

How did the U.S. government lead its people to war?

Abuses and Misuses of Intelligence

In its eagerness to justify and build public support for war in Iraq, the Bush administration set out to collect and make public all the incriminating evidence it could gather, no matter how flimsy or unsubstantiated.



The administration made claims that were often unreliable and flawed by manipulations, fabrications and exaggerations. Key allegations such as [aluminum tubes for nuclear centrifuges](#), [yellowcake uranium from Niger](#), [mobile weapons labs](#), [Mohamed Atta's meeting Iraqi intelligence in Prague](#), and numerous other allegations have been chronicled as notorious falsehoods, even fabrications. Time and again, significant details were presented as factual and well-sourced, only to

be fully discredited later.

Notes from joint U.S./U.K. strategy meetings, known as the [Downing Street memo](#), revealed that "the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy" – a policy for war which had already been decided upon.

To bolster its case for war in Iraq, policymakers "cherry-picked" the intelligence, selecting information that supported their position while discounting or ignoring that which didn't. They pressured the CIA to come up with intelligence that supported their policies. They fast-tracked reports through channels without thorough evaluation of details and sources. Small, poorly substantiated details were given significance as "dots" to be connected into some overall pattern. They "shopped" for the information they wanted. They used sources of questionable reliability, including detainees interrogated under harsh conditions, who had a strong incentive to tell interrogators what they wanted to hear in order to gain favorable treatment.

Indicative of the administration's emphasis on constructing a case for war was the creation of a new quasi-intelligence apparatus called the Office of Special Plans within the Defense Department. This unit – which was later reprimanded by the Pentagon's Inspector General as "inappropriate" – was extremely influential within the administration as it ventured into gathering and interpreting intelligence on its own, as well as instrumental in critiquing and belittling the work of other intelligence agencies. Much of the information it disseminated came from the Iraqi National Congress (INC), an Iraqi political exile group, headed by Ahmad Chalabi, that had a clear agenda of wanting the U.S. to oust Saddam Hussein. Almost all of this INC information was later determined to be worthless.



"The [INC's] intelligence isn't reliable at all," said Vincent Cannistraro, a former CIA official and counterterrorism expert. "Much of it is propaganda. Much of it is telling the Defense Department what they want to hear... They make no distinction between intelligence and propaganda, using alleged informants and defectors who say what Chalabi wants them to say, [creating] cooked information that goes right into presidential and vice-presidential speeches." There were even instances of translators supplied by the INC who slanted stories by altering meaning in translation.

Whether overtly or through leaks, the administration, which was otherwise so devoted to secrecy, freely disseminated pieces of incriminating information to the public without caveats or dissents, no matter how unreliable or unsubstantiated. The press, in general, broadcast this information with little scrutiny. James Bamford, in his book *A Pretext for War*, notes:

"First OSP [Office of Special Plans] supplies false or exaggerated intelligence; then members of the WHIG [White House Iraq Group] leak it to friendly reporters, complete with prepackaged vivid imagery; finally, when the story breaks, senior officials point to it as proof and parrot the unnamed quotes they or their colleagues previously supplied."

Furthermore, where the intelligence community had been most accurate and potentially helpful – with its projections and warnings regarding post-war Iraq – the Bush administration chose to dispute and disregard those assessments in order to dispel public concerns over the long-term ramifications of taking military action. The predictions made by experienced government analysts of a difficult post-war Iraq, with a likelihood of violent social upheaval, were dismissed. Instead, the Bush administration presented an optimistic "best-case" scenario.

16 Words

Video: SIXTEEN WORDS

A Mechanism for War

Rhetoric and Spin

War Through Rose-Colored Glasses

● Abuses and Misuses of Intelligence

16 Words

British Dossier

A Mythic Reality

Items of Note

Bush Administration Claims vs. The Facts

"The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

These notable 16 words were part of President Bush's State of the Union speech on January 28, 2003. Yet 10 months earlier, in March 2002, the CIA knew that this claim (that Hussein had sought to purchase uranium from Africa) was most likely false, and by October 2002 had issued an assessment stating that "the evidence is weak" and that "the Africa story is overblown."

Draft seven of a presidential speech to be delivered on October 7, 2002 in Cincinnati, Ohio contained the line, "and the [Iraqi] regime has been caught attempting to purchase substantial amounts of uranium oxide from sources in Africa." CIA director George Tenet himself removed this language from the speech, and faxed a statement to the White House stating that: 1) the evidence was weak, as one of the mines cited had long been flooded and the other was controlled by French authorities; 2) Iraq already had its own stock of uranium, so it made no sense for them to go through great efforts to acquire it secretly; and 3) the CIA had already shared points one and two with Congress.

Nevertheless, only than 4 months later, this false uranium claim made its way back into President Bush's State of the Union speech. Since U.S. intelligence agencies would not confirm this claim – and because Bush was so intent on citing this information – Bush attributed the intelligence to the British government ('The British government has learned') as a way of lending legitimacy to his claim. And "if anyone did have any concerns about the truth of the charge itself, attributing it to the British report would give them cover: we're not saying it's true; the British are." (*Hubris*, p. 170, by Michael Isikoff and David Corn)

Only one week later, after privately expressing serious doubts about this claim, Colin Powell conspicuously removed any reference to it in his speech to the United Nations on February 5, 2003.

It is now universally recognized that the documents which formed the basis for this claim were forgeries – containing "flaws in the letterhead, forged signatures, misspelled words, incorrect titles for individuals and government entities..." (report from the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the U.S. Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction – known as the [Silberman-Robb Commission](#)) On July 11, 2003, Tenet released a statement saying, "These 16 words should have never been included in the text written for the president."

British Dossier

In Colin Powell's speech to the United Nations on February 5, 2003, he said:

"...Every statement I make today is backed up by sources, solid sources. These are not assertions... I would call my colleagues' attention to the fine paper that the United Kingdom distributed yesterday, which describes in exquisite detail Iraqi deception activities..."



It was widely reported on February 7, 2003 that this "fine paper," a 19-page British government dossier entitled *Iraq: Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation*, plagiarized an article in the *Middle East Review of International Affairs* by Ibrahim al-Marashi. Major portions (pages 6-16) of the dossier were copied directly from al-Marashi's article, and even contained his grammatical errors and typographical mistakes.

Furthermore, in his original article, al-Marashi **cited the information as being 12 years old**; however, the British dossier did not acknowledge this essential fact, presenting the information on Iraq as though it were current.

Two days later, on February 9, 2003, Colin Powell appeared on *Meet the Press*:

When asked fundamental questions about the veracity of this dossier, Powell refuses to acknowledge its problematic character.

TIM RUSSERT: ...And now, this headline about Britain's intelligence dossier, "*Britain admits that much of its report on Iraq came from magazines.*" Are you concerned that there is a sloppiness with evidence and a rush to war?

COLIN POWELL: No, I don't think so. I think Britain stands behind its document. They have acknowledged that they use other sources that they didn't acknowledge or attribute. But I think the document stands up well, because it describes a pattern of deceit on the part of the Iraqis that is not just a pattern of deceit that exists today, but has existed for many years.

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