

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

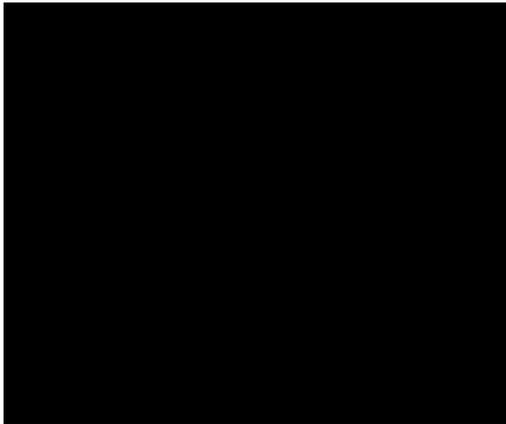
A Mechanism for War

Manufacturing a Problem

A Threat to America and the Peace of the World

Senior Bush officials characterized Saddam Hussein's military ambitions as intending to "do in" the U.S. and to "wipe out our way of life." Using alarming language and hyperbole, they portrayed Iraq as a grave threat to world peace.

Video: A DANGEROUS THREAT



Specifically, the Bush administration claimed that:

- Iraq was actively trying to develop **nuclear weapons**.
- Hussein would not hesitate to use Iraqi caches of **biological and chemical weapons** against the U.S.
- Hussein had collaborative **ties to al-Qaeda**, with whom he could share weapons of mass destruction.

Bush said, "The Iraqi dictator must not be permitted to threaten America and the world with horrible poisons, and diseases, and gases, and atomic weapons."

In truth, Iraq, with its severely diminished military and no WMD, was not a threat to the U.S. or the world. Moreover, Iraq had no collaborative relationship with al-Qaeda.

• **Nuclear Weapons**

Video: NUCLEAR WEAPONS

A Mechanism for War

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Items of Note

Bush Administration Claims vs. The Facts

BUSH: There's no doubt in my mind he wants to have a nuclear weapon, and he's got some capacity.

RICE: ...There will always be some uncertainty about how quickly he can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.

Despite numerous claims by the Bush administration, no evidence of nuclear weapons or active nuclear weapons programs were found in Iraq.

[link to section: [Iraq did not seek to acquire yellowcake uranium from Africa](#)]
[link to section: [The aluminum tubes were not suitable for nuclear weapons development](#)]

- ***Biological and Chemical Weapons***

Video: BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL WEAPONS

BUSH: The United Nations concluded in 1999 that Saddam Hussein had biological weapons sufficient to produce over 25,000 liters of anthrax, enough doses to kill several million people... The United Nations concluded that Saddam Hussein had materials sufficient to produce more than 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin, enough to subject millions of people to death by respiratory failure... Our intelligence officials estimate that Saddam Hussein had the materials to produce as much as 500 tons of sarin, mustard, and VX nerve agent.

In this excerpt from his 2003 State of the Union address, Bush gives specific details (25,000 liters of anthrax, 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin) to lend veracity to everything he is saying, even though he is telling a half-truth: Hussein had in fact developed these weapons prior to the first Gulf War (1990-1991), but his weapons production capability and nearly all of these weapons had been destroyed prior to 1999 by U.N. weapons inspectors (according to the [final report of the Iraq Survey Group](#)), and what few weapons that may have remained would have degraded to "harmless goo" by 2003, 11 years after the Gulf War.

Despite the lists detailing vast quantities of alleged biological and chemical weapons, [no such weapons were ever found in Iraq](#).

- **Ties to al-Qaeda**

Video: TIES TO AL-QAEDA

BUSH: The danger is, is that al-Qaeda becomes an extension of Saddam's madness and his hatred, and his capacity to extend weapons of mass destruction around the world.

Iraq had no collaborative ties to al-Qaeda. Moreover, the suggestion that Hussein could extend WMD *around the world* using terrorist organizations is completely unfounded, since he did not have any WMDs to provide to anyone.

BUSH: It's a man who has got connections with al-Qaeda. Imagine a terrorist network with Iraq as an arsenal and as a training ground. So that a Saddam Hussein could use his shadowy group of people to attack his enemy and leave no fingerprint behind.

That Saddam Hussein would work with al-Qaeda is highly questionable. As Brent Scowcroft, former National Security Advisor (1989–1993) under President George H. W. Bush, wrote: "Saddam's goals have little in common with the terrorists who threaten us, and there is little incentive for him to make common cause with them." (*Wall Street Journal*, Op-Ed "Don't Attack Saddam," 8/15/2002)

A Grave and Growing Danger

Bush officials emphasized the urgency of the Iraq situation, heightening the sense of fear in the U.S. public and creating the need to act quickly.

President Bush said that "peril draws closer and closer," suggesting that the threat from Iraq was imminent and building in momentum, and that America needed to defend itself.

While the U.S. pushed towards military action, most of the world, including the majority of the U.N. Security Council, wanted to allow U.N. weapons inspectors sufficient time to finish their work. But Bush officials argued that America could not afford to wait any longer – the danger was growing and time was running out.

Despite what the Bush administration claimed, the threat from Iraq was neither grave nor growing. In fact, it is almost certain that nothing was happening in Iraq that had any consequence to the security of the United States.

Video: A GRAVE AND GROWING DANGER

BUSH: By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose **a grave and growing danger**.

RICE: There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein's regime is a danger to the United States and to its allies, to our interests. It is also a **danger that is gathering momentum**. And it simply makes **no sense to wait any longer** to do something about the threat that is posed here. As the President has said, the one option that we do not have is to do nothing.

BUSH: In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic. We'll be deliberate, **yet time is not on our side. I will not wait on events while dangers gather**. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons.

BUSH: 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.

Fear Stories

The Bush administration concocted imaginary tales of terror and exploited the nation's feelings of vulnerability. After 9/11, they cast 'terrorism' as the new universal threat – calling their response the 'War on Terror' – and focused on Iraq as central to this global war.

Bush officials amplified and distorted the potential danger from Iraq in order to frighten the American people into supporting military action. They asserted that Hussein had a "list of governments he'd like to do in" – and that the U.S. was on the top of that list. They described unmanned aerial vehicles filled with horrible poisons or lethal biological agents that could be launched off the coast of the U.S. to attack hundreds of miles inland. They stated as fact that the "Iraqi regime could launch a biological or chemical attack in as little as 45 minutes."

These fanciful stories helped cultivate a persistent state of fear and paranoia throughout the nation, becoming an integral part of the Bush administration's efforts to build support for its war of aggression.

- ***Imagine Those 19 Hijackers***

Video: IMAGINE THOSE HIJACKERS...

BUSH: Imagine those 19 hijackers with other weapons and other plans, this time armed by Saddam Hussein. Take one vial, one canister, one crate, slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known.

This is a hypothetical fear story meant to evoke a horror worse than 9/11. Moreover, the story implies a relationship between Saddam Hussein and the 9/11 attacks. In fact, Hussein was not involved in the planning or implementation of the 9/11 attacks. He had no collaborative relationship with al-Qaeda. And, in any case, he did not possess any WMD for such an act of war.

- ***Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs)***

Video: UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES

BUSH: Iraq has developed spray devices that could be used on unmanned aerial vehicles [UAVs], with ranges far beyond what is permitted by the Security Council. A UAV launched from a vessel off the American coast could reach hundreds of miles inland.

This scenario is a frightening one, but it is highly speculative to suggest that Iraq would send a ship, along with a UAV, 7000 miles across the oceans to attack the U.S.

More fundamentally, the U.S. Air Force (USAF), which according to the Senate Intelligence Committee was “the agency with primary responsibility for technical analysis of UAV programs, [“disputed that Iraq’s UAVs were being developed to deliver chemical or biological weapons \(CBW\).](#)”

In an official dissent in the classified 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), the USAF said [“Iraq is developing UAVs primarily for reconnaissance rather than delivery platforms for CBW agents.”](#) The analysts did not believe the UAVs posed a threat to the United States or Iraq’s neighbors. And days before the March 19 attack on Iraq, the CIA advised that there was [“no indication that Baghdad \[was\] planning to use WMD-armed UAVs against the U.S. mainland.”](#)

[Postwar evidence uncovered by the Iraq Survey Group confirms these assessments.](#)

- **6 Months Away**

Video: SIX MONTHS

BUSH: I would remind you that when the inspectors first went into Iraq and were finally denied access [in 1998], 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.

Suggesting that Iraq was only 6 months away from a nuclear weapon was meant to provoke fear.

This story was untrue: after this statement was made, the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) issued a statement saying that this 1998 report cited by Bush does not exist. ["There's never been a report like that issued from this agency,"](#) Mark Gwozdecky, the IAEA's chief spokesman, told the *Washington Times*. He continued, "I don't know where they have determined that Iraq has retained this much weaponization capability because when we left in December '98 we had concluded that we had neutralized their nuclear-weapons program. We had confiscated their fissile material. We had destroyed all their key buildings and equipment."

Furthermore, in 1998, after inspectors left Iraq, [IAEA Director-General Mohammed ElBaradei laid out a case contradicting](#) President Bush's "they were six months away" declaration:

"The verification activities have revealed no indications that Iraq had achieved its programme objective of producing nuclear weapons or that Iraq had produced more than a few grams of weapon-usable nuclear material or had clandestinely acquired such material. Furthermore, there are no indications that there remains in Iraq any physical capability for the production of weapon-usable nuclear material of any practical significance. "

- **An Attack in 45 Minutes**

Video: 45 MINUTES

BUSH: According to the British government, the Iraqi regime could launch a biological or chemical attack in as little as 45 minutes, after the order were given.

Earlier, Bush made the false claim that Iraq was 6 months away from developing a nuclear weapon. Now citing biological and chemical weapons, he ratchets up the urgency from 6 months to *45 minutes* to present an even more immediate threat.

This claim was based on hearsay from a ["single anonymous uncorroboated source."](#) In his assertion, Bush ["ignored the fact that U.S. intelligence mistrusted the source,"](#) and thus "the claim never appeared in the October 2002 U.S. [National Intelligence] estimate." Since U.S. intelligence agencies doubted this claim, Bush attributes this information to the British government.

Moreover, Iraq did not even possess any biological or chemical WMD.

- **"Nuclear Holy Warriors"**

Video: NUCLEAR HOLY WARRIORS

BUSH: Saddam Hussein has held numerous meetings with Iraqi nuclear scientists, a group he calls his "Nuclear Mujahadin," his nuclear holy warriors.

The use of the term 'Nuclear Mujahadin' fuses two chilling fears: nuclear weapons and terrorism.

[Dr. Glen Rangwala of Cambridge University observed](#) that Bush's quote and translation of "Nuclear Mujahadin" was erroneous: Bush took Hussein's speech about nuclear *energy* and transformed it into a speech about nuclear *weapons*, portraying Hussein as a radical terrorist threat.

"The last part of the excerpt from President Bush's speech of 7 October 2002 contains a misquote, and a mistranslation... Saddam Hussein actually refers to 'nuclear energy mujahidin', and doesn't mention the development of weaponry.

"In addition, the term 'mujahidin' is often used in a non-combatant sense, to mean anyone who struggles for a cause. Saddam Hussein, for example, often refers to the mujahidin developing Iraq's medical facilities. There is nothing in the speech to indicate that Iraq is attempting to develop or threaten the use of nuclear weapons."

- **The Very Weapons He Says He Does Not Have**

Video: FIELD COMMANDERS

BUSH: And we have sources that tell us that Saddam Hussein recently authorized Iraqi field commanders to use chemical weapons, the very weapons the dictator tells the world he does not have.

The source of this story is unknown, and it is difficult to understand where it came from, since Iraq had no chemical weapons (or any other WMD).

- **Threat Alert**

Video: THREAT ALERT

A heightened alert was announced on February 7, 2003 (and kept in effect for 20 days), just weeks before the start of the war:

JOHN ASHCROFT: After conferring this morning with the Homeland Security Council, the decision has been made to increase the threat condition designation currently classified at "elevated risk," to increase that threat condition designation to the "high risk" category. This decision for an increased threat condition designation is based on specific intelligence received and analyzed by the full intelligence community.

After the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration created the 'National Threat Advisory,' a system of color-coded threat levels warning of the likelihood of a terrorist attack. Periodically, the government would elevate the threat level, creating fear and anxiety in the American people.

Some have argued that the evidence to justify raising the threat level was often flimsy. [Tom Ridge, former Secretary of Homeland Security, said:](#)

"More often than not, we were the least inclined to raise it [the threat level]. Sometimes we disagreed with the intelligence assessment. Sometimes we thought even if the intelligence was good, you don't necessarily put the country on (alert). ... There were times when some people were really aggressive about raising it, and we said, 'For that'"



- **Blackmail**

Video: BLACKMAIL

BUSH: Failure to act would embolden other tyrants, allow terrorists access to new weapons and new resources, and make *blackmail* a permanent feature of world events.

CHENEY: Saddam Hussein could then be expected to seek domination of the entire Middle East... and subject the United States or any other nation to nuclear *blackmail*.

The Bush administration claimed that Iraq's possession of WMDs could be used to blackmail the United States – forcing the U.S. to compromise its national interests.

Since the United States has the most powerful military in the world, the Bush administration could not reasonably promote a fear of military defeat from a third-rate military power such as Iraq. However, they *could* tap into the fear of blackmail, whereby the most powerful can be rendered helpless by the weak.

But as political scholars [John Mearsheimer \(University of Chicago\)](#) and [Stephen M. Walt \(Harvard University\)](#) explain:

“. . . Mr. Hussein cannot blackmail us. Nuclear blackmail works only if the blackmailer's threat might actually be carried out. But if the intended target can retaliate in kind, carrying out the threat causes the blackmailer's own destruction. This is why the Soviet Union, which was far stronger than Iraq and led by men of equal ruthlessness, never tried blackmailing the United States.”

Demonization

Governments commonly demonize their enemies when they prepare their people for war.

The United States – which had supported Saddam Hussein during Iraq's war with Iran in the 1980's – vilified him after he invaded Kuwait (leading to the Gulf War of 1991). In 2002, Hussein was once again put forth as world enemy #1, eclipsing Osama bin Laden as the focus of American fear and anger.

Saddam Hussein was indeed a tyrant who did unspeakable things to his people, as well as to the people of Iran and Kuwait. The terrible truth is that there are many dictators around the world who have committed horrible crimes against their own citizens – some of whom are even supported by the U.S. By choosing to demonize Saddam Hussein, the U.S. was preparing the American people to support an invasion of Iraq.

In analyzing Bush officials' speeches, there are various ways that Hussein is demonized.

One is based on facts: the administration lists a horrifying array of things Hussein had done, such as gassing his own people – the Kurds.

Another is rhetorical, in which Hussein's character is attacked with embellished language. Bush called him “unbalanced,” “a homicidal dictator who is *addicted* to weapons of mass destruction,” “*a student of Stalin*, using murder as a tool of terror and control.”

The Bush administration painted a picture of a man with whom the U.S. would be foolish to negotiate. They cultivated a paranoid fear that Iraq was out to destroy the U.S., and in turn, suggested that Hussein had to be eliminated.

CHENEY: This is a man of great evil, as the President has said.

BUSH: On Saddam Hussein's orders, opponents have been decapitated. Wives and mothers of political opponents have been systematically raped as a method of intimidation. And political prisoners have been forced to watch their own children being tortured.

CHENEY: Armed with an arsenal of these weapons of terror and seated atop 10% of the world's oil reserves, Saddam Hussein could then be expected to seek domination of the entire Middle East and subject the United States or any other nation to nuclear blackmail.

POWELL: Saddam Hussein has investigated dozens of biological agents, causing diseases such as gas gangrene, plague, typhus, tetanus, cholera, camel pox, and hemorrhagic fever.

[continue to the next section: [Dismissing Other Policy Options](#)]

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