

Untruth and Consequences

by David MacMichael

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The administration, and its spokespersons in the White House, the Department of State, the Pentagon, and the National Security Adviser's office who made the case for war to the Congress and to the American people—and the people of the world—now say that if they were wrong, it was because the intelligence system failed to provide them with accurate information. Thus, according to this argument, the untruths purveyed were not, strictly speaking, lies. There are now a host of commissions and committees looking into how U.S. intelligence could have failed so egregiously—if, in fact, that was the main problem.

Another school of thought holds that the Bush Administration, rather than responding to false alarm bells rung in Langley, had been determined from the outset to find a rationale for invading Iraq. Indeed, former Bush Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill declares in his recent book that, at the new administration's very first cabinet meeting, the decision to invade Iraq was presented as a given. Members of this school argue that Bush and the ardent supporters for war, especially in the office of Vice-President Dick Cheney and in the Defense Department of Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, recruited long-time proponents of use of American military power in the Middle East like Richard Perle, Douglas Feith, Paul Wolfowitz, Abraham Shulsky, and Michael Malouf, to bypass the CIA, DIA, and State Department's INR whose professional analysts were skeptical about Iraq's allegedly hostile capabilities and intentions.

This school of thought contends that, like prosecutors preparing a case, this cabal of war seekers "cherry picked" the intelligence reporting and presented, without caveat, even the shakiest and most suspect evidence to make the argument for war. Importantly, they have shown that this group relied heavily on reports from an Iraqi exile group, the Iraqi National Congress (INC) headed by Ahmed Chalabi and heavily funded by the Department of Defense, despite the fact that the CIA had long since concluded that INC reporting was untrustworthy. Further, they insist that these so-called neo-cons were encouraged and abetted by Cheney, Rumsfeld, and the White House itself.

A final, and not unimportant, concern about the neo-cons is their adherence to the Machiavellian teachings of the late

University of Chicago philosopher Leo Strauss. . . .

If the Bush Administration used evidence, ignoring warnings that [it] was suspect or invalid, to make its case for war, then—no matter how sincerely it may have believed it was acting out of concern for the security of the nation—it was, if not actually lying, coming perilously close to doing so. . . .

At least one important figure in this controversy about crooks and liars is Ahmed Chalabi himself. . . . as a fugitive from Jordan where he was convicted of massive bank fraud, he is a crook. As for lying in the matter under consideration here, he is unabashed. In an interview with London's *Daily Telegraph* on Feb. 19, Chalabi triumphantly admitted that he had knowingly provided false information about Iraq's weapons and its ties to terrorists (not to mention his rosy predictions of U.S. troops being welcomed as liberators) to his gullible patrons in the Pentagon and, for that matter, in the mainstream U.S. press. "We are," he said, "heroes in error. As far as we are concerned, we've been entirely successful. That tyrant Saddam is gone and the Americans are in Baghdad. What was said before is not important."

What We Know We Know

- So now we know for certain that exile Iraqis and other agenda-driven people told lies to ideologically driven individuals in the Bush Administration all too eager to use them to press their case for the invasion and occupation of Iraq. We know that the White House dismissed the objections of professional intelligence officers in the CIA and elsewhere, probably because it had already decided to invade Iraq. We know that key administration officials chose to use the suspect evidence to persuade most members of Congress to, let us say, suspend their critical faculties, and vote to authorize the President to use the armed forces of the United States to invade Iraq. We know for certain that most of the United States media reported this false information as truth.

- We cannot be certain that the spokespersons of the Bush Administration knew that they were speaking untruth. We don't yet really know why Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet appeared at least tacitly to endorse conclusions his own experts believed untrue.

- What we do know for certain is that Chalabi lied, and that he lied to people who believe as a matter of principle that government leaders must and should lie, and that these people were in places of dominant influence in the Bush Administration, and that they used Chalabi's lies to further their policy goals.

- What we do know for certain is that as a result of decisions based on these lies, to date, over 560 members of the United States armed forces have died in Iraq and several thousand others have been injured, many of them disabled for life. A hundred or more other non-U.S. members of the invading force have been killed, and many thousands of Iraqis, military and civilian, are also dead. And we know that Iraq, battered and impoverished, teeters on the brink of civil war.