

# A Lesson About Liars

*As the U.S. wages wars in the Middle East and elsewhere and threatens new ones, it is important for people to take a hard look at the pretext that the U.S. used in 2003 to start the war on Iraq.*

In 2002 and 2003, the President of the United States, the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense and Vice President insisted that Saddam Hussein's Iraq was pursuing nuclear weapons, that it had chemical and biological weapons and a fleet of aerial drones to deliver them, and that it had ties with Al Qaeda and international terrorism, and was linked to the September 11, 2001 attacks. These claims were backed up by extensive "documentation," "evidence," and lengthy "intelligence findings." The Iraq war, and revelations that emerged about what was going on in the White House at the time, reveal that these claims were total lies, cooked up to justify a war that the Bush regime had already decided to launch.

In the build-up to the invasion of Iraq, Vice President Dick Cheney twice claimed that CIA director George Tenet told the White House that it was a "slam dunk" that Iraq had WMD. Tenet (who remains loyal to Bush) left the administration, insists Cheney twisted his words, but most revealingly wrote: "There was never a serious debate that I know of within the administration about the imminence of the Iraqi threat," nor "was there ever a significant discussion" about the possibility of containing Iraq without an invasion." In response to claims by Cheney that the "slam dunk" convinced him to go to war against Iraq, Tenet wrote, "As if you needed *me* to say 'slam dunk' to convince *you* to go to war with Iraq."

February 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell told the UN, "The facts and Iraq's behavior show that Saddam Hussein and his regime are concealing their efforts to produce more weapons of mass destruction." Powell played a clip of an audiotape, held up a model vial of poison anthrax, and waved what he said were "2,000 pages of documents" as "proof" of Iraq's WMD program. The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency had assessed that the source of part of what Powell presented to the UN was "a liar, a fabricator." Powell's chief of staff called

his involvement in preparing the speech "the lowest point of my life." The entire presentation defied credibility and would have been exposed as bizarre concoctions had anyone in the mainstream media or politics subjected it to critical examination.

The *New York Times* channeled Bush regime lies to justify the WMD hoax. Judith Miller's September 7, 2002 front-page story in the *Times* claimed that metal tubes bound for Iraq were intended to be used to enrich nuclear material. It quoted unnamed "American officials" and "American intelligence experts" and insisted there was evidence that Iraq "stepped up its quest for nuclear weapons and has embarked on a worldwide hunt for materials to make an atomic bomb." The *Times*, based on feeds Miller was getting from the White House, declared that "Mr. Hussein's dogged insistence on pursuing his nuclear ambitions... [and] Iraq's push to improve and expand Baghdad's chemical and biological arsenals, have brought Iraq and the United States to the brink of war." Shortly after this article appeared in the *Times*, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld all appeared on television and pointed to the *Times* story [which the administration itself had concocted, fabricated, and fed to the *Times*] as a significant motive for going to war.

The Democrats misdirected the anger of people who opposed moves toward war on Iraq into voting, but the main and dominant leaders of the Democratic Party, including Hillary Clinton and Al Gore, promoted the WMD lies. Hillary Clinton claimed, "If left unchecked Saddam Hussein will continue to increase his capability to wage biological and chemical warfare and will keep trying to develop nuclear weapons."

All along, the reality that "intelligence" reports about weapons of mass destruction and links to Al Qaeda were "fixed" to justify an invasion of Iraq was no secret within U.S. and allied top political and diplomatic circles. The "Downing Street Memo," prepared by British intelligence to convey what they were being told by U.S. officials, summarized: "[George W.] Bush wanted to remove Saddam Hussein, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy."

The WMD claims were—simply put—absurd. But voices that questioned the WMD lies were attacked, shut down, marginalized, and threatened.

When UN weapons inspector and former U.S. Marine intelligence officer Scott Ritter questioned WMD claims on CNN, host Paula Zahn ridiculed Ritter, attacked him as unpatriotic, and introduced him with an insulting comment about Ritter "drinking Saddam Hussein's Kool-aid." Ritter had the gall—in the eyes of CNN—to point out that "[W]e have the Bush administration talking the talk of disarmament, talking the talk of weapons



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On February 5, 2003, at the United Nations, then-U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell holds up a model vial of anthrax poison while lying that Iraq's rulers possessed "weapons of mass destruction."

Top: Donald Rumsfeld, Hillary Clinton, Dick Cheney.

inspections, but the walk—the walk they're walking is of regime removal."

Former Ambassador Joseph Wilson and his wife Valerie Plame, a CIA agent, were attacked and had their lives threatened for exposing elements of the WMD hoax, including the lie that Iraq had bought weapons-grade uranium in the African country of Niger.

Phil Donahue was fired from MSNBC for questioning the WMD lies. In spite of the fact that he had the highest-rated show on MSNBC at the time, and that MSNBC was positioning itself as the liberal or "progressive" network, his show was cancelled in February 2003. A leaked NBC document said Donahue "presented a difficult public face for NBC in a time of war... He seems to delight in presenting

guests who are anti-war, anti-Bush and skeptical of the administration's motives." In a post-firing interview, Donahue observed, "We were the only antiwar voice that had a show, and that, I think, made them very nervous. I mean, from the top down, they were just terrified."

A 2006 survey published in the British medical journal *Lancet* found that there had been more than 650,000 "excess Iraqi deaths as a consequence of the war" to that point. And more than 4.7 million Iraqis had been driven from their homes.

No nuclear or high-tech chemical or biological "weapons of mass destruction" ever turned up in exhaustive searches of Iraq during and after the U.S. invasion. □



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Iraq