



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

Machiavelli and U.S. Politics, Part 2: Ethics and Creating the Facts by Lawrence M. Ludlow

Once we understand Machiavelli's dismal view of humanity, it is easier to understand the ethical universe in which he operates. Machiavelli opens his discussion of princely virtues by immediately discarding them. His explanation is that virtues lack utility and are merely a product of the imagination (chapter 15):

Since my intent is to write something useful to whoever understands it, it has appeared to me more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it. And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth; for it is so far from how one lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation. For a man who wants to make a profession of good in all regards must come to ruin among so many who are not good. Hence it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity.

... And furthermore one should not care about incurring the fame [i.e., infamy] of those vices without which it is difficult to save one's state; for if one considers everything well, one will find something appears to be virtue, which if pursued would be one's ruin, and something else appears to be vice, which if pursued results in one's security and well-being.

Note that for Machiavelli, truth is defined by the effect, or outcome, of an action from the point of view of a dictator — not by any intrinsic, unchanging standards of value. Certainly liberty is not one of them. That is the meaning of the words “effectual truth” in the preceding quotation. We can see, therefore, that Machiavelli has defined himself as a situational relativist with a soft spot for tyranny. And where have we heard this kind of talk before? From liberals and Democrats? Yes, but it is equally true of self-proclaimed conservatives and Republicans. In particular, this

viewpoint bears an eerie resemblance to a statement made to reporter Ron Suskind by a neoconservative senior advisor of President George W. Bush. In “Without a Doubt,” an article that appeared in the *New York Times* on October 17, 2004, Suskind relates the contents of an interview that took place with the senior advisor in the summer of 2002 — months before the United States launched Operation Iraqi Freedom [sic]. According to Suskind,

The aide said that guys like me [i.e., Suskind] were “in what we call the reality-based community,” which he defined as people who “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.” I [Suskind] nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He [the aide] cut me off. “That’s not the way the world really works anymore,” he continued. “We’re an empire now, and when we act, *we create our own reality*. And while you’re studying that reality — judiciously, as you will — we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors ... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.” [Emphasis added.]

This advisor is suggesting that the only “reality” guiding right-thinking politicians is the current situation and the goals of the moment, which can change as frequently as the weather. It is a statement of pure relativism; expediency is the measure of all things. Certainly this approach contains no values lofty enough to merit the constant appeals to ethical concepts such as good and evil, which our current president uses with great frequency.

With this in mind, it should not surprise us that President Bush — contrary to claims that he was misled by the intelligence community — was fully aware that Iraq’s WMDs were a pile of half-truths and tailor-made lies as early as July 2002. This becomes clear in an article entitled “[The Secret Downing Street Memo](#),” published in London’s *Sunday Times* on May 1, 2005. The article reprints a leaked secret memo that summarizes the contents of a briefing received by British Prime Minister Tony Blair on July 23, 2002. The key part of the memo reveals information gathered by Richard Dearlove, director of MI-6 (Britain’s CIA). Dearlove had just returned from a trip to the United States and was reporting what he had learned about the Bush administration’s plans for Iraq. According to Dearlove,

It seemed clear that Bush had made up his mind to take military action, even if the timing was not yet decided. But the case was thin. Saddam was not threatening his neighbours, and his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea or Iran. [Emphasis added.]

Furthermore, the Bush administration was aware that a pre-emptive war was both unjustified and illegal. According to the memo,

The Attorney-General [John Ashcroft] said that the desire for regime change was not a legal base for military action. There were three possible legal bases: self-defence, humanitarian intervention, or UNSC authorisation. The first and second could not be the base in this case. *Relying on UNSCR 1205 of three years ago would be difficult.* [Emphasis added.]

In a critical revelation, the memo also revealed that the Bush administration planned to juggle the facts to build a case for its illegal war. In other words, the neoconservatives planned to “create reality” in the same manner that was recommended by the senior Bush advisor quoted in the *New York Times* article. The secret Downing Street memo sets out the agenda of the war faction as follows:

Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. *But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.* The NSC had no patience with the UN route, and no enthusiasm for publishing material on the Iraqi regime’s record.... [Emphasis added.]

Note how easy it was for the Bush administration to “fix” the intelligence and facts so that they would justify the predetermined policy of war. Britain’s MI-6, however, was not the only intelligence agency that was able to ferret out the truth about the Bush administration’s tendency to play fast and loose with the facts. During the build-up to the war against Iraq, the CIA warned that the much-publicized “evidence” of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was deeply flawed. These warnings were published in several newspapers and were available through broadcast media as well. Unfortunately, they did not receive the attention they deserved.

Karen Kwiatkowski, a retired USAF lieutenant colonel and information specialist posted in the Pentagon’s Near East South Asia (NESA) office, supplied strong corroboration. She provided the world with an insider’s view of how the Bush administration was able to create the facts that “supported” its predetermined policy to go to war. While posted at the NESA office in the spring of 2002, she personally witnessed the unholy creation of the Office of Special Plans (OSP), a project that was close to the hearts of Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

A lifelong conservative, Kwiatkowski was appalled by the neoconservative agenda that was being constructed within the OSP. She watched as bona fide information specialists at the Pentagon were replaced by politically appointed information magicians in the OSP. The chief task of these magicians was to toe the White House party line, bury the objections of lifelong Pentagon professionals, twist the facts, and orchestrate the flow of information to build a case that supported the administration’s decision to launch a war. As her frustration mounted in the months before the invasion, she decided to tell the world the truth about what was happening

inside the Pentagon; she wrote a series of anonymous dissenting newspaper “columns” that were posted on the Internet by Col. David Hackworth, America’s most decorated war veteran. Finally, during the week of the invasion in March 2003, she left the military and went public with her columns — placing her name on her web postings and accepting speaking invitations.

Although the administration attempted to blame its decision to go to war on intelligence errors, the secret Downing Street memo and Kwiatkowski’s reports have exposed how these “errors” were created by the White House to obtain the desired results. Consequently, the House of Representatives published [*Iraq on the Record: The Bush Administration’s Public Statements on Iraq*](#). This report has received little attention, but it kept a running tab on the lies manufactured by the White House. A key paragraph reads as follows:

The *Iraq on the Record* database contains 237 misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq that were made by President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Powell, and National Security Advisor Rice. These statements were made in 125 separate appearances, consisting of 40 speeches, 26 press conferences and briefings, 53 interviews, 4 written statements, and 2 congressional testimonies. Most of the statements in the database were misleading because they expressed certainty where none existed or failed to acknowledge the doubts of intelligence officials. Ten of the statements were simply false.

The Downing Street memo also made it clear that the war planners gave no thought to the vast damage and upheaval that the invasion would create in Iraq and how it would be remedied. According to the memo, “There was little discussion in Washington of the aftermath after military action.” Is it possible that the lack of discussion about the aftermath of the war explains why Iraq has become a blood-soaked basket-case of a country and a recruitment center for terrorists as a result of the U.S. invasion? Meanwhile, how many Americans are concerned about the origins of the war as well as its long-term effects?

It is easy to see how the three-part pattern leaps from the words of the president and his officials. The lie was the “constructed” reality, namely the claim that war against Iraq was justified by the threat of a smoking gun that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud. The hypocrisy was that the United States, not Iraq, posed a significant threat to world peace — possessing more WMDs than the rest of the world combined. The plausible half-truth subsequently trotted out for public consumption to cover up the lack of WMDs was the old story that Saddam Hussein was, indeed, a bad man.

*Lawrence Ludlow (LLSD55@yahoo.com) is a freelance writer living in San Diego. Harvey C. Mansfield’s translation of *The Prince* is the source for quotations unless otherwise noted.*

This article was originally published in August 2005.