

## In Lieu of *Casus Belli*: an Analysis of Pre-War Bellicose Rationale

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My inquiry is directed against the alleged proliferation of disinformation by George W. Bush's administration in the days between the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and Gulf War II. Various commentators and spectators have noted that some of the claims made by the administration in support of their contention that the autocratic Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein posed an immediate and insoluble threat to the peace and security of the United States of America have not materialized in the wake of Hussein's removal. The majority of the criticism centers on the administration's pre-war position that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. To date, no weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq.

The significance of this query is three-fold. First, if the rationale advanced by the Bush administration as *casus belli* is in fact founded on fallacious foundations, then perhaps the coalition invasion of the formerly sovereign nation of Iraq was an illegal act. Second, the dissemination of disinformation by the

executive branch of the federal government (whether premeditated or not), and the role of the media in promoting this dissemination, has significant repercussions for democracy and democratic modes of government. Third, in the absence of evidence pointing to weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the actions of a lone superpower of hegemonic proportions, convinced of a fiction and taking seemingly unilateral action in response to this fiction, has (and will continue to have) serious ramifications for international relations.

Public opinion polls conducted as recently as 6 December 2005 indicate that 52% of a representative sample of adults feel that the Bush administration intentionally misled the public in making its case for war with Iraq. (More recent polls show a further weakening of public support for the war.) Significantly, the percentage of the population that feels the Bush administration misled the public about Iraq has shifted significantly as time has progressed:

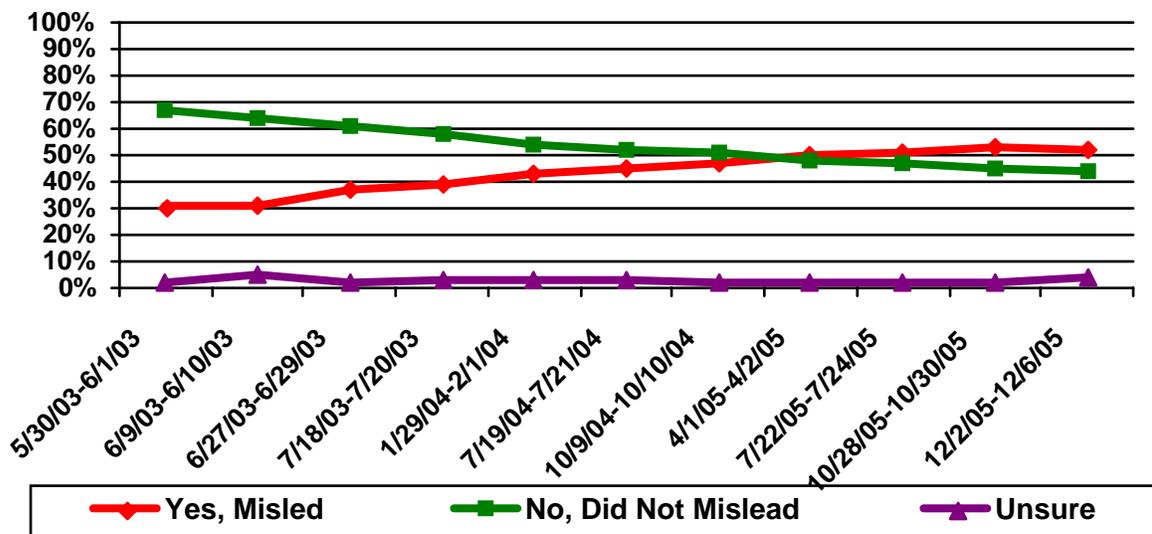


Figure 1. "Do you think the Bush Administration deliberately misled the American public about whether Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, or not?" CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll. 15 Dec. 2005 <<http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq2.htm>>.

Analysis of this shifting trend in light of corresponding events and media coverage will shed important insight into the public-media-government relationship and perhaps have important implications for democracies in the modern age.

This study will not incorporate other issues and events of importance that transpired within the same time frame. While events such as Hurricane Katrina and White House information leaks may have relevance to consideration of the ongoing war in Iraq, this study is concerned only with the case made by the Bush administration for war in Iraq and the fallout of inquiries into the veracity of that case. The casualties arising from the military aspect of the war are also not likely to be of concern to this study, at least in so far as the rationale for war is concerned. Casualty figures may be incorporated to add weight to the gravity of the situation, but will not be a prevalent theme in the work. Military aspects of the war in Iraq, especially military policy, are of no relevance to this study and will, therefore, not be incorporated. Religious aspects of the conflict, both domestic and foreign, also are of no relevance to this study. Personal character evaluations and discussions on the success or failure of the current presidency in general will be excluded, except for those instances of such discourse that bear directly on the issue at hand. Finally, this report is concerned with the causes for war, not the remedies for it. As such, this inquiry will be free of discourse on appropriate exit strategies from Iraq.

My research focuses exclusively on the Iraqi conflict, though comparative analyses with other, potentially relevant political and military maneuvers conducted in the past, such as the Vietnam War and America's 1899 War in the Philippines, would yield interesting parallels. Alleged war crimes, including the accusations of misconduct in the handling of prisoners and the trial of Saddam Hussein, will not be addressed in this study, though they are

becoming the newly-minted rationale for the invasion. Economic, psychological, and environmental impacts of military action in Iraq will similarly not play a role in this study. If political cartoons and parodies are used in this study, I will limit these to representations of public sentiment and interpretations of government actions to further gauge public opinion regarding the war.

As one who was misled, I—alongside most citizens of the United States—bore witness to the attacks of 11 September 2001. I was swept up with the patriotism that reigned in the shadow of that fateful day and turned a blind eye to government acts to stifle liberty under the guise of security. I was privy to the same information as those who responded in the polls cited above and, for some time, I shared their beliefs. President George W. Bush was a source of comfort and resolve in uncertain times. However, as the public is beginning to realize, the Bush administration may have abused the public's faith by participating in a disinformation campaign likely staged by loyal followers in his administration committed to effecting the removal of Saddam Hussein in response to the purported threat he represented.

My current uncertainty with regard to this issue causes me to question the events and information that led to war with Iraq. I am not alone in this line of inquiry. Indeed, this train of thought permeates several of the key sources of my study. Peer-reviewed articles such as "Did President Bush mislead the country in his arguments for war with Iraq?", in *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, and "Inventing the axis of evil: the myth and reality of us intelligence and policy-making after 9/11", in *Intelligence and National Security*, foster the same questions. These articles analyze statements by President Bush and his administration regarding the link between Saddam Hussein, al-Qaeda, and 11 September 2001; they analyze the wilting evidence for Iraq's weapons of mass destruction cache; and they investigate evidence pertaining to Saddam Hussein's will

and ability to deploy such weapons. These sources suggest the Bush administration misled the American public and an attentive (and often skeptical) world audience. But any complete analysis of the argument for disinformation requires analysis of opposing viewpoints, and so this inquiry will also analyze articles harboring viewpoints supporting Bush, such as "Presidential Pants on Fire?: They say that Bush is 'lying.' They're wrong.", in *National Review*, whose conclusions are in stark contrast to those found in the previously noted articles.

My initial research leads me to believe there was, in fact, an extensive disinformation campaign promoted by the government of the United States under the presidency of George

W. Bush. The evidence suggests information was often (and at times poorly) forced to fit a predetermined model for war. It also suggests we are likely to experience serious political, democratic, and international ramifications from these actions. I will be using my analysis of public statements by government officials, interpretative articles, chronologies of events, evidence reports, and polling information to affirm, negate, or modify the claims I have laid out in this introduction to my research. Based on my findings, I will offer some deductions concerning ramifications for the American people, for democratic modes of government, and for future international relations between the US and its "allies" and "enemies."

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