

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

Bush Administration Claims vs. The Facts

Iraq did not provide chemical weapons training to al-Qaeda

Pre-War Claims:

Bush officials repeatedly asserted that Iraq had provided chemical weapons training to al-Qaeda, citing "high-ranking detainees" as sources.

Facts:

There is no evidence to support this claim. The primary source for this claim was Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, an al-Qaeda operative who ran a paramilitary camp in Afghanistan. Al-Libi was captured in Pakistan on November 11, 2001 by U.S. forces, and, under duress, told interrogators that Iraq had provided chemical weapons training to al-Qaeda. Yet as early as February 2002, the Defense Intelligence Agency and CIA issued classified reports to senior members of the Bush administration questioning the reliability of al-Libi's reporting.

Other sources for this claim were never considered credible by the intelligence community.

After U.S. interrogators presented al-Libi with new evidence from other detainees that cast doubt on his claims, al-Libi recanted his story in January 2004.

Overview:

Despite intelligence community briefings contesting the credibility of this claim, in the months leading up to war senior Bush officials repeatedly cited this unconfirmed account as fact. Not once did Bush officials mention that there were doubts within the intelligence community about this veracity of this claim.



January 4, 2002

NBC Nightly News reports that Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, an al-Qaeda paramilitary trainer in Afghanistan, has been captured by U.S. forces [\[link to source\]](#)

"The U.S. military is also taking custody of more prisoners, now 273. NBC News has learned that one of them is a top al-Qaeda official, Ibn Al-Shaykh al-Libi, who was in charge of military training at bin Laden's terrorist camps and could provide valuable information about how the terrorists were trained and what other American targets they intend to attack."

A Mechanism for War

Rhetoric and Spin

War Through Rose-Colored Glasses

Abuses and Misuses of Intelligence

A Mythic Reality

Items of Note

Bush Administration Claims vs. The Facts

No weapons of mass destruction found

No mobile biological weapons labs

Iraq did not seek to acquire yellowcake uranium

Aluminum tubes not for nuclear weapons

Mohamed Atta did not meet with Iraqis

● Iraq did not provide training to al-Qaeda

No collaboration between Iraq and al-Qaeda

Iraq was not involved in the attacks of 9/11

The Costs of War

February 22, 2002 [reported at a later date]

From the Defense Intelligence Agency's *Defense Intelligence Terrorism Summary* (DITSUM No. 044-02, issued on February 22, 2002; declassified and made public on November 18, 2005 by Congress)

SSCI "Phaseiiaccuracy.pdf" (page 77) [\[link to source\]](#)

Report S.Rep. 109-331 [\[link to source\]](#)



"This is the first report from Ibn al-Shaykh in which he claims Iraq assisted al-Qaida's CBRN [chemical, biological, radiological & nuclear] efforts. However, he lacks specific details on the Iraqis involved, the CBRN materials associated with the assistance, and the location where training occurred. **It is possible he does not know any further details; it is more likely this individual is intentionally misleading the debriefers.** Ibn al-Shaykh has been undergoing debriefs for several weeks and may be describing scenarios to the debriefers that he knows will retain their interest.

"Saddam's regime is intensely secular and is wary of Islamic revolutionary movements. Moreover, Baghdad is unlikely to provide assistance to a group it cannot control."

June 21, 2002 [reported at a later date]

A CIA report, titled *Iraq and al-Qa'ida: Interpreting a Murky Relationship* (issued on June 21, 2002 and publicly declassified on April 15, 2005 by Congress) states [\[link to source\]](#)

"In the past several years, Iraq reportedly has provided specialized training to al-Qa'ida in explosives and assistance to the group's chemical and biological weapons program, although the level and extent of this assistance is not clear...

"Our knowledge of Iraqi links to Al-Qa'ida still contains many critical gaps because of limited reporting [deleted] and the questionable reliability of many of our sources...

"Some analysts concur with the assessment that intelligence reporting provides 'no conclusive evidence of cooperation on specific terrorist operations'... These analysts would contend that mistrust and conflicting ideologies and goals probably tempered these contacts and severely limited the opportunities for cooperation."

September 25, 2002

National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice appears on PBS' *News Hour* and states [\[link to source\]](#)

"We know too that several of the (al Qaeda) detainees, in particular, some high-ranking detainees, have said that Iraq provided some training to al Qaeda in chemical weapons development."



September 26, 2002

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld holds a Department of Defense news briefing [\[link to source\]](#)

"We have what we consider to be very reliable reporting of senior level contacts going back a decade, and of possible chemical and biological agent training. And when I say contacts, I mean between Iraq and al Qaeda... We do have- I believe it's one report indicating that Iraq provided unspecified training relating to chemical and/or biological matters for al Qaeda members."

October 7, 2002

President George W. Bush outlines the Iraqi threat in Cincinnati [\[link to source\]](#)

"We've learned that Iraq has trained al Qaeda members in bomb-making and poisons and deadly gases."



November 4, 2002

Remarks by President George W. Bush at the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport [\[link to source\]](#)

" [Hussein's] had contacts with al Qaeda. Imagine a scenario where an al Qaeda-type organization uses Iraq as an arsenal, a place to get weapons, a place to be trained to use the weapons."

January 2003 [\[reported at a later date\]](#)

From a CIA statement (declassified by Congress in October 2005) [\[link to source\]](#)



"In January 2003, the CIA produced an updated version of the report 'Iraqi Support for Terrorism.' That report cited the [al-Libi] claims that al-Qa'ida sent operatives to Iraq to acquire chemical and biological weapons and related training but noted the detainee was not in a position to know if any training had taken place."

February 5, 2003

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice on CNN's *Larry King Live* [\[link to source\]](#)

"There is no question in my mind about the al Qaeda connection. And what emerges is a picture of a Saddam Hussein who ... began to give them assistance in chemical and biological weapons, something that they were having trouble achieving on their own..."

February 5, 2003

Secretary of State Colin Powell addresses the United Nations Security Council [\[link to source\]](#)

"I can trace the story of a senior terrorist operative [Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi] telling how Iraq provided training in these weapons to al-Qaida. ... The support that this detainee describes included Iraq offering chemical or biological weapons training for two al-Qaida associates beginning in December 2000. He says that a militant known as Abdallah al-Iraqi had been sent to Iraq several times between 1997 and 2000 for help in acquiring poisons and gasses. Abdallah al-Iraqi characterized the relationship he forged with Iraqi officials as successful."



February 6, 2003

President George W. Bush gives a statement in the White House Roosevelt Room [\[link to source\]](#)

"Iraq has also provided al Qaeda with chemical and biological weapons training."

March 9, 2003

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice on CBS News' *Face the Nation* [\[link to source\]](#)

"We know from a detainee that – the head of training for al-Qaida – that they sought help in developing chemical and biological weapons because they weren't doing very well on their own. They sought it in Iraq. They received the help."

March 19, 2003

The United States launches military strikes, commencing the Iraq war.



June 22, 2003

The *Washington Post* reports [\[link to source\]](#)

"The National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq, which represented the consensus of the U.S. intelligence community, contained cautionary language about Iraq's connections with al Qaeda and warnings about the reliability of conflicting reports by Iraqi defectors and captured al Qaeda members about the ties, the sources said.

"There has always been an internal argument within the intelligence community about the connections between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda," said a senior intelligence official, who, like others interviewed for this article, spoke on condition of anonymity. "The NIE had alternative views..."

"Bush, in his speech in Cincinnati on Oct. 7, made his case that Iraq had ties with al Qaeda, by mentioning several items such as high-level contacts that 'go back a decade.' He said 'we've learned' that Iraq trained al Qaeda members 'in bomb-making and poisons and deadly gases.' **Although the president offered essentially circumstantial evidence, his remarks contained none of the caveats about the reliability of this information as contained in the national intelligence document, sources said.**

"The presidential address crystallized the assertion that had been made by senior administration officials for months

that the combination of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons and a terrorist organization, such as al Qaeda, committed to attacking the United States posed a grave and imminent threat. Within four days, the House and Senate overwhelmingly endorsed a resolution granting the president authority to go to war."

September 14, 2003

Vice President Dick Cheney is interviewed on NBC News' *Meet The Press* [\[link to source\]](#)

"We learned more and more that there was a relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda that stretched back through most of the decade of the '90s, that it involved training, for example, on BW [biological weapons] and CW [chemical weapons], that al-Qaeda sent personnel to Baghdad to get trained on the systems that are involved. The Iraqis providing bomb-making expertise and advice to the al-Qaeda organization."



October 10, 2003

Vice President Dick Cheney addresses the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C. [\[link to source\]](#)

"[Hussein] also had an established relationship with al Qaeda, providing training to al Qaeda members in the areas of poisons, gases, making conventional bombs."

January 2004 [\[reported at a later date\]](#)

Newsweek's Michael Isikoff reports on July 5, 2004 that, in January 2004, Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi recanted his earlier claims that Iraq provided biological and chemical weapons training to al-Qaeda [\[link to source\]](#)

"A captured Qaeda commander who was a principal source for Bush administration claims that Osama bin Laden collaborated with Saddam Hussein's regime has changed his story... The apparent recantation of Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, a onetime member of bin Laden's inner circle, has never been publicly acknowledged. But U.S. intelligence officials tell NEWSWEEK that al-Libi was a crucial source for one of the more dramatic assertions made by President George W. Bush and his top aides: that Iraq had provided training in 'poisons and deadly gases' for Al Qaeda... Although he never mentioned his name, Secretary of State Colin Powell prominently referred to al-Libi's claims in his February 2003 speech to the United Nations..."

"But more recently, sources said, U.S. interrogators went back to al-Libi with new evidence from other detainees that cast doubt on his claims. Al-Libi 'subsequently recounted a different story,' said one U.S. official. 'It's not clear which version is correct. We are still sorting this out.' Some officials now suspect that al-Libi, facing aggressive interrogation techniques, had previously said what U.S. officials wanted to hear. In any case, the cloud over his story explains why administration officials have made no mention of the 'poisons and gases' claim for some time and did not more forcefully challenge the recent findings of the 9-11 Commission that Al Qaeda and Iraq had not forged a 'collaborative relationship.'"

February 14, 2004 [\[reported at a later date\]](#)

The *New York Times* reports on July 31, 2004 that Mr. Libi's reversal was reported to senior administration officials in an intelligence document that was circulated on February 14, 2004 [\[link to source\]](#)

"... Intelligence officials said Mr. Libi had backed away from many of his earlier claims after American interrogators presented him with conflicting information..."

"Mr. Libi's reversal was reported to senior administration officials in an intelligence document that was circulated on Feb. 14, 2004, the intelligence officials said."

December 9, 2005

The *New York Times* reports [\[link to source\]](#)

"The Bush administration based a crucial prewar assertion about ties between Iraq and Al Qaeda on detailed statements made by a prisoner while in Egyptian custody who later said he had fabricated them to escape harsh treatment, according to current and former government officials."

The New York Times

"The Bush administration used Mr. Libi's accounts as the basis for its prewar claims, now discredited, that ties between Iraq and Al Qaeda included training in explosives and chemical weapons."

"The fact that Mr. Libi recanted after the American invasion of Iraq and that intelligence based on his remarks was

withdrawn by the C.I.A. in March 2004 has been public for more than a year. But American officials had not previously acknowledged either that Mr. Libi made the false statements in foreign custody or that Mr. Libi contended that his statements had been coerced.”

September 8, 2006

**From Phase II of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence’s Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community’s Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq: SSCI pages 79-82 [\[link to source\]](#)
Report S.Rep. 109-331 [\[link to source\]](#)**



“Al-Libi claimed that he fabricated ‘all information regarding al-Qa’ida sending representatives to Iraq to try to obtain WMD assistance.’ Al-Libi claimed that to the best of his knowledge al-Qa’ida never sent any individuals into Iraq for any kind of support in chemical or biological weapons, as he had claimed previously...

“...He claimed he ‘decided he would fabricate any information the interrogators wanted in order to gain better treatment and avoid being handed over to a [foreign government]...

“The other reports of possible al-Qa’ida CBW training from Iraq were never considered credible by the Intelligence Community. No other information has been uncovered in Iraq or from detainees that confirms this reporting.”

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