectivity and professionalism of the intelligence process. Former DIA analyst and specialist on Iraq Patrick Lang characterized the administration’s efforts to influence intelligence as not professional. “What we have here is advocacy, not intelligence work.”⁶⁶ One senior State Department analyst told a congressional committee that he felt pressured by the administration to shift his analysis to be more certain about the evidence on Iraq’s activities. Other analysts told the Senate Intelligence Committee that the administration was disclosing only the worst-case scenario aspects of intelligence reports and not accurately representing the work of the professional analysts.⁶⁷

One response of Secretary Rumsfeld to his dissatisfaction with the analysis of the CIA was to create the Office of Special Plans headed by Deputy Undersecretary of Defense William Luti to do intelligence analysis and bring a different perspective than the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the CIA.⁶⁸ One important difference in their analysis was the weight they gave to claims provided by the Iraqi National Congress and its leader Ahmad Chalabi about Saddam’s WMD. The CIA had discounted these same claims because the exiles had a stake in the outcome of U.S. policy and thus the CIA did not consider them as credible as the Office of Special Plans judged them to be.⁶⁹ According to W. Patrick Lang who was the head of Middle East intelligence for the DIA, “The D.I.A. has been intimidated and beaten to a pulp. And there’s no guts at all in the C.I.A.”⁷⁰

Another tactic Secretary Rumsfeld used to circumvent the established professional intelligence apparatus of the executive branch was his reliance on the Defense Policy Board. The DPB was chaired by Richard Perle, a hawk on Iraq and former member of the Reagan administration. In Perle’s judgment, the CIA’s judgment about Iraq “isn’t worth the paper it is written on.”⁷¹ The board also contained other high-visibility hawks

63. Ray McGovern, “Cheney and the CIA: Not Business as Usual.” Retrieved June 27, 2003, from <http://www.truthout.org>.

64. James Risen, “C.I.A. Aides Feel Pressure in Preparing Iraqi Reports,” *New York Times*, March 23, 2003, p. B10.

65. Walter Pincus and Dana Priest, “Some Iraq Analysts Felt Pressure from Cheney Visits,” *Washington Post*, June 5, 2003, p. 1.

66. Bruce B. Auster, Mark Mazzetti, and Edward T. Pound, “Truth and Consequences,” *U.S. News and World Report*, June 9, 2003, p. 17.

67. James Risen and Douglas Jehl, “Expert Said to Tell Legislators He Was Pressured to Distort Some Evidence,” *New York Times*, June 25, 2003, no page number. Available from <http://www.nytimes.com>.

68. Judis and Ackerman (2003), 5.

69. See Seymour M. Hersh, “Selective Intelligence,” *New Yorker*, May 12, 2003, pp. 44-51.

70. Ibid, 44.

71. Judis and Ackerman (2003), 5.

on Iraq, such as James Woolsey and Newt Gingrich, as well as a range of other former defense officials not necessarily committed to war with Iraq. It is interesting that this board of outside advisors played a much more highly visible role in supporting the administration's war plans than the traditional outside advisory board to the president, the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. Perhaps that was because the PFIAB was chaired by Brent Scowcroft, national security advisor to President George H. W. Bush and critic of war with Iraq.

While all executive branch agencies should take their guidance from the president and his appointees, it is dangerous for a presidential administration to pressure intelligence agencies to distort their professional judgments in order to support an administration's short-term policy goals. Once intelligence is politicized, it becomes more difficult for a president to distinguish the professionals' best judgment from what they think he wants to hear. Such a situation is dangerous for the American presidency. While evidence of undue pressure from the administration is inconclusive and circumstantial at this time, insofar as the Bush administration put pressure on U.S. intelligence agencies to suit their analyses to its policy goals, it jeopardized its own best sources of intelligence.

Conclusion

Possible justifications for war with Iraq ranged from the idealistic goal of bringing democracy to Iraqis and the humanitarian desire to rid them of a tyrant to geostrategic concerns about the future of the Middle East. That Saddam was a vicious tyrant who tortured his political enemies, gassed his own people, and invaded other countries was known long before the Bush administration decided to go to war to depose him. But the most compelling arguments to the American people were the arguments that the national security of the United States was at risk. Thus, the claims that Saddam's WMD posed a direct threat were most effective in sustaining political support for war.

In an interview, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz implied that the WMD argument was not necessarily the most important for policy makers. "For bureaucratic reasons we settled on one issue, weapons of mass destruction, because it was the one reason everyone could agree on."⁷² On the other hand, in a discussion with the editors of the *New York Times*, Colin Powell implied that the claimed WMD were central to his own support of the war. "Asked whether Americans would have supported this war if weapons of mass destruction had not been at issue, Mr. Powell said the question was too hypothetical to answer. Asked if he, personally, would have supported it, he smiled, thrust his hand out and said, 'It was good to meet you.'"⁷³

In the judgment of Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, the imminent threat to the United States was crucial to President Bush's argument for war with Iraq. "Bush's ex

72. Sam Tanenhaus, "Bush's Brain Trust," *Vanity Fair*, July 2003, p. 169.

73. Editorial in the *New York Times*, "The Failure to Find Iraqi Weapons," September 26, 2003, p. A24.

post facto justification for the war—that the Iraqi people are much better off without Saddam—ignores the basic but highly salient fact that there would not have been a war without his argument that Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction posed an unacceptable threat that was both immediate and serious” (Daalder and Lindsay 2003, 167). In focusing on WMD as the main reason for war and arguing that there was an imminent threat to the United States, President Bush left himself open to the doubts expressed by Senator Carl Levin (D-MI), who said that the issue “is about whether administration officials made a conscious and very troubling decision to create a false impression about the gravity and imminence of the threat that Iraq posed to America.”⁷⁴

The administration’s inference that Saddam Hussein was continuing his previous weapons programs was not an unreasonable conclusion, one that was shared by intelligence agencies in other countries. The problem was that there was little evidence to support their conclusion, and they used claims of dubious validity to make their case to the American people. There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein had significant conventional warfare capacity and was developing missiles and other weapons systems that violated UN resolutions. But the focus of this article has been on the Bush administration’s arguments that Saddam’s WMD presented an imminent threat to the United States.

This article has addressed the question of the accuracy of some of the claims in the arguments that the Bush administration used in favor of war with Iraq. While President Bush made few untrue statements in his arguments for the war, the real problem was his broader claims.⁷⁵

1. His series of statements connecting Saddam to the atrocities of 9/11 created a false impression that the administration had evidence of a connection between Saddam and the 9/11 terrorist attacks.
2. His pattern of statements about Saddam Hussein’s nuclear capacity was also systematically misleading.
3. His claims about Iraq’s chemical and biological capacity were shared by many, including allied intelligence agencies, UN inspectors, and the Clinton administration. Bush cannot be fairly blamed for using such widely accepted claims, even though little evidence of the weapons was found in Iraq after the war.
4. His claims about the possible use of Iraqi UAVs to deliver chemical and biological weapons to the U.S. homeland were made despite the best judgment of the U.S. Air Force.

74. Dana Milbank, “White House Didn’t Gain CIA Nod for Claim,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 2003, p 1, A21.

75. President Bush said on July 14, 2003 in response to questions about Iraq’s WMD, “And we gave him a chance to allow the inspectors in, and he wouldn’t let them in. And, therefore, after a reasonable request, we decided to remove him.” (Quoted by Jonathan S. Landay, “Controversy over Iraq: The President Pushes Back,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 15, 2003, published on <http://www.freep.com>.) In fact, Saddam did allow UN inspectors to come into Iraq, and they had virtually free rein to search the country. When they failed to find WMD the administration criticized them, and they withdrew in anticipation of a military attack by the United States. Mentioned previously in this article were the president’s claims that WMD had been found in the two trailers in Iraq and that the IAEA had said that Saddam was within six months of producing a nuclear weapon. Each of these inaccurate statements was more likely due to confusion than an attempt to lie.

Should the president be held responsible for what he said during the course of his argument that war with Iraq was necessary? It is true that much of what the president said about nuclear weapons was supported by the National Intelligence Estimate of October 2002. But it is also true that there were serious caveats in the NIE that called into question the certainty of the conclusions the president expressed. Although it is too soon to come to firm historical judgments, the publicly available evidence so far seems to support the following conclusions:

- To the extent that the president himself understood that there were serious doubts about Saddam's connections to 9/11, he is responsible for playing upon fears of the American public and encouraging the desire for revenge in order to build support for a war with Iraq.
- To the extent that the president was aware of serious doubts about Saddam's nuclear capacity, he failed to present a balanced or accurate view to Congress and the American people. He himself may have been convinced of the rightness of his cause, but that did not justify misleading the country by the certainty of his assertions about Saddam's nuclear capacity in his campaign to create political support for the war. To the extent that the serious doubts about Iraq's nuclear capacity were not presented to the president, he was poorly served by his staff and advisors.
- To the extent that the president's immediate advisors reported to him only the evidence and analysis that supported his own predilection to attack Iraq, the president was not well served. It is the president's responsibility to create an atmosphere in which the White House staff and cabinet officers give the president all of the relevant evidence to help him make an informed decision. If they bend their advice to suit his preconceptions, they are not serving his best interests, nor the country's.
- Although evidence is circumstantial and inconclusive, to the extent that the intelligence process was politicized and distorted in order to produce conclusions with insufficient evidence, the presidency may be vulnerable to future distortions and the capacity of the intelligence community to produce objective analysis in the future may have been undermined.

The issue here is not whether the war with Iraq was wise; whether it was a wise war will become clear only with the passage of years. At issue here is a matter of democratic leadership. Citizens must trust the president because they do not have all of the information that he has. If the president misrepresents the nature of crucial information, he undermines the democratic bonds between citizens and president upon which this polity is based. Insofar as President Bush misled the Congress and the citizenry, either from deliberate misstatements or through creating an atmosphere in which he was not well informed by his advisors, he undermined the crucial trust upon which the nation depends.

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