

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

Bush Administration Claims vs. The Facts

Iraq did not seek to acquire yellowcake uranium from Africa

Pre-War Claims:

President Bush asserted in his 2003 State of the Union address that Iraq sought to purchase yellowcake uranium – fissile material that is a key ingredient in producing a nuclear weapon – from Africa. This claim relied on documents provided to the U.S. embassy in Italy, allegedly documenting Niger’s intentions to sell up to 500 tons of yellowcake uranium to Saddam Hussein.

Facts:

The Bush claim was false, as the Italy/Niger documents were proven to be forgeries even before the war began. The documents were filled with glaring errors: one letter, dated October 10, 2000, bore the signature of a Foreign Affairs Minister who had been out of office since 1989; another document contained the forged signature of Niger President Tandja Mamadou – a forgery so poor that it was clearly not that of Mamadou.

In addition, yellowcake uranium comes from two mines in Niger, both controlled by a French mining consortium that tightly controls the uranium from the time it is mined to the time it is loaded onto ships for transport overseas. As stated in the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence’s report on page 43, “It would be difficult, if not impossible, to arrange a special shipment of uranium to a pariah state, given these controls.”

There has been no evidence to show that Iraq sought uranium from abroad after 1991 or renewed indigenous production of uranium since the end of the first Gulf War.

Overview:

Despite repeated briefings from top CIA and other U.S. intelligence officials warning that the Italy/Niger documents were obvious forgeries, President Bush and his team chose to cite this faulty intelligence in his 2003 State of the Union address and elsewhere.

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



October 15, 2001 [reported at a later date]

From the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence’s Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community’s Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq (published on July 9, 2004) [link to source]

“...On October 15, 2001... The Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) Directorate of Operations (DO) issued an intelligence report... from a foreign government service indicating that Niger planned to ship several tons of uranium

to Iraq.”

November 20, 2001 [reported at a later date]

From the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence’s Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community’s Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq (published on July 9, 2004) [\[link to source\]](#)

“U.S. Embassy Niamey [the capital of Niger] disseminated a cable on a recent meeting between the ambassador and the Director General of Niger’s French-led consortium. The Director General said ‘there was no possibility’ that the government of Niger had diverted any of the 3,000 tons of yellowcake produced in its two uranium mines.”

February 24, 2002 [reported at a later date]

Marine Gen. Fulford meets in Niger with U.S. Ambassador Owens-Kirpatrick and Niger President Tandja, as reported later in the Washington Post on July 15, 2003 [\[link to source\]](#)

“A four-star general, who was asked to go to Niger last year to inquire about the security of Niger’s uranium, told The Washington Post yesterday that he came away convinced the country’s stocks were secure. The findings of Marine Gen. Carlton W. Fulford Jr. were passed up to Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff..

“Fulford said he came away ‘assured’ that the supply of ‘yellowcake’ was kept secure by a French consortium... ‘I was convinced it was not an issue,’ Fulford said...”

February 26, 2002 [reported at a later date]

At the behest of the CIA and State Department, Joseph Wilson, a U.S. diplomat who had served in various posts in Africa and had been the acting U.S. Ambassador to Iraq just prior to the first Gulf War, was sent to Niger to investigate (from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence’s Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community’s Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq, published on July 9, 2004) [\[link to source\]](#) [\[link to source\]](#)



“[Wilson] met with the former Nigerien Prime Minister, the former Minister of Mines and Energy, and other business contacts. At the end of his visit, he debriefed [U.S.] Ambassador [to Niger] Owens-Kirkpatrick... he had told both U.S. officials he thought there was ‘nothing to the story.’ Ambassador Owens-Kirkpatrick... recalled the former ambassador saying, ‘he had reached the same conclusions that the embassy had reached, that it was highly unlikely that anything was going on.’”

March 1, 2002 [reported at a later date]

From the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence’s Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community’s Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq (published on July 9, 2004) [\[link to source\]](#)

“On March 1, 2002, INR [State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research] published an intelligence assessment, *Niger: Sale of Uranium to Iraq Is Unlikely...* The assessment reiterated INR’s view that France controlled the uranium industry and ‘would take action to block a sale of the kind alleged in a CIA report of questionable credibility from a foreign government service.’”

March 8, 2002 [reported at a later date]

After CIA officers debriefed Joseph Wilson regarding his trip to Niger on March 5, the CIA issues a widely-distributed report based on Wilson’s verbal accounts (from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence’s Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community’s Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq, published on July 9, 2004) [\[link to source\]](#)

“The [CIA] intelligence report indicated that former Nigerien Prime Minister Ibrahim Mayaki was unaware of any contracts that had been signed between Niger and any rogue states for the sale of yellowcake while he was Prime Minister (1997–1999) or Foreign Minister (1996–1997). Mayaki said that if there had been any such contract during his tenure, he would have been aware of it.

“The intelligence report also said that Niger’s former Minister for Energy and Mines, Mai Manga, stated that there were no sales outside of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) channels since the mid-1980s.”



October 1, 2002 [\[reported at a later date\]](#)

The classified, 93-page [National Intelligence Estimate \(NIE\)](#) entitled *Iraq's Continuing Programs For Weapons of Mass Destruction* is published, claiming (from pages 52–23, [Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq](#), published on July 9, 2004) [\[link to source\]](#) [\[link to source\]](#)

"Iraq has about 500 metric tons of yellowcake and low-enriched uranium at Tuwaitha, which is inspected annually by the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency]..."

Also contained in this NIE is the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) dissenting opinion:

"The claims of Iraqi pursuit of natural uranium in Africa are, in INR's assessment, highly dubious."

October 6, 2002 [\[reported at a later date\]](#)

Claims of Iraq's alleged pursuit of uranium from Africa are removed from a presidential speech to be delivered on October 7 in Cincinnati, Ohio. (from the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq, published on July 9, 2004) [\[link to source\]](#)

"On October 4, 2002, the NSC [National Security Council] sent a draft of a speech they were preparing for the President to deliver in Cincinnati, Ohio..."

"Draft seven of the Cincinnati speech... contained the line, 'and the [Iraqi] regime has been caught attempting to purchase substantial amounts of uranium oxide from sources in Africa.' Draft seven was sent to CIA for coordination."



"The DCI [Director of Central Intelligence, George Tenet] called the Deputy National Security Advisor directly to outline the CIA's concerns. [Tenet] told the Deputy National Security Advisor that... the 'reporting was weak.' The NSC then removed the uranium reference from the draft of the speech."

"Later on October 6, 2002 the CIA sent a second fax to the White House which said, 'more on why we recommend removing the sentence about procuring uranium oxide from Africa: Three points (1) The evidence is weak. One of the two mines cited by the source as the location of the uranium oxide is flooded. The other mine cited by the source is under the control of the French authorities. (2) The procurement is not particularly significant to Iraq's nuclear ambitions because the Iraqis already have a large stock of uranium oxide in their inventory. And (3) we have shared points one and two with Congress, telling them that the Africa story is overblown and telling them this is one of the two issues where we differed with the British.'"

January 28, 2003

President George W. Bush delivers his State of the Union address [\[link to source\]](#)

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

Former U.S. State Department Chief of Staff, Colonel Lawrence B. Wilkerson testified before Congress on June 26, 2006 [\[reported at a later date\]](#)
[\[link to source\]](#)

"...The Vice President was using portions of the intelligence documents in ways that the documents themselves did not seem to support, or at least not strongly. Others in the administration were participating in this distortion. The most startling example was the President's State of the Union Address on January 28, 2003, which included the now infamous statement about uranium and Niger. The Secretary of State and I, and a host of others in the administration, knew that Iraq's alleged attempt to acquire uranium from Niger, as that attempt was then reported, was highly improbable."

February 1–4, 2003 [\[reported at a later date\]](#)

As reported in Newsweek (published on June 9, 2003) [\[link to source\]](#)

"George Tenet, the director of Central Intelligence, was frustrated. For four days and nights last winter, some of the most astute intelligence analysts in the U.S. government sat around Tenet's conference-room table in his wood-paneled office in Langley, Va., trying to prove that Saddam Hussein posed an imminent threat to America..."

"On Feb. 5, Secretary of State Colin Powell was scheduled to go to the United Nations and make the case that Saddam possessed an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. But the evidence was thin – sketchy and speculative, or uncorroborated, or just not credible..."

"A recently retired State Department intelligence analyst directly involved in assessing the Iraqi threat, Greg Thielmann, flatly told NEWSWEEK that inside the government, 'there is a lot of sorrow and anger at the way intelligence was misused. You get a strong impression that the administration didn't think the public – would be enthusiastic about the idea of war if you attached all those qualifiers.'

"... Presented with a 'script' by the White House national-security staff, Powell suspected that the hawks had been 'cherry-picking,' looking for any intel that supported their position and ignoring anything to the contrary.

"Powell ordered his aides to check out every fact...

"For four days and nights, Powell and Tenet, top aides and top analysts and, from time to time, Rice, pored over the evidence – and discarded much of it. Out went suggestions linking Saddam to 9/11. The bogus Niger documents were dumped."

March 7, 2003

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Mohamed ElBaradei delivers a speech to the United Nations Security Council [\[link to source\]](#)



"Based on thorough analysis, the IAEA has concluded with the concurrence of outside experts that **these documents which formed the basis for the report of recent uranium transaction between Iraq and Niger are in fact not authentic. We have therefore concluded that these specific allegations are unfounded.**"

"...Second, there is no indication that Iraq has attempted to import uranium since 1990."

March 14, 2003

David Ensor of CNN's Washington Bureau reports [\[link to source\]](#)



"Intelligence documents that U.S. and British governments said were strong evidence that Iraq was developing nuclear weapons have been dismissed as forgeries by U.N. weapons inspectors.

"The documents, given to International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Mohamed ElBaradei, indicated that Iraq might have tried to buy 500 tons of uranium from Niger, but the agency said they were 'obvious' fakes..."

"U.S. officials said that the assertion by the president and British government was also based on additional evidence of Iraqi efforts to obtain uranium from another African country. But officials would not say which nation and a knowledgeable U.S. official said that there was not much to that evidence either."

March 18, 2003

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



"As the Bush administration prepares to attack Iraq this week, it is doing so on the basis of a number of allegations against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein that have been challenged – and in some cases disproved – by the United Nations, European governments and even U.S. intelligence reports.

"Earlier this month, ElBaradei [Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency] said information about Iraqi efforts to buy uranium were based on fabricated documents. **Further investigation has found that top CIA officials had significant doubts about the veracity of the evidence, linking Iraq to efforts to purchase uranium for nuclear weapons from Niger, but the information ended up as fact in Bush's State of the Union address...**"

"Cheney on Sunday said ElBaradei was 'wrong' about Iraq's nuclear program and questioned the IAEA's credibility."

March 19, 2003

The U.S. launches military strikes, commencing the Iraq War.



March 23, 2003

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

"The recent disclosure that reports claiming Iraq tried to buy uranium from Niger were based partly on forged documents has renewed complaints among analysts at the C.I.A. about the way

intelligence related to Iraq has been handled, several intelligence officials said.

"Analysts at the agency said they had felt pressured to make their intelligence reports on Iraq conform to Bush administration policies."

March 31, 2003

Seymour M. Hersh reports in the *New Yorker* [\[link to source\]](#)

"On March 7th, Mohamed ElBaradei, the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, in Vienna, told the U.N. Security Council that the documents involving the Niger-Iraq uranium sale were fakes..."

"One senior I.A.E.A. official went further. He told me, 'These documents are so bad that I cannot imagine that they came from a serious intelligence agency. It depresses me, given the low quality of the documents, that it was not stopped. At the level it reached, I would have expected more checking.'

"The I.A.E.A. had first sought the documents last fall, shortly after the British government released its dossier. After months of pleading by the I.A.E.A., the United States turned them over to Jacques Baute, who is the director of the agency's Iraq Nuclear Verification Office.

"It took Baute's team only a few hours to determine that the documents were fake. The agency had been given about a half-dozen letters and other communications between officials in Niger and Iraq, many of them written on letterheads of the Niger government. The problems were glaring. One letter, dated October 10, 2000, was signed with the name of Allele Habibou, a Niger Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, who had been out of office since 1989. Another letter, allegedly from Tandja Mamadou, the President of Niger, had a signature that had obviously been faked and a text with inaccuracies so egregious, the senior I.A.E.A. official said, that 'they could be spotted by someone using Google on the Internet.'

"The large quantity of uranium involved should have been another warning sign. Niger's 'yellow cake' comes from two uranium mines controlled by a French company, with its entire output presold to nuclear power companies in France, Japan, and Spain. 'Five hundred tons can't be siphoned off without anyone noticing,' another I.A.E.A. official told me."

June 8, 2003

National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice on NBC News' *Meet The Press* [\[link to source\]](#)

"We did not know at the time – no one knew at the time in our circles – maybe someone knew down in the bowels of the agency, but no one in our circles knew that there were doubts and suspicions that this might be a forgery. Of course, it was information that was mistaken."



July 6, 2003

Former Ambassador Joseph Wilson writes an Op-Ed in the *New York Times* [\[link to source\]](#)

The New York Times

"Based on my experience with the administration in the months leading up to the war, I have little choice but to conclude that some of the intelligence related to Iraq's nuclear weapons program was twisted to exaggerate the Iraqi threat..."

"In February 2002, I was informed by officials at the Central Intelligence Agency that Vice President Dick Cheney's office had questions about a particular intelligence report. While I never saw the report, I was told that it referred to a memorandum of agreement that documented the sale of uranium yellowcake — a form of lightly processed ore — by Niger to Iraq in the late 1990's. The agency officials asked if I would travel to Niger to check out the story so they could provide a response to the vice president's office..."

"In late February 2002... I met with Ambassador Owens-Kirkpatrick at the embassy. For reasons that are understandable, the embassy staff has always kept a close eye on Niger's uranium business. I was not surprised, then, when the ambassador told me that she knew about the allegations of uranium sales to Iraq — and that she felt she had already debunked them in her reports to Washington. Nevertheless, she and I agreed that my time would be best spent interviewing people who had been in government when the deal supposedly took place, which was before her arrival.

"I spent the next eight days... meeting with dozens of people: current government officials, former government officials, people associated with the country's uranium business. It did not take long to conclude that it was highly doubtful that any such transaction had ever taken place..."

"Before I left Niger, I briefed the ambassador on my findings, which were consistent with her own. I also shared my conclusions with members of her staff. In early March, I arrived in Washington and promptly provided a detailed briefing to the C.I.A. I later shared my conclusions with the State Department African Affairs Bureau. There was nothing secret or earth-shattering in my report, just as there was nothing secret about my trip...

"I thought the Niger matter was settled... In September 2002, however, Niger re-emerged. The British government published a "white paper" asserting that Saddam Hussein and his unconventional arms posed an immediate danger. As evidence, the report cited Iraq's attempts to purchase uranium from an African country.

"Then, in January, President Bush, citing the British dossier, repeated the charges about Iraqi efforts to buy uranium from Africa."

July 9, 2003

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee [\[link to source\]](#)

SEN. MARK PRYOR (D-AR): ... Secretary Rumsfeld, when did YOU know that the reports about uranium coming out of Africa were bogus?

SEC. RUMSFELD: Oh, within recent days, since the information started becoming available.

SEN. PRYOR: So in other words, you didn't- right after the speech, you didn't know that, or even before the speech you had no knowledge of that?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I've just answered the question.

SEN. PRYOR: You're trying to say that in no briefing, in no documents that you had or that you were exposed to, that was never communicated to you in any way?

SEC. RUMSFELD: I didn't say that. I see hundreds and hundreds of pieces of paper a day. And is it conceivable that something was in a document? It's conceivable. Do I recall hearing anything or reading anything like that? The answer is as I've given it. No.

July 11, 2003

Referring to the claim that Iraq had sought uranium from Africa in President Bush's State of the Union address, CIA Director George Tenet releases a statement saying [\[link to source\]](#) [\[link to source\]](#)

"These 16 words should have never been included in the text written for the President."

July 11, 2003

National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, in a press gaggle aboard Air Force One en route to Uganda, concerning the dissenting views amongst intelligence agencies regarding the yellowcake claim [\[link to source\]](#)



"If there were doubts about the underlying intelligence to that NIE [National Intelligence Estimate], those doubts were not communicated to the President, to the Vice President, or to me."

July 23, 2003

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

"The CIA sent two memos to the White House in October [2002] voicing strong doubts about a claim President Bush [would make] three months later in the State of the Union address that Iraq was trying to buy nuclear materials in Africa...

"... the CIA warned the White House early on that the charge, based on an allegation that Iraq sought 500 tons of uranium in Niger, relied on weak evidence, was not particularly significant and assumed Iraq was pursuing an acquisition that was arguably not possible and of questionable value because Iraq had its own supplies.

"Yesterday's disclosures indicate top White House officials knew that the CIA seriously disputed the claim that Saddam Hussein was seeking uranium in Africa long before the claim was included in Bush's January address to the nation."

September 30, 2004

Created in June 2003, the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) was a fact-finding mission organized by the Pentagon and the CIA, consisting of 1,400 Americans, Britons and Australians charged to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. After 18 months of exhaustive investigations, the ISG issues its final report [\[link to source\]](#)



"ISG has not found evidence to show that Iraq sought uranium from abroad after 1991 or renewed indigenous production of such material – activities that we believe would have constituted an Iraqi effort to reconstitute a nuclear weapons program."

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