

Bush's Favorite Lie

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When cataloguing George W. Bush's lies – even if you stick just to his fabrications about the Iraq War and the “war on terror” – there are so many to choose from, it's hard to pick a favorite.

There's the one about how before Sept. 11, 2001, Americans thought that “oceans protected us” – although perhaps not from Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles armed with nuclear warheads, which during the Cold War had school children hiding under desks and homeowners buying bomb shelters.

After taking office in January 2001, Bush was so confident about the protective oceans that he pushed aggressively for a “Star Wars” missile defense system.

Or there's Bush's oft-repeated claim that al-Qaeda terrorists are poised to dominate the world through a caliphate “stretching from Spain to Indonesia,” though in reality they are a bunch of crazed misfits forcibly exiled from their own countries and now living in caves along the Afghan-Pakistani border.

Bush also insists that Americans must heed what Osama bin Laden says, like when this homicidal maniac supposedly calls Iraq the “central front” in the “war on terror,” the American people must keep troops there indefinitely.

But it's never explained why it makes sense for the United States to let bin Laden's public declarations shape Washington's policies.

There's a chance, you see, that bin Laden is either completely nuts or perhaps clever enough to bait Bush into taking actions that actually help al-Qaeda, like getting the United States bogged down in Iraq, alienating the Muslim world and diverting military resources away from where bin Laden is hiding.

Indeed, the evidence from captured (internal rather than public) al-Qaeda communications indicates that bin Laden's high command considers Afghanistan and Pakistan – not Iraq – their central front.

In 2005, for instance, one intercepted letter, purportedly written by al-Qaeda's No. 2 Ayman al-Zawahiri, asked fighters in Iraq to send \$100,000 to headquarters back on the Afghan-Pakistani border. If Bush were right – and al-Qaeda considered Iraq the “central front” – one might expect that the money would be going in the opposite direction. [See Consortiumnews.com's “[Al-Qaeda's Fragile Foothold](#).”]

Personal Favorite

But my personal favorite Bush lie is when he insists that the United States invaded Iraq to enforce a United Nations resolution and that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein “chose war” by barring U.N. weapons inspectors.

Bush dusted off that old canard on Nov. 7 while standing next to French President Nicolas Sarkozy during [a press conference](#) at George Washington’s estate at Mount Vernon in Virginia.

Responding to a question from a French journalist about Bush’s dispute with France over the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, the U.S. president said:

“We had a difference of opinion with your great country over whether or not I should have used military force to enforce U.N. demands. ... I just want to remind you that [U.N. Resolution] 1441 was supported by France and the United States, which clearly said to the dictator, you will disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. Now, I’m the kind of person that when somebody says something, I take them for their word.”

Bush has made this same false argument scores of times dating back to July 2003, several months after the invasion when it was becoming clear that Saddam Hussein had told the truth when his government reported to the U.N. in 2002 that Iraq’s WMD stockpiles had been eliminated.

Hussein also relented in fall 2002, allowing U.N. weapons inspectors to travel freely around Iraq checking out suspected WMD sites. The U.N. inspectors found nothing and reported growing Iraqi cooperation in the early months of 2003. In other words, Hussein was complying with Resolution 1441.

Nevertheless, Bush was determined to invade Iraq and tried to get the U.N. Security Council to go along. However, France and most other members of the Security Council rebuffed Bush and sought more time for the inspectors.

Then, in defiance of the U.N. – and in violation of the U.N. Charter which prohibits aggressive wars – Bush forced out the U.N. inspectors and launched his “shock and awe” assault. After a bloody three-week campaign, U.S.-led forces toppled Hussein’s government, but found no WMD caches.

Instead of admitting the obvious facts – that he had launched an unprovoked war on false pretenses – Bush rewrote the history. Starting at a White House press briefing on July 14, 2003, Bush began insisting that he had no choice but to invade Iraq because Hussein wouldn’t let the U.N. inspectors in.

Bush [told reporters](#): “We gave him [Saddam Hussein] a chance to allow the inspectors in, and he wouldn’t let them in. And, therefore, after a reasonable request, we decided to remove him from power.”

Bush’s Litany

Facing no contradiction from the White House press corps, Bush repeated this lie in varied forms over the next four-plus years as part of his litany defending the invasion.

On Jan. 27, 2004, for example, Bush said, “We went to the United Nations, of course, and

got an overwhelming resolution – 1441 – unanimous resolution, that said to Saddam, you must disclose and destroy your weapons programs, which obviously meant the world felt he had such programs. He chose defiance. It was his choice to make, and he did not let us in.”

As the years went by, Bush’s lie and its unchallenged retelling took on the color of truth.

At a March 21, 2006, news conference, Bush again blamed the war on Hussein’s defiance of U.N. demands for unfettered inspections.

“I was hoping to solve this [Iraq] problem diplomatically,” Bush said. “The world said, ‘Disarm, disclose or face serious consequences.’ ... We worked to make sure that Saddam Hussein heard the message of the world. And when he chose to deny the inspectors, when he chose not to disclose, then I had the difficult decision to make to remove him. And we did.”

At a press conference on May 24, 2007, Bush offered a short-hand version, even inviting the journalists to remember the invented history.

“As you might remember back then, we tried the diplomatic route: [U.N. Resolution] 1441 was a unanimous vote in the Security Council that said disclose, disarm or face serious consequences. So the choice was his [Hussein’s] to make. And he made a choice that has subsequently caused him to lose his life.”

Not only have Washington journalists stayed consistently silent in the face of this false history, some have even adopted Bush’s lie as their own. For instance, in a July 2004 interview, ABC’s veteran newsman Ted Koppel used it to explain why he – Koppel – thought the invasion of Iraq was justified.

“It did not make logical sense that Saddam Hussein, whose armies had been defeated once before by the United States and the Coalition, would be prepared to lose control over his country if all he had to do was say, ‘All right, U.N., come on in, check it out,’” Koppel told Amy Goodman, host of “Democracy Now.”

Of course, Hussein did tell the U.N. to “come on in, check it out.” But that was in the real world, not in the faux reality that governs modern Washington.

Bush’s Iraq lies are now entering a new political generation, seeping into Campaign 2008. At the Republican debate on June 5, 2007, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney defended Bush’s invasion on the grounds that Hussein refused to let U.N. weapons inspectors in to search for WMD.

If Saddam “had opened up his country to I.A.E.A. inspectors, and they’d come in and they’d found that there were no weapons of mass destruction,” the war might have been averted, Romney said.

Not surprisingly, Romney’s false statement was no more challenged by the CNN debate moderators than Bush’s earlier versions had been. By constant repetition, Bush has transformed his lie into what passes for truth in modern American politics.

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, [Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush](http://neckdeepbook.com), was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His

two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there. Or go to Amazon.com.

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