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## **They Lied About the Reason for Going to War** **by Jacob G. Hornberger**

In determining whether someone has lied, circumstantial evidence can oftentimes be as critical as direct evidence. For example, suppose someone says, “I was outside all last night and it did not rain.” A person who was inside might be tempted to conclude, “Well, since I wasn’t outside, I must assume that he is telling the truth.” However, if the person on the inside looks outside and sees that everything — the houses, yards, driveways, and cars — are wet and that streams of water are running in the streets, his conclusion might be different. Using such circumstantial evidence, he might well conclude that the person who is claiming that it did not rain is lying.

The circumstantial evidence with respect to the invasion of Iraq leads inexorably to but one conclusion: President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and other U.S. officials lied about their reasons for invading Iraq. Those lies have profound consequences not only for the Iraqi people, who have borne the brunt of the invasion and subsequent occupation of their country, but also for the American people, including U.S. soldiers who have killed and maimed people whose government never attacked the United States or even threatened to do so.

Among the many justifications that the administration relied upon in the months leading up to invading Iraq were:

- (1) To protect the American people from an urgent and imminent threat of a WMD attack by Saddam Hussein;
- (2) To enforce UN resolutions requiring Saddam to disarm; and
- (3) To liberate the Iraqi people from Saddam’s tyranny.

The first justification was the one on which most Americans relied. In the critical months leading up to the invasion, which we here at FFF were ardently opposing, we were being inundated every day with critical emails taking us to task for not trusting our public officials, who obviously had access to secret information that they could not share with the public. There was no doubt that the senders of those critical emails were convinced that the United States was

under an urgent threat of an impending WMD attack. “What would you do?” they nervously asked. “Wait until the nuclear bomb goes off?”

Most of the fear revolved around a nuclear attack, which was not surprising, given the statements that federal officials were feeding their minds.

In his speech to the United Nations, President Bush tried to shut down the political speculation. This is a life-and-death matter, the President insisted. “Should Iraq acquire fissile material, it would be able to build a nuclear weapon within a year,” he told the U.N. General Assembly in New York Thursday.

To those who say, we want more evidence that there’s a real threat, the Administration says, we can’t wait for a smoking gun to turn up. “We don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud,” National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice said on CNN’s *Late Edition* recently. ([CNN.com, September 12, 2002](http://www.cnn.com/2002/09/12/un.02))

Some people suggest that President Bush and Vice President Cheney just made an honest mistake in relying on faulty intelligence reports about the threat posed by Saddam’s WMDs. There’s plenty of evidence to suggest that that the mistake was not an honest one — that they “cherry-picked” the parts of the intelligence reports to support what they wanted to believe.

However, while most of the postwar debate has revolved around whether Bush and others lied about or intentionally exaggerated the WMD threat posed by Saddam, the circumstantial evidence leads to but one conclusion on something much more important — that Bush, Cheney, and other U.S. officials were knowingly and intentionally lying with respect to the real reason that they were invading Iraq.

Let’s review that circumstantial evidence.

1. Prior to the actual invasion, President Bush spent months lobbying the UN Security Council to unanimously grant him authority to invade Iraq to enforce the UN resolutions that required Saddam to rid himself of his WMDs. Ultimately, once Bush realized that he was going to be unable to secure the votes of all the permanent members of the Security Council, he decided to invade anyway, with the assistance of a “coalition of the willing” — a coalition of nations that were willing to participate in the enforcement of the UN resolutions requiring Saddam to “disarm.”

Now ask yourself: If a foreign nation was really about to attack the United States, especially with WMDs, would any president spend any time whatever going to the UN to seek permission to attack that nation first or spend time to round up a group of countries to participate in a “coalition of the willing”? That is beyond the realm of reasonable probability. In a real-life situation in which America was about to come under a nuclear, biological, or chemical attack the

president would strike hard immediately to defend the nation against such an attack without first seeking anyone's consent or approval.

Indeed, if an enemy nation was really about to attack the United States, would the president even be talking about the importance of enforcing UN resolutions? Who in his right mind would care about the importance of enforcing UN resolutions if another nation was about to fire nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons at our country? All that would matter would be taking out attacking missiles immediately.

Yet even while feeding the fears of the American people by suggesting extreme urgency because of Saddam's WMD threat, President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and Secretary of State Powell were lobbying UN officials — that is, officials of other nations — for a new resolution authorizing them to enforce previous UN resolutions that required Saddam to “disarm.” Indeed, recall that when Powell made a famous speech with charts detailing Saddam's WMDs that he would soon be firing at the United States, Powell was at the UN seeking a resolution, not at the Congress of the United States seeking a declaration of war against a nation that supposedly was about to attack the United States with WMDs.

Then, once it became clear to Bush that the UN was not going to give him the resolution he sought, the situation became “Hurry, hurry, hurry.” We can't let those hapless UN inspectors continue searching for Saddam's WMDs, Americans were told, because the situation is too dire and urgent. We've got to invade now because otherwise we might well see a mushroom cloud tomorrow. And there is no doubt that most Americans who supported the invasion believed it.

2. Among the alternative rationales that Bush, Cheney, and other U.S. officials relied on to justify their invasion of Iraq was to free the Iraqi people from Saddam's tyranny. Granted, that wasn't the primary justification — that is, it wasn't the one that resonated deep within American people, like the threat of a nuclear attack did — but it certainly was one of reasons given for invading. Ask yourself: If our nation was really about to be attacked by an enemy nation, especially with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, what is the likelihood that U.S. officials would be justifying their preemptive strike to take out those missiles by arguing that a collateral benefit of a preemptive strike would be to free the people of the enemy nation from tyranny? Would U.S. officials, including those in the military, really be thinking about such benefits? Not a chance. If our nation was really about to be attacked by an enemy nation, U.S. officials would strike them hard, without considering how this would help the people of the targeted nation.

In fact, the use of alternative and secondary rationales for invading Iraq is itself strong circumstantial evidence that the primary rationale given for invading — the dire threat of an imminent WMD attack — was bogus, because if such a threat really existed no one would be bothering to come up with alternative and secondary reasons for attacking.

3. On September 7, 2002 — that is, on the eve of the 2002 congressional elections — White House Chief of Staff Andrew H. Card Jr., provided an additional piece of circumstantial proof that U.S. officials were lying about the urgent threat of an imminent WMD attack on the United States by Saddam Hussein. Card said, “From a marketing point of view, you don’t introduce new products in August.”

What was Card referring to? He was referring to the methods by which the Bush administration was selling the necessity of a war against Iraq. Keep in mind that this was the period of time when Democratic congressional candidates in the 2002 election were terrified that Bush and the Republicans would accuse them of being soft on terrorism and of being unpatriotic. Thus, Bush and his people knew that the best time for getting a congressional resolution authorizing Bush to declare war on Iraq was before, not after, the November 2002 election.

So what Card was suggesting was that in August people are on vacation and their minds are on the summer, fun, and their families. Therefore, the best time to produce the arguments for going to war on Iraq would be in September, when people were once again focused on politics and business, which would still provide plenty of time to terrify people before the November election into thinking that a WMD attack could come at any time.

Ask yourself: If the nation was really under threat of an imminent attack, would U.S. officials be concerned with developing a marketing plan for getting people behind the war effort? Would they be thinking that August would not be a good month for telling people about the fact that an enemy nation was preparing a nuclear, biological, or chemical attack and that September would be better? How likely is that? Not likely at all. If an enemy nation was truly preparing to strike the United States with WMDs, there would be no marketing strategy at all — U.S. officials would immediately begin preparing the preemptive strike, whether in June, July, or August, and would gravely inform the American people of what has happening. There would be no reason to try to develop a marketing strategy to sell the necessity of going to war — or to come up with alternative and secondary rationales for attacking.

4. Recently, Vice President Cheney stated that given what he now knows — that is, that the United States was not under an urgent threat of a WMD attack by Saddam — that there was no threat that Saddam would explode mushroom clouds over American cities — that Saddam had nothing to do with 9/11 and had no connections to al- Qaeda — the United States would have invaded Iraq anyway.

Let that sink in for a moment. What Cheney is saying is that the United States would have invaded Iraq regardless. In other words, in the minds of Bush and Cheney, the imminent threat of a WMD attack on our country by Saddam was not a determining factor in invading Iraq. That is, even if Bush and Cheney knew beforehand that Saddam had “disarmed,” they would have attacked anyway.

5. A few months after the invasion of Iraq, when it was clear that no WMDs were going to be discovered, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz told *Vanity Fair*, “The truth is that for reasons that have a lot to do with the U.S. government bureaucracy, we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on which was weapons of mass destruction as the core reason.”

Ask yourself: If the United States were truly under the threat of an imminent WMD attack by a foreign nation, would federal bureaucrats be trying to figure out which issue everyone could agree on to justify an attack on that nation? Aren't Wolfowitz's words more consistent with the notion that U.S. officials were more concerned with coming up with the best excuses to justify an attack on Iraq rather than the notion that they were acting under the genuine threat of an imminent WMD attack on the United States?

Those pieces of circumstantial evidence inexorably lead but to one conclusion — that from the start, the threat of an imminent WMD attack on the United States was a bogus reason for going to war against Iraq. But U.S. officials knew that it was the most effective marketing tool to get the American people and the members of Congress to become sufficiently trusting and fearful to cause them to immediately support the coming invasion.

So if the urgent WMD threat wasn't the real reason for going to war, what was? For that answer, we must look, once again, to circumstantial evidence.

For more than 10 years after the Persian Gulf War, the U.S. government, operating in conjunction with the UN, imposed and enforced some of the most brutal and effective sanctions against Iraq that have ever been enforced against another country. For a good collection of articles on the devastating effects of the sanctions on the Iraqi people — especially with respect to the high death rate among Iraqi children from infectious diseases — [click here](#).

Suffice it to say (1) that the sanctions contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children; (2) that U.S. Ambassador the UN Madeleine Albright expressed the sentiments of other U.S. officials when she said that the deaths were “worth it”; and (3) that high UN officials resigned in protest against the massive number of Iraqi children who were dying every year.

What was the purpose of the sanctions? The ostensible purpose was to compel Saddam Hussein to comply with UN resolutions requiring him to disarm himself of WMDs. Yet, even though Saddam continued to steadfastly maintain, year after year of rising deaths among the Iraqi populace, that he had complied with the UN resolutions, he was hit with the same response by U.S. officials — “He's lying, and the only reason that the UN inspectors are unable to locate the WMDs is that they are incompetent.” Year after year, U.S. officials continued to maintain that Saddam had the burden of showing that he no longer had WMDs as a condition of lifting the sanctions, ignoring the obvious difficulty that anyone would have in trying to prove such a negative.

Ultimately, Saddam stopped cooperating with the UN inspectors not because he was trying to hide his WMDs, which is what U.S. officials steadfastly continued claiming, but rather because

it finally became clear that U.S. officials would never permit the sanctions to be lifted, no matter whether Saddam could prove he had disarmed or not. They made it clear that the sanctions would be lifted only if Saddam Hussein left office and was replaced by a U.S.-approved substitute.

Thus, the real purpose of the sanctions was what has become known as “regime change” — the idea of squeezing a nation and its regime economically so hard that either the ruler abdicates or his own people oust him from office and replace him with a U.S.-approved substitute (such as Ahmed Chalabi), at which point the sanctions would be lifted and U.S. foreign aid would flow into the country to “rebuild it.”

Thus, given that “regime change” was the purpose of the sanctions throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, it stands to reason that “regime change” continued to be a major driving force behind the plans to invade Iraq in 2003.

That had to be why Cheney announced that they would have invaded Iraq even if they had known that there were no WMDs. They were going into Iraq to do what more than a decade of brutal and deadly sanctions had not done — oust Saddam from power and replace him with a U.S. substitute.

At the time he made that statement, Cheney suggested that it would have been necessary to remove Saddam anyway because he was a dangerous ruler, a postinvasion point that Bush has also used. That justification rings hollow as well. Of course Saddam was a dangerous ruler, but there are lots of dangerous rulers in the world, many of whom the U.S. government has ardently supported. Pervez Musharraf, the military general who took power in a coup in Pakistan, who won't permit democratic elections, and who has nuclear weapons, is a good example. Another example would be Saddam Hussein himself, whom U.S. officials supported during the 1980s when they delivered to him the very WMDs that they later used as their primary pretext for invading Iraq. [Click here](#) for a collection of articles detailing where Saddam, a dangerous ruler, got his WMDs. (Thus, it's not surprising that Bush and Cheney would market the war with the WMD rationale: in their minds it was inconceivable that Saddam would have actually destroyed the WMDs that the United States had delivered to him during the Reagan-Bush years.)

Another important piece of circumstantial evidence that inexorably leads to regime change, not the imminent threat of a WMD attack, as the real reason for invading Iraq is the famous (and previously secret) Downing Street Memo, in which British officials stated, “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.”

Defenders of the war might argue, “By relying on faulty intelligence, the president and vice president just made an honest mistake, and therefore, U.S. officials are not morally responsible for the massive death and destruction in Iraq.” But that's just not true: even if the WMD intelligence reports had been faulty, the circumstantial evidence overwhelmingly establishes that President

Bush and Vice President Cheney and their associates were being dishonest with respect to the *real* reason they were sending the nation into war against Iraq. As Vice President Cheney pointed out, even if the president and vice president had known that the intelligence reports were false, they would have ordered an invasion anyway.

Is the WMD lie important? Yes, because it led an untold number of Americans to support a war and an occupation that have unleashed forces that have resulted in the deaths and maiming of hundreds of thousands, on both sides. Thus, while it is entirely possible that Bush and Cheney would have invaded Iraq anyway if the American people had known the truth about why they were invading, at least the war and occupation would not have received the moral sanction of a deceived people.

*Mr. Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation. He will be among the 22 speakers at FFF's upcoming conference on June 1-4 in Reston, Virginia: "[Restoring the Constitution: Foreign Policy and Civil Liberties](#)."*

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