

Cindy Sheehan, WMD and Bush's Pretext for Waging War on Iraq

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Cindy Sheehan has been subjected to an unwarranted backlash by right-wing pundits because of her antiwar protests and some explosive statements she made about President Bush. Perhaps Sheehan, while mourning the death of her son, Casey, a U.S. soldier who died in the Iraq war, lashed out at the president, and decided to take her antiwar message to Crawford, Texas, after doing some fact checking on her emotional state. If so, these are likely some of the circumstances that drove her.

While searching the 600 or so sites identified by United States intelligence and Iraqi officials as places where the country's biological weapons may have been hidden, which was President Bush's rationale for starting the war, to rid Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, not a single speck of anthrax or other WMD has been uncovered since the war started more than two years ago. Two skeletal trailers that may have been used to develop anthrax or botulism, scrubbed from top to bottom when it was found, leaving no biological weapons traces behind, according to the Department of Defense, is the only evidence the U.S. has found so far to justify its preemptive strike against Iraq. But this is far from a "smoking gun" and the prospects for finding any WMD in the months ahead are becoming grim. The media who covered the war on the ground asked U.S. military officials in Iraq why WMD haven't been found. The responses were short and to the point.

"I honestly don't know," said Stephen Cambone, undersecretary of defense for U.S. intelligence, during a briefing May 30, 2003.

Prior to the war, nearly every major media outlet warned, based on reports from the Pentagon, that Iraq's cache of chemical and biological weapons could be used on U.S. and British troops sent into Iraq to destroy Saddam Hussein's regime.

To back up these claims, President Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said Saddam's history of using WMD on his own people and in the war the country fought against Iran was evidence of the viciousness of the dictatorship. So are we to believe that Saddam suddenly got a dose of humanity, opting instead to let his regime be torn apart rather than go out in a blaze of glory? Or could it be that Iraq either destroyed its WMD or never had anything substantial to begin with?

Looking back at the events that led up to the war, it's likely the latter. The Bush administration never presented the proof to the United Nations that its intelligence suggesting Iraq was developing chemical and biological weapons was superior to that of the U.N. weapons inspectors who actually combed through the country looking for stockpiles of anthrax, botulism or VX. Now the military, which has taken over inspections, are finding

exactly what U.N. weapons inspectors found – nothing. Even Al Capone’s safe had a couple of empty bottles of liquor in it when Geraldo Rivera opened it up twenty years ago.

In October 2002, President Bush gave a speech in Cincinnati and spoke about the imminent threat Iraq posed to the U.S. because of the country’s alleged ties with al-Qaeda and its endless supply of chemical and biological weapons:

Surveillance photos reveal that the (Iraqi) regime is rebuilding facilities that it had used to produce chemical and biological weapons,” Bush said. “Iraq possesses ballistic missiles with a likely range of hundreds of miles – far enough to strike Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey, and other nations – in a region where more than 135,000 American civilians and service members live and work. We’ve also discovered through intelligence that Iraq has a growing fleet of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles that could be used to disperse chemical or biological weapons across broad areas. We’re concerned that Iraq is exploring ways of using these UAVs for missions targeting the United States. And, of course, sophisticated delivery systems aren’t required for a chemical or biological attack; all that might be required are a small container and one terrorist or Iraqi intelligence operative to deliver it.”

None of this intelligence information has ever panned out. Most notably, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Vice President Dick Cheney erred when he said in 2002 that Iraq was six months away from developing a nuclear weapon.

Furthermore, the president’s claims that thousands of high-strength aluminum tubes sought by Iraq were intended for a secret nuclear weapons program were also incorrect.

Bush said in a September 2002 speech that attempts by Iraq to acquire the tubes point to a clandestine program to make enriched uranium for nuclear bombs. But experts contradicted Bush, saying that the evidence is ambiguous.

The report, from the Institute for Science and International Security, a copy of which was acquired by the Washington Post, “also contends that the Bush administration is trying to quiet dissent among its own analysts over how to interpret the evidence.”

David Albright, a physicist who investigated Iraq’s nuclear weapons program following the 1991 Persian Gulf War as a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency’s inspection team, the [Post reported](#), authored the report.

The Institute, headquartered in Washington, is an independent group that studies nuclear and other security issues.”

“By themselves, these attempted procurements are not evidence that Iraq is in possession of, or close to possessing, nuclear weapons,” the report said, according to the Post story. “They do not provide evidence that Iraq has an operating centrifuge plant or when such a plant could be operational.”

The lack of evidence and public blunders by other high-ranking officials in the Bush administration are endless. Secretary of State Colin Powell made it clear in an op-ed piece in the Wall Street Journal on February 3, 2003, a day before his infamous meeting at the U.N. where he presented “evidence” of an Iraqi weapons program, which turned out to be the empty trailers the U.S. military found shortly after the start of the war, that there was no

“smoking gun”:

“While there will be no ‘smoking gun,’ we will provide evidence concerning the weapons programs that Iraq is working so hard to hide,” Powell said in his op-ed. “We will, in sum, offer a straightforward, sober and compelling demonstration that Saddam is concealing the evidence of his weapons of mass destruction, while preserving the weapons themselves.”

However, Powell did no such thing. Instead, Powell held up a small vial of anthrax at the U.N. meeting to illustrate how deadly just a small vial can be and then used that to couch his claims that Iraq’s alleged stockpile of anthrax would be much deadlier. The same day, February 3, 2003 White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer dodged a dozen or so questions about the intelligence information from sources in Iraq and from the CIA that showed, without any doubt, that Iraq possessed WMD. “I think the reason that we know Saddam Hussein possesses chemical and biological weapons is from a wide variety of means. That’s how we know,” Fleischer said. In virtually every press briefing ([archived on the White House’s web site](#)), and every speech by President Bush between January 2003 and the days leading up to the war in March, hundreds of questions were directed at Bush during stakeouts and at Fleischer at his press briefings about what intelligence information the U.S. had that could be declassified to support its allegations that Iraq was either developing WMD or was hiding them. However, not a single shred of proof was offered up by the White House to back up its claims. Moreover, when the White House finally seized on something tangible prior to the war, such as the existence of long-range missiles, Iraq started destroying the weapons in the presence of U.N. inspectors. But at that point war with Iraq was inevitable. In an interview with “Meet the Press” on February 9, 2003, Tim Russert, the program’s host, asked Powell about one of the alleged WMD sites Powell spoke about at a U.N. meeting the week before. Russert asked Powell if the U.S. knew where certain weapons in Iraq were being stored why not just send the U.N. inspectors in or destroy the facility rather than go to war.

“Well, the inspectors eventually did go there, and by the time they got there, they were no longer active chemical bunkers.”

Still trying to figure out what’s eating Cindy Sheehan?

Jason Leopold is the author of the explosive memoir, *News Junkie*, to be released in the spring of 2006 by Process/Feral House Books. Visit Leopold’s website at www.jasonleopold.com for updates. Reporter’s note: I wrote a portion of this article in 2003, shortly after the start of the war. I have changed some elements of it in hopes of explaining why some people, such as Cindy Sheehan, demand an end to the war.

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