

Machiavellian Concepts and the Plame Scandal: Strategies for Justifying an Invasion

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Introduction

In 2002 Joseph Wilson visited Niger to investigate if Iraq was attempting to purchase yellow cake uranium for developing weapons of mass destruction. He concluded that Iraq was not attempting to purchase uranium. In 2003, the United States of America invaded Iraq under the premise that Iraq was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction. Four weeks after the invasion, Wilson published an article in the *New York Times* restating his conclusion from the Niger trip that there was no evidence to support that Iraq was attempting to purchase uranium to develop weapons of mass destruction. Wilson also accused the White House of manipulating intelligence reports to make a case for the war. The release of the article challenged President Bush's rationale for going to war with Iraq. After Wilson's article was published, Robert Novak published an article in *The Washington Post* that exposed Valerie Plame, Wilson's wife, as a covert CIA operative. There was a rumor that Plame had influenced Wilson to conduct the Niger investigation for her own agenda. An investigation found the leak of her name came directly from a White House Official. When the investigation concluded, it was determined that I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby had released Plame's name to the press. Libby was indicted and his testimony indicated that the release of Plame's name was done deliberately to discredit Wilson's conclusions regarding the rationale for invading Iraq. He also testified that Dick Cheney, the Vice President, had said the President had authorized him to disclose this information. The authorization claim was rescinded in other filings from Libby. Karl Rove, White House Chief of Staff was called into question as having a role in the leaking of Plame's name. Rove was never charged and in the end, Libby was found guilty and sentenced accordingly (McClellan, 2008). There has been no evidence found since the 2003 invasion that Iraq was manufacturing weapons of mass destruction and the stated purpose for the invasion was changed to remove a dictator and install a democratic government.

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Analysis

The behavior of Bush, Cheney, Rove, and Libby is consistent with some of the concepts Machiavelli discussed in The Prince. This paper will examine their behavior and discuss it as examples of those concepts. For the purposes of this paper, Bush, Cheney, and Rove, will be referred to collectively as the Administration.

A prince must select his secretaries and ministers carefully (Machiavelli, 2004). In the case of the Administration, each person was chosen carefully for their role and ability to perform their job. The Administration's ministers played a role in orchestrating the leaking of Plame's name to discredit Wilson. When the Plame scandal was traced back to the White House, Bush's staff was able to dispel the situation. Libby was Cheney's Chief of Staff and his testimony that the President had authorized the leaking of the name put the Administration's power at risk. That testimony was later rescinded but the allegations were established that revealing Plame was a political move to discredit Wilson. Bush chose wisely in his decision for Rove who was able to navigate the entire scandal leaving Bush relatively unscathed. The consequences of these staffing choices could have caused every member of the Administration to lose their power.

Machiavelli refers to the need for a prince to be other than good and to have the ability to avoid any sort of infamy by his actions so that he can keep his throne (Machiavelli, 2004). In the case of the Plame scandal, the Administration was able to avoid infamy by using a lower level official as a scapegoat. Once Libby was identified as the person who leaked the information, the investigation into the matter ceased. There was evidence to support involvement of the Administration in deliberately leaking Plame's name but Libby accepted responsibility. The matter did not receive any further investigation and the Administration was able to maintain their

position of power without any further questions on this scandal. Libby paid a substantial fine for the crime but the Administration commuted his prison sentence. The consequence of having Libby take responsibility is that the culprit(s) involved in this scheme have been exonerated despite the ruin of Plame's career after many years of service.

A prince's decisions are irrevocable and subjects should not attempt to question those decisions. He is exposed to dangers from both his own subjects and foreign powers (Machiavelli, 2004). The Administration made a decision to invade as a preemptive action based on evidence that Iraq was manufacturing weapons of mass destruction. Wilson's original intelligence report did not provide evidence to support the claim that Iraq was manufacturing weapons. The accusations made by Wilson that intelligence reports were manipulated demanded a response from the Administration to maintain their credibility and power. Beyond the attempt to discredit Wilson, the Administration changed the purpose for the invasion as the months passed and no weapons of mass destruction or their components were found. As the Administration left office there was never an acknowledgement that the decision to invade Iraq on the original weapons of mass destruction premise was a mistake despite the passage of five years, the capture of a dictator, and the implementation of a democratic government. The Administration exposed Plame to discredit the danger posed by Wilson's article that questioned the preemptive invasion. The invasion of Iraq was done to eliminate **them** as a foreign threat. The consequence of attempting to discredit Wilson was that the Administration was involved in a serious scandal that had the potential to threaten their ability to stay in power. If the Administration had embraced Wilson's original report, they may have been able to maintain their credibility by seeking more diplomatic means to settle their differences with the Iraqi

Comment [pme3]: Who? If you mean the country, use the pronoun "it" if you mean the people, change Iraq.

government. Seeking diplomatic resolution would have saved billions of dollars and thousands of lives.

It is necessary for a prince to maintain a good reputation amongst his subjects and inspire a sense of greatness and goodness (Machiavelli, 2004). The invasion of Iraq was swift and within a couple of weeks American troops had conquered Baghdad. Accomplishing a ground assault with such speed required a series of broad aerial attacks meant to destroy enemy combatants that would also have a high probability of killing innocent civilians as collateral damage. Wilson's article discrediting the intelligence that justified the Iraq invasion meant that the civilians were killed in vain. To maintain a good reputation amongst the American public and in the international community, it was necessary for the Administration to discredit Wilson to prevent the appearance that Iraqi civilians were being killed by an invasion that was justified by poor or manipulated intelligence. The potential consequence for the death of civilians in an effort for a rapid ground assault could have been backlash from the international community. Manipulating Wilson's intelligence and attempting to discredit him actually damaged the Administration's reputation based on the scandal and accusations that were made of White House Officials. The reputation was further damaged in May of 2003 when President Bush made a speech from an aircraft carrier where he stated that the mission had been accomplished in Iraq and that major combat operations would be over. That speech continued to damage his reputation as time passed and combat operations continued.

Comment [pme4]: In any military situation isn't it the case that civilian deaths are always in vain?

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Once the American forces were able to take control of the country a democratic government was installed. Along with the new government came the training of the Iraqi security force. It is important for the prince to arm his subjects to demonstrate trust in their fidelity. It is also important to gain the favor of the people of the conquered nation (Machiavelli,

2004). If the new government is not viewed as favorable and people are only less discontented with the new government than the previous, then it will be difficult for the prince to have a positive relationship with the people. The purpose of the Iraqi invasion shifted from removing weapons of mass destruction from a failed state to installing a government that would allow Iraq to be a democratic nation. The people of Iraq would not be the subjects of the Administration but it was important to demonstrate the trust in the Iraqi people to govern and protect themselves. It was difficult to organize the security force as the people of Iraq were in conflict with each other. The consequence of arming the security forces was that it was difficult to discern the level of commitment of each person and there was potential that enemy combatants were being armed in this manner. The Administration did not foresee the clash between the Sunni and Shiite cultures that hindered the ability to install the new government.

Machiavelli's principles were implemented by the Administration to help keep their power despite Wilson's attempts to challenge their authority. The Administration chose secretaries that were able to successfully navigate this political situation. They attempted to discredit him by exposing Plame's covert identity. The exposure was covered up and infamy was avoided by having another official take responsibility. The basis for the decision to invade was questioned by Wilson but was never revoked by the Administration despite the failure to find weapons of mass destruction. The Administration maintained their reputation through Libby taking responsibility for exposing Plame and transitioning the purpose of the war from seizing weapons of mass destruction to helping the Iraqi people overthrow their dictator and install a democratic government. Finally, the Administration armed and trained an Iraqi security force to help protect the nation and the new government.

Comment [pme6]: Isn't the point here that even though the Administration acted according to Machiavellian principles, in this case circumstances were such that things did not go as planned.

[19.5 points](#)

References

Machiavelli, N. (2004). *The Prince*. New York: Pocket Books.

McClellan, S. (2008). *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington's Culture of Deception*. New York: Public Affairs.