

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

Rhetoric and Spin

Spinning Agreement Where There's Disagreement



In March 2002, Vice President Cheney visited allies in the Middle East to seek support for military action against Iraq in order to remove Saddam Hussein from power. However, Arab leaders publicly expressed strong opposition to such a policy. Long-time friend and ally of the U.S., King Abdullah of Jordan said, "[To attack Baghdad now would be a disaster.](#)"

When confronted by journalists, Bush officials reframed Arab opposition to give the impression that Arab leaders were in agreement with Bush's policy of military action – when in fact such support was lacking.

Three techniques were used to respond to journalists' questions about Arab opposition:

- "Private meetings need to stay confidential"
- Arab leaders were reluctant to speak openly
- re-characterizing Arab *opposition* as "concern"

"Private meetings need to stay confidential"

Video: SPINNING WITH CONFIDENTIALITY

TIM RUSSERT: The Arab League announced today that at their meeting on Wednesday they will say the United States should *not* preemptively attack Iraq to take out any weapons of mass destruction. Reports from your trip around the Middle East that Arab country after Arab country said to you, "Don't do that, Mr. Vice President. Don't you dare attack Iraq."

CHENEY: That's not the way that I would describe, first of all, their opinions. I had **private confidential meetings** at

A Mechanism for War

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nearly every stop. And those meetings, obviously, **were and need to remain confidential.**

Cheney spins opposition into *support* by suggesting that Arab leaders told him a different story in "private, confidential" meetings.

Arab leaders were reluctant to speak openly

Video: SPINNING AS RELUCTANT

JIM LEHRER: Vice President Cheney came back from his trip. He said that many Arab leaders could share the concern about weapons of mass destruction, but did not share the U.S. desire to get rid of Saddam Hussein, said it would cause instability in the region. How do you read that?

DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE PAUL WOLFOWITZ: I would not expect Saddam's neighbors to be the first people to raise their hands to say, "You've got to take tough action against them." I think they look to the United States to lead, and I think the President is leading very clearly.

Wolfowitz is hinting that Arab leaders are reluctant to say publicly that they support U.S. military action against Iraq.

Re-characterizing Arab opposition as "concern"

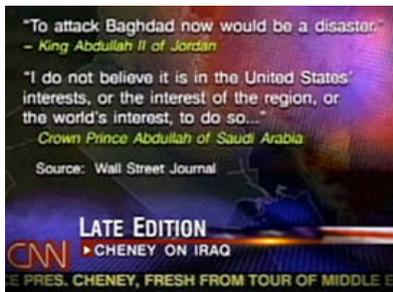
Cheney repeatedly uses the word "concern" to deflect questions and to recharacterize what the Arab leaders are actually saying. He gives the false impression that there is support for U.S. policy by saying that leaders "share our concern" about Iraq.

The Arab states may well have been "concerned," but they also knew the culture and the politics of the region better than the U.S., and they strongly opposed a preemptive war.

Video: SPINNING WITH "CONCERN"

TIM RUSSERT: ...Arab country after Arab country said to you, "Don't do that, Mr. Vice President. Don't you dare attack Iraq."

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: That's not the way that I would describe, first of all, their opinions... They're all very **concerned** about Iraq. They live in the neighborhood. They know Saddam Hussein better than we do. Many of them know that right after us, they're high on his list of governments he'd like to do in.



BOB SCHIEFFER: Did you leave that region feeling that Arab leaders would basically oppose an American action against Saddam Hussein?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: No, not at all. What I came away with, Bob, is the sense that they share our **concerns**.

SCHIEFFER: I ask that because the public reaction was, if one just read what those leaders said in public, it was "We're unified against any kind of action against Saddam Hussein." Is that a correct interpretation of the public reactions?

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: It was mixed, I think, in terms of their public reactions...

WOLF BLITZER: On your most recent trip to the region, most of the moderate Arab leaders with whom you met were not very enthusiastic about a U.S. strike against Iraq. King Abdullah of Jordan said, "To attack Baghdad now would be a disaster." Crown Prince Abdullah said, "I do not believe it is in the United States' interest, or the interest of the region or the world's interest, to do so."

VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY: What I would say is that our friends in the region are equally **concerned** about the problems we see in Iraq, specifically the development of weapons of mass destruction by Saddam Hussein.

This is a man of great evil, as the President has said. And he is actively pursuing nuclear weapons at this time. And we think that's cause for **concern** for us and for everybody in the region. And I found, during the course of my travels, that it is, indeed, a problem of great **concern**.

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