

The Ongoing Iraq Intel Fraud

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Theme: [Intelligence](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

Almost five years and perhaps half a million deaths too late, it's finally the accepted wisdom in Washington that the intelligence that George W. Bush used to justify invading Iraq was garbage. But the pattern of twisting the truth about Iraq continues unabated and the President is still rarely called on it.

Bush has never stopped making statements about the Iraq War that are untrue, illogical or irrelevant. Yet, the Washington press corps remains almost as lax today about holding Bush accountable as it was in 2002 and 2003.

So, when Bush mocks Democratic “politicians in Washington” who supposedly seek to substitute their judgments for those of experienced commanders on the ground, the national news media stays silent on Bush’s hypocrisy. It’s almost never mentioned that he was the Washington politician in December who overruled the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the two top generals in Iraq on the escalation of the war.

Bush not only rejected the advice of the Joint Chiefs and his field generals, John Abizaid and George Casey, but then replaced Abizaid and Casey with new commanders who were compliant to Bush’s wishes. Though the removals fell within Bush’s Commander-in-Chief powers, it can’t be said he was respecting the judgments of the combat generals.

Nevertheless, Bush sees no risk when he attributes to congressional Democrats the notion that commanders should “take fighting directions from politicians 6,000 miles away in Washington, D.C.,” as Bush said in a speech on May 1.

Nor does the national news media question Bush’s sincerity when he asserts, as he did on May 2, that “the question is, who ought to make that [military] decision? The Congress or the commanders? And as you know, my position is clear – I’m a commander guy.”

But Bush is not “a commander guy,” at least not when the commanders disagree with him. In that same May 2 speech, Bush took both sides of the issue and got away with it. He claimed to respect the judgments of his commanders and then explained how he repudiated his commanders.

Bush said last year’s polls showed many Americans responding “we don’t approve of what’s happening in Iraq. That was what the poll said last fall and winter, you know. And had they polled me, I’d have said the same thing. I didn’t approve of what was happening in Iraq. And so we put a new strategy in that was fundamentally different.”

In other words, politicians in Washington – Bush and his neoconservative advisers – imposed their opinions about Iraq on the judgments of the on-the-ground commanders and the Joint Chiefs who thought the “surge” of more U.S. troops would prove counterproductive by

reducing pressure on Iraqi authorities to take the lead.

After switching out Abizaid and Casey with new commanders, Admiral William Fallon and General David Petraeus, Bush then settled back comfortably into the fiction that he was just following the guidance of the commanders on the ground; the Democrats were the ones guilty of bucking the military's advice by seeking a phased withdrawal.

Explaining why he vetoed a congressional war appropriation bill that included a timeline for withdrawal, Bush said, "That didn't make any sense to me, to impose the will of politicians over the recommendations of our military commanders in the field."

(In another indicator of feckless Washington behavior, two key "surge" proponents in the White House – political appointees Dr. J.D. Crouch II and Meghan O'Sullivan – are resigning even before their new policy is fully implemented. Another "surge" architect, retired Army Gen. Jack Keane, was among five retired generals who rejected [the new "war czar" position](#) for overseeing the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.)

Hot Buttons

Bush also continues to push American hot buttons despite contrary intelligence assessments, just like he did before the Iraq invasion when he warned of "mushroom clouds" and touted a non-existent relationship between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda.

For instance, the U.S. intelligence community has long ago concluded that the Iraq War has been a recruiting bonanza for al-Qaeda and other Islamic extremist groups, increasing – not decreasing – the threat of future terrorist attacks on U.S. interests.

But Bush has insisted in speech after speech that the Iraq War is protecting the United States from terrorism and that if the United States doesn't win in Iraq, "the enemy would follow us home."

U.S. intelligence analysts consider that argument nonsensical, recognizing that fighting some extremists in Iraq doesn't preclude other terrorists from mounting an operation inside the United States. Indeed, the swelling anti-Americanism makes such an eventual attack more likely.

CIA analysts believe that al-Qaeda wants the United States to remain bogged down in Iraq indefinitely, so the terrorist group can continue recruiting, training and hardening new jihadists, some of whom surely will be assigned to undertake violent operations against U.S. targets. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Bush Is Losing the War on Terror](#)."]

Al-Qaeda leaders view Bush's open-ended war in Iraq as crucial to their long-range plans for spreading their radical ideology throughout the Muslim world. As "Atiyah," one of Osama bin Laden's top lieutenants, explained in an intercepted Dec. 11, 2005, letter, "prolonging the war is in our interest."

[To read the "prolonging the war" passage from the Atiyah letter at the Web site of West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, click [here](#) and then scroll down to the bottom of page 16 and the top of page 17.]

Yet, even as an open-ended Iraq War helps al-Qaeda, Bush still cites 9/11 and al-Qaeda as

reasons to continue the Iraq War indefinitely.

“For America, the decision we face in Iraq is not whether we ought to take sides in a civil war; it’s whether we stay in the fight against the same international terrorist network that attacked us on 9/11,” Bush said in his May 2 speech. “I strongly believe it’s in our national interest to stay in the fight.”

But Bush’s position again conflicts with the views of many intelligence analysts and top U.S. commanders, who understand that Bush’s simplistic thinking presents a dangerous and false dichotomy, a choice between glorious “victory” and humiliating “surrender.”

The real issue, in the analysts’ opinion, is whether the United States will mount a sophisticated global counter-insurgency campaign against Islamic extremism – addressing legitimate concerns of the Muslim world and isolating al-Qaeda terrorists – or continue playing into al-Qaeda’s hands by extending the Iraq War for years and years.

More Cherry-Picking

But the U.S. news media continues to let Bush get away with cherry-picking the few facts that tend to bolster his position, while ignoring the more significant information that undercuts him.

For instance, the remarkable “Atiyah” comment that “prolonging the [Iraq] war is in our interest” was first reported by Consortiumnews.com in [a story](#) posted on the Internet on Oct. 3, 2006. That story was matched by a Christian Science Monitor [article](#) on Oct. 6, but the revelation has been widely ignored by other news organizations.

Much wider media currency has gone to the recurring – and trivial – White House theme about an increasing number of “tips” from Iraqis, supposedly proving progress in the war.

“American and Iraqi forces received more tips from local residents in the past four months than during any other four-month period on record,” Bush said in his May 2 speech. “People are beginning to have some confidence.”

But the “tips” argument – similar to earlier reports from Iraq that the number of painted classrooms proved success for the U.S. reconstruction effort – represents ephemeral evidence that establishes little. More than a year ago, the “tips” argument also was cited to demonstrate war progress that turned out to be illusory.

On Dec. 2, 2005, for instance, the right-wing Heritage Foundation published a report entitled “[Dispelling Myths about Iraq](#)” that challenged the growing pessimism about whether U.S.-trained Iraqi forces could bring security to the country.

“The increasing effectiveness of the Iraqi security forces has inspired optimism among the Iraqi people,” the Heritage report countered. “This is reflected in the growing number of intelligence tips from Iraqi civilians. In March 2005, Iraqi and coalition forces received 483 tips from Iraqi citizens. This figure rose to 3,300 in August [2005], and to more than 4,700 in September.”

On Jan. 10, 2006, White House reprised the progress on Iraqi tips for a fact sheet entitled “[Progress and the Work Ahead in Iraq](#).”

“As Iraqis see their own countrymen defending them against the terrorists and Saddamists, they are stepping forward with needed intelligence,” the fact sheet read, noting the supposed success of a tips hot line. “The number of tips from Iraqis has grown from 400 in March 2005 to over 4,700” in December 2005.

But a New York Times story in November 2006 punched a hole in the tips-as-evidence-of-success story.

“After rising slowly yet steadily since the hot line’s inception, the number of tips suddenly started to dry up last summer [2006]. From a rate of about 62 usable tips a day in June, the number dropped to about 29 tips a day in mid-September, according to statistics provided by the U.S. military. On Sept. 19, the operators recorded only one usable tip.”

The Times story said the discrepancy between the overall number of “tips” and the number of usable tips was explained by the fact that the vast majority of “tips” were phony. “Almost all intended to harass the operators, presumably as part of an effort by the insurgency to tie up the lines,” the article said. “Callers berated and threatened the operators.” [International Herald Tribune, [Nov. 5, 2006](#)]

Despite these problems with this success indicator, the tips argument returned in the past two weeks as part of Bush’s new sales pitch arguing progress in the Iraq War.

In an April 20, 2007, [fact sheet](#), the White House announced that “Iraqi and American forces have received more tips in the past three months than during any three-month period on record.” But specific numbers were not released.

(Bush used a four-month comparison in his May 2 speech, but it wasn’t clear if he simply misspoke or if the White House had revised its “good news” argument. Bush’s tips claim has shown up unchallenged in U.S. news outlets, including the [Los Angeles Times](#).)

Critical Assessment

A less sanguine view of the Iraq War, reflecting the judgment of many intelligence analysts, was provided by Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Nebraska, in an interview with right-wing columnist Robert D. Novak.

After a fifth visit to Iraq, with stops in Baghdad, Fallujah and Ramadi, Hagel said, “this thing is really coming undone quickly, and [Prime Minister] Maliki’s government is weaker by the day. The police are corrupt, top to bottom. The oil problem is a huge problem. They still can’t get anything through the parliament – no hydrocarbon law, no de-Baathification law, no provincial elections,” which could help bring Sunnis into the governing process.

As for Bush’s repeated assertions that the terrorists in Iraq would “follow us home,” Hagel said, “That’s nonsense... That’s the same kind of rhetoric and thinking that neocons used to get us into this mess.”

Hagel, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, cited “national intelligence” attributing “maybe 10 percent” of the insurgency and violence to al-Qaeda and noting that Iraqis across the board have no fondness for the non-Iraqi terrorists who have swarmed into Iraq to fight the Americans.

The Iraqis “don’t like the terrorists. What’s happened in Anbar province is the tribes are

finally starting to connect with us because al-Qaeda started killing some of their leadership and threatening their people. So the tribes now are at war with al-Qaeda.”

“So,” said Hagel, “when I hear people say, ‘Well, if we leave them to that, it will be chaos’ – what do you think is going on now? Scaring the American people into this blind alley is so dangerous.” [[Washington Post, April 30, 2007](#)]

But President Bush continues to get a relatively easy ride on his Iraq arguments because the U.S. news media has little more appetite now for challenging him and his influential right-wing backers than the press corps did in 2002-03, when the prevailing Washington conventional wisdom was that invading Iraq was one peachy idea.

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, [Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq](#), can be ordered at [secrecyandprivilege.com](#). It's also available at [Amazon.com](#), as is his 1999 book, [Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth.'](#)

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