

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

## A Mythic Reality

*"Lurking beneath the surface of every society, including ours, is the passionate yearning for a nationalist cause that exalts us, the kind that war alone is able to deliver.' When war psychology takes hold, the public believes, temporarily, in a 'mythic reality' in which our nation is purely good, our enemies are purely evil, and anyone who isn't our ally is our enemy."*

- *New York Times*, Op-Ed by Paul Krugman, quoting Chris Hedges, Sept. 7, 2004

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## Through a Looking Glass: *The Bush Administration's Mythic Reality*

The Bush administration developed and promoted a "mythic reality" to help persuade the American people to support an invasion of Iraq. The *New York Times* reported that a senior Bush adviser belittled the "reality-based community," asserting that "we're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality."

### The Bush administration's **mythic reality** declared:

➔ Saddam Hussein is a growing threat who needs to be dealt with urgently. He is evil and he intends to do us grave harm. He has weapons of mass destruction and is building more. He has ties to al-Qaeda and could provide them, or other terrorist organizations, with weapons of mass destruction. He may have been connected with the 9/11 attacks. The United States is in danger.

There are no viable options aside from war, or Hussein's abandoning power under imminent threat of war. Inspections can't work. Containment can't work. Diplomacy can't work.

War is our last option. The choice to go to war rests in the hands of Saddam Hussein.

If the United States is forced to go to war, the outcome will be bright. The war will not be difficult since Iraq's military capacity is degraded from the Persian Gulf War and 10 years of sanctions. The war will be inexpensive, and the reconstruction costs will be largely paid from Iraqi oil revenues. We will be treated as liberators by the Iraqi people. The war will result in the spread of peace and freedom.

### The **actual reality** was:

➔ There was no urgent or grave threat from Iraq. Hussein was indeed a vicious, tyrannical dictator – however, containment, including 7 1/2 years of U.N. weapons inspections and a decade of sanctions, had been effective: Hussein did not have any weapons of mass destruction nor any active WMD programs. Hussein had no collaborative relationship with al-Qaeda, and he was not connected to the 9/11 attacks. In the first Gulf War, the Iraqi army was severely weakened, and by 2003 it was operating at 40% of Gulf War troop strength. As a result, Iraq was in no position to wage an offensive war with its neighbors, let alone the United States.

Inspections had worked. Containment had worked. Diplomacy and pressure from the international community had worked. Any serious threat from Iraq had been neutralized.

War was not Hussein's choice; war was actively pursued by the U.S. and Great Britain.

The Bush administration failed to adequately plan for the security of post-war Iraq, as they did not take into account Iraq's long history of political strife and tensions between the Kurd, Sunni and Shiite populations. After the invasion, Iraq was ripped apart by an insurgency and violent civil strife. Over one hundred thousand Iraqis have been killed, and two million have fled the country. The Iraq War has cost the U.S. over \$500 billion to date (2008), fueled recruits for terrorist groups, and fostered greater instability in the Middle East.

## Challenges to the Bush Administration's Mythic Reality

A number of American and international political leaders, high-ranking U.S. military officers, journalists, academics and others understandably challenged this 'mythic reality.' Moreover, there was broad opposition to the war from many governments and peoples worldwide.

Here are examples of how the administration responded to these challenges.

### When confronted by questions of fact...

Video: INTRUSIONS OF REALITY

#### Challenges from the real world



- ***the military might be stretched too thin***

**BLITZER:** You saw the story in today's *USA Today* on the front page, suggesting that your military chiefs are not enthusiastic about going after Iraq right now, that the military might be stretched too thin already in Afghanistan.

- ***it will take several hundred thousand U.S. troops***

*From The Washington Post:*

#### Defending the mythic reality



**RUMSFELD:** I meet with those folks all the time. I have no reason to give credence to that.

*Two days later, on Feb. 27, 2003:*

General Eric Shinseki, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, testified on Feb. 25, 2003 before the Senate Armed Service Committee that "several hundred thousand soldiers" would be needed to secure postwar Iraq.



• **cooperation with inspectors seems to be good**

**REPORTER:** Mr. Secretary, they [the Iraqis] seem to be doing what is being asked of them by inspectors.

And by that, Kofi Annan says cooperation seems to be good. Why is cooperation not good?

**REPORTER:** They're letting people in.

• **a sloppiness with evidence**

**RUSSET:** ...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?

• **outside estimates say up to \$300 billion**

**STEPHANOPOULOS:** Outside estimates say up to \$300 billion.

• **not backed up by hard facts**

*From a speech by former U.N. weapons inspector Scott Ritter:*

**RITTER:** The rhetoric of fear that is disseminated by my government and others has not, to date, been backed up by hard facts that substantiate any allegations that Iraq is, today, in possession of



**WOLFOWITZ:** Some of the higher end predictions that we have been hearing recently, such as the notion that it will take several hundred thousand U.S. troops to provide stability in post-Saddam Iraq, are wildly off the mark.

**RUMSFELD:** You'd have to ask the President.

**RUMSFELD:** Maybe he's looking at intelligence that somebody else isn't seeing. I don't know.

**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.

**RUMSFELD:** The Office of Management and Budget estimated [the war] would be something under \$50 billion dollars.

**RUMSFELD:** Baloney.

*Reacting to a videotape of Ritter's speech:*

**POWELL:** We have facts, not speculation. Scott is certainly entitled to his opinion. But I'm afraid that I would not place the security of my nation and the

weapons of mass destruction or has links to terror groups responsible for attacking the United States.

- ***Iraq has no weapons of mass destruction***

**REPORTER:** Mr. Secretary, what do you make of the statement made by the Iraqi government yesterday that Iraq has no weapons of mass destruction, and is not developing any?

- ***a pretext to try to topple the regime***

**REPORTER:** Tariq Aziz said this morning -- he characterized you and several other people in the Bush administration as "warmongers," as using the issue of inspections as a pretext to try to topple the regime. And he said he *is* willing to sit down and talk about all of the issues involving Iraq.

security of our friends in the region on that kind of an assertion by somebody who is not in the intelligence chain any longer.

**RUMSFELD:** They're lying... Next?

**RUMSFELD:** Well, I've met with Tariq Aziz a number of times, both in Baghdad and in Washington and elsewhere. And clearly, he does the bidding of his master, Saddam Hussein. They have, over a good many years, demonstrated wonderful talent and skill at manipulating the media, and international organizations in other countries. When it's the right moment to lean forward, they lean forward. When it's the right moment to lean back, they lean back. And it's a dance, it's a dance they engage in.

**When confronted with broad opposition to the war...**

**Video: BROAD OPPOSITION**

**Challenge**



**Response**



**BOB SCHIEFFER:** Yesterday, we saw tens of thousands of demonstrators converge on Washington. They say we should not go to war against Iraq. I would just like to ask you this morning, what do you say to those people?

**REPORTER:** One thing that has to factor in is the growing number of U.S. allies-- Russia, Germany, Bahrain, now Canada, who say that if you go to war with Saddam, you're going to go alone. Does the American military have the capability to prosecute this war alone?

**REPORTER:** But broad opposition remains all over the world to your policy. Will you continue to try and build support? If so, how will you do that? Or do you think the Security Council vote would be all the mandate you need?

**REPORTER:** In the past several weeks, your policy on Iraq has generated opposition from the governments of France, Russia, China, Germany, Turkey, the Arab League, and many other countries, opened a rift at NATO and at the U.N., and drawn millions of ordinary citizens around the world into the streets in anti-war protests. May I ask, what went wrong, that so many governments and peoples around the world, now not only disagree with you very strongly, but see the U.S. under your leadership as an arrogant power?

**POWELL:** What I would say to them is that the President is trying every means not to go to war. But the decision to go to war is in the hands of Saddam Hussein.

**PRESIDENT BUSH:** Are you asking about Iraq? The subject didn't come up in this meeting. But having said that, we take all threats seriously. And we will continue to consult with our friends and allies.

**PRESIDENT BUSH:** Yeah, first of all, you know, 'broad opposition around the world, not in support of my policy on Iraq?' Well, I think most people around the world realize that Saddam Hussein is a threat. And no one likes war, but they also don't like the idea of Saddam Hussein having a nuclear weapon.

**PRESIDENT BUSH:** I think you'll see, when it's all said and done, if we have to use force, a lot of nations will be with us. Iraq will serve as a catalyst for change, a positive change. So there's a lot more at stake than just American security and the security of people close by Saddam Hussein. Freedom is at stake, as well. And I take that very seriously.

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