

THE UNITED STATES & THE IRAQ WAR 2003

The Issue: How did the United States launch the 2003 Iraq War, if there were no nuclear weapons or other 'WMD' in Iraq?

Did US intelligence fail to assess well—adequately and accurately—the capabilities and intentions of Iraq? Or was the process distorted to bring the analyses into correspondence with already-decided GW Bush administration aims?

The Republican position, widely articulated in 2003 and 2004, has been that GW Bush and other policy-makers were misled by error and inadequacy in the intelligence provided them. One ostensible reason, then, for 'reform' of the US intelligence system, and especially the Central Intelligence Agency, was to prevent future bad intelligence. [The 9.11 Commission also called for thoroughgoing organizational reform of US intelligence and put a premium on 'sharing' among US intelligence agencies.] But was there also sound skepticism among CIA analysts concerning the 2001-2003 presumptions of US Iraq policy? Some commentators on sweeping personnel changes, which followed Porter Goss' naming as Director of the CIA, saw a comprehensive move to suppress those within the CIA whose analyses did not conform to the dispositions and policy intentions of the GW Bush administration: in effect, 'taming' the CIA.

Critics of the standard Republican story point to

- long Department of Defense reliance on Ahmed Chalabi and informants introduced by him, despite his having been rejected years before by the CIA;
- the Cheney-Rumsfeld dismissal of UNMOVIC and IAEA inspectors and inspections;
- Rumsfeld's adamant insistence that a small force would be sufficient and that US forces would be welcomed;
- White House use of discredited claims concerning 'uranium from Niger' and the 'aluminum tubes', and the White House's repeating unsound British claims that Iraq had chemical and biological weapons they could "deploy in 45 minutes" ;
- Cheney's and Rumsfeld's insistence there were significant ties between Saddam Hussein's Iraq and 'terrorists', despite absence of evidence; and to
- the inability of the White House to present unambiguous evidence, to the public or to other governments, of Iraqi 'weapons of mass destruction' or ongoing programs to obtain them.

In short, critics argue that whatever the shortcomings in intelligence, it was the White House and Department of Defense which wanted war with Iraq and abused intelligence to silence Congress. Either Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld failed to apply skeptical tests required before choosing war, or they recklessly disregarded the role of facts, in service of a higher cause.



The Documents

1992.03.11 The *Washington Post* reports the existence of a draft Defense Planning Guidance, which in-

cludes several possible war scenarios, including war against Iraq.¹

The *Washington Post* summarises that the report “contemplates use of American military power to preempt or punish” use of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons—then directly quoting the text—“even in conflicts that otherwise do not directly engage U.S. interests.” The Pentagon sought to dismiss the text as a draft.

1998.01.26 A private letter to President Clinton urging Saddam Hussein’s “removal from power.”

This letter advances a case for Clinton to “act decisively” to bring about “the removal of Saddam Hussein’s regime from power.” Not to do so is to “accept a course of weakness and drift.” The letter’s significance lies in the signers, among them a number who hold positions in or near the GW Bush administration: Elliott Abrams, John Bolton, Zalmay Khalilzad, Richard Perle, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and R. James Woolsey. The writers utter a number of the arguments which were to echo in 2002 and 2003. ‘Containment’ of Saddam is eroding. Even if weapons inspections were resumed “experience has shown that it is difficult if not impossible to monitor Iraq’s chemical and biological weapons production.” “Given the magnitude of the threat, the current policy ... is dangerously inadequate.”

The only acceptable strategy is one that eliminates the possibility that Iraq will be able to use or threaten to use weapons of mass destruction. ... In the near term, this means a willingness to undertake military action ...²

¹ *The Washington Post*, 11 March 1992.

² Ibid.

<http://www.newamericancentury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm>

2000.08 Project for a New American Century. “Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century.”³

This document lays out a plan for future US policy, in which Iraq is mentioned 25 times in 90 pages. It argues, for example, that

the United States has for decades sought to play a more permanent role in Gulf regional security. While the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides the immediate justification, the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein. ... We cannot allow North Korea, Iran, Iraq or similar states to undermine American leadership, intimidate American allies or threaten the American homeland itself. The blessings of the American peace, purchased at fearful cost and a century of effort, should not be so trivially squandered.

<http://www.newamericancentury.org/defensenationalsecurity2000.htm>

2002.08. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “Iraq: A New Approach.”

<http://www.ceip.org/files/pdf/Iraq.Report.pdf>

2002.08.26 Vice President ‘Dick’ Cheney Speaks to 103rd National Convention of the Veterans of For-

³ The authors stipulate that the report “does not necessarily represent the view of the project participants.” Among participants is Paul Wolfowitz, US Undersecretary of Defense 2001-2005 and US nominee to be head of the World Bank.

eign Wars.⁴

Cheney flatly declares that “The Iraqi regime has in fact been very busy enhancing its capabilities in the field of chemical and biological agents. And they continue to pursue the nuclear program they began so many years ago. ... Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons.”

2002.10.04 United States. Central Intelligence Agency. “Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction Program.”

http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/iraq_wmd/Iraq_Oct_2002.htm

This National Intelligence Estimate, put together in a few short weeks, was delivered to the Congress and public (in an abbreviated unclassified summary), and to the White House (in a more complete secret version). In the course of public debate about the war in 2003 the Administration was brought to disclose that the complete version included a number of registered dissents, not previously acknowledged. [This well-illustrated overview covers much the same ground as the 24 September 2002 British dossier.] GW Bush’s Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction took this document as the subject of a ‘case study’.

2002.10.10 **United States. Congress. “Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq**
2002.10.16 **Resolution of 10-11 October 2002. Public Law 107-243—October 16, 2002.** The US House of Representatives and Senate passed the authorizing resolution on 10 October 2002. The debates are in the Congressional Record of 8, 9, and 10 October. For links to

⁴ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/08/20020826.html>

texts and the debates, see Charles Judson Harwood Jr., “Iraq War: Congressional Vote, Debates, Statements,” at <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/jksonc/docs/congress-iraq-war.html>

Text of authorization [one line http request: add no [spaces](#)] as Public Law 107-243:
http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=107_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ243.107

White House signing ceremony [16 October 2002]:
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021016-1.html>

Issues concerning Congress’ grant of authority to undertake war in Iraq are canvassed in Bruce D. Larkin, “The Iraq War of 2003 and the Politics of Denuclearization,” for which the URL is at the end of this guide.

2002.11.08 **United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441. S/RES/1441 (2002).**

<http://www.un.int/usa/sres-iraq.htm>

2003.01.27 United Nations. Transcript of Statement by Hans Blix to the United Nations Security Council, 27 January 2003. Transcript of Statement by Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, to the UN Security Council, 27 January 2003. *The New York Times*, 28 January 2003.

2003.02.05 US Secretary of State **Colin Powell** presented to the UN Security Council the Administra-

tion case that Iraq was in breach of UN resolutions. [Some of the assertions he made were later shown to be wrong.]

www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030205-1.htm

2003.01.30 In a memorandum of this date, a US National Security Agency official called for intensified surveillance of UN Security Council member states' delegations' communications. A copy to NSA's British counterpart, GCHQ, was leaked by a GCHQ employee, and Ms. Katherine Gun was charged.⁵ Correspondents Martin Bright and Peter Beaumont wrote, in part:

Translators and analysts at the Government's top-secret surveillance centre GCHQ were ordered to co-operate with an American espionage 'surge' on Security Council delegations after a request from the US National Security Agency at the end of January 2003. This was designed to help smooth the way for a second UN resolution authorising war in Iraq.

The information was intended for US Secretary of State Colin Powell before his presentation on weapons of mass destruction to the Security Council on 5 February.

Sources close to the intelligence services have now confirmed that the request from the security agency was 'acted on' by the British authorities. It is also known that the operation caused significant disquiet in the intelligence community on both sides of the Atlantic.

2003.03.17 Notified by the United States that war is impending, **the United Nations and IAEA with-**

⁵ *The Observer*, 8 February 2004.

draw the UNMOVIC and IAEA inspectors from Iraq after a stay of about four months.

2003.03.19 United States launches war against Iraq.

2003.10.02 US. Central Intelligence Agency. Statement by David Kay on the Interim Progress Report on the Activities of the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) Before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Defense, and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. [Kay Report]

2004.09.30 US Central Intelligence Agency. Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD. Charles Duelfer, Special Advisor to the Director of Central Intelligence.

This report, the final report of the Iraq Survey Group, follows David Kay's interim report of 2 October 2003. The Iraq Survey Group found no evidence of significant chemical or biological agents, no evidence of nuclear weapons, and no evidence of ongoing programs to make or acquire BW, CW, or nuclear weapons.

http://www.cia.gov/cia/reports/iraq_wmd_2004/index.html

2005.03.31 Report. Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, appointed by GW Bush to assess the abilities of US intelligence to "collect, process, analyze and disseminate information concerning the capabilities, intentions and activities of foreign powers." The co-chairmen are Laurence H. Silberman and Charles S. Robb. In its covering letter to GW Bush the Commission writes:

We conclude that the Intelligence Community was dead wrong in almost all of its pre-war judgments about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. This was a major intelligence failure. Its principal causes were the Intelligence Community's inability to collect good information about Iraq's WMD programs, serious errors in analyzing what information it could gather, and a failure to make clear just how much of its analysis was based on assumptions, rather than good evidence. On a matter of this importance, we simply cannot afford failures of this magnitude.

After a thorough review, the Commission found no indication that the Intelligence Community distorted the evidence regarding Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. What the intelligence professionals told you about Saddam Hussein's programs was what they believed. They were simply wrong.

The Commission's report, then, conforms to a reading of the events which supports the canonical defenses long constructed by the White House and Pentagon: first, that the gap between their insistence on war and the facts on the ground was someone else's fault; and, second, that the messages all ran from the 'intelligence community' upward, without any distortion as a result of preconceived policy running from the White House and Pentagon downward. The Commission insists that it dealt thoroughly with the issue of alleged influence, but a thorough assessment of the Commission's report will need to address a number of subjects, and other evidences, which the Commission does not discuss. The press conference transcript cited below contains this statement of fact:

QUESTION: Could your report be read as an exoneration of the president's use of the intelligence, or did you not tackle that question?

SILBERMAN: We did not -- our executive order did not direct us to deal with the use of intelligence by policymakers, and all of us were agreed that that was not part of our inquiry.

A preliminary view by *New York Times* journalists, based on interviews with sources who said they had read the executive summary and the full (secret) report:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/29/politics/29weapons.html>

Transcript of press conference by GW Bush, Laurence H. Silberman and Charles S. Robb, introducing the report:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A15908-2005Mar31.html>

The unclassified version of the report:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/wmd/>

Also See

2002.12.08 Bruce D. Larkin, "Iraq: Go to War? and the Nuclear Question."

<http://www.gcdd.net/TX.024=2002.12.08.Iraq.pdf>

2003.11.17 Bruce D. Larkin, "The Iraq War of 2003 and the Politics of Denuclearization."

<http://www.gcdd.net/TX=2003/TX.028=2003.11.11.IraqWar.pdf>

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