

**Deliberate Misinformation to Gain Support of the Public
The Case of Americans Invasion of Iraq in March 2003**

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Abstract

Although Iraq had no operational relationship with Al-Qaeda, who had been the primary target of the 'War on Terrorism', and even though Iraq had been devastated by over ten years of harsh economic sanctions, the Bush administration was successful in convincing the American public that Saddam's Iraq was a grave threat to the United States that needed to be dealt with immediately.

The major question the article seeks to answer is: 'How was the US public convinced into favoring a war with Iraq by the Bush administration?' The Bush administration's main effort was to convince the American public that Iraq possessed WMD and had links to Al-Qaeda, and as such these two will be the first two issues the article will examine. In the next part, the use of the underlying atmosphere in the American public following the events of September the 11th by the Bush administration, followed by a section on whether these efforts were a coordinated and conscious effort or not, will be addressed.

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Introduction

On March 20th 2003, the United States attacked Iraq, resulting in the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. So far the war has resulted in over 90000 Iraqi civilian casualties based on very conservative estimates (Iraq Body Count Project, February 17, 2009) to a million casualties based on other estimates. (Opinion Research Business, February 17, 2009) The UNHCR estimates that the war had resulted in 4.7 million Iraqi refugees (UNHCR, April 2008) (about 16 per cent of the population of Iraq). The war has also resulted in over 4300 American casualties and over 30,000 wounded (over 100,000 estimated wounded) (antiwar.com, February 22, 2010) as well financial costs estimated to eventually exceed three trillion dollars. (Stiglitz, 2008) This situation has been unlike what was expected by the US administration and the American public. Thanks to the open media, American public was ultimately able to find out the truth, and due to democratic process, to show its discontent by voting-out Republicans and instead voting in for Democrats and particularly President Barack Hossein Obama-an African American with Muslim background.

On the eve of the invasion, polls suggested that support for the war exceeded 60 per cent among the American public. (Benedetto, March 17, 2003) Although Iraq had no operational relationship with Al-Qaeda, who had been the primary target of the 'War on Terrorism', and even though Iraq had been devastated by over ten years of harsh economic sanctions, eliminating the threat of its military force so far that it was not a threat even to its neighbors let alone the United States, the Bush administration was successful in convincing the American public that Saddam's Iraq was a grave threat to the United States that needed to be dealt with immediately. The major question the article seeks to answer is: 'How was the US public convinced into

favoring a war with Iraq by the Bush administration?' The Bush administration's main effort was to convince the American public that Iraq possessed Weapons of Mass Destruction and had links to Al-Qaeda, and as such these two will be the first two issues the article will examine. In the next part, the use of the underlying atmosphere in the American public following the events of September the 11th by the Bush administration, followed by a section on whether these efforts were a coordinated and conscious effort or not, will be addressed.

Iraq and WMD

Based upon its inherent trend to consolidate its global hegemony, Bush the Second has launched an aggressive foreign policy since 2001. The most frequently used argument used to convince the American public to invade Iraq was its possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction or WMD. White House officials including the President told the American public on numerous occasions about Saddam Hussein's arsenal of chemical and biological weapons as well as nuclear weapons program. An intensive research done by the Center for Public Integrity shows that George W. Bush and seven of his administration's top officials, including Vice President Dick Cheney, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, White House press secretaries Ari Fleischer and Scott McClellan made at least 935 false statements in the two years following September 11th, regarding the threat posed by Saddam's Iraq to the nation. Most of these statements stated that Iraq possessed Weapons of Mass Destruction while a smaller amount alleged Iraqi links to Al-Qaeda and 9/11. For example President Bush who with 260 false statements had the highest number of statements, made 232 statements about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and 28 statements about Iraq's links to Al Qaeda. Contrary to public

thinking about Powell's opposition to the war, the Secretary of State had the second-highest total in the two-year period, with 244 false statements about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and 10 about Iraq's links to Al Qaeda.¹ (Lewis & Reading-Smith, January 23, 2008)

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, the campaign to accuse Iraq of WMD possession slowly started with Bush saying in November 2001 that Iraq will be held responsible for harboring Weapons of Mass Destruction, (Rich, 2006, 58) however the effort largely took off after the January 2002 State of the Union address in which President Bush declared Iraq, Iran and North Korea as an "axis of evil". The campaign to link Iraq with WMD and Al-Qaeda went into full swing starting from September 11th 2002 during which President Bush presented his case against Iraq on the first anniversary of 9/11 on Ellis Island with the statue of Liberty in the background. In the weeks before the speech, top administration officials prepared the public for the case against Iraq. For example on August 26th 2002 Dick Cheney in a speech said that *"There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction, there is no doubt that he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us"* (Cheney, August 26, 2002), Rice said *"We don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud"* on CNN's late edition, the same message was echoed by Donald Rumsfeld on CBS's *Face the Nation* and Collin Powell on *Fox News Sunday*. (Rich, 2006, 59-60)

The rhetoric of the administration in the following months became even more intense. Bush in a speech made in October 2002 in Cincinnati warned of the danger of Iraqi drones (unmanned aircrafts) that could be used for *"missions targeting the United States, and of course, sophisticated delivery systems are not required for a chemical or*

¹. Neo-Cons were determined to consolidate US global hegemony by military means, see (Seifzadeh, 2001, 1-29)

biological attack; all that might be required are a small container and one terrorist or Iraqi intelligence operative to deliver it". (Bush, October 7, 2002) The drones which supposedly could be used for a chemical or biological attack on the United States were mentioned again in the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on 'Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs'. The NIE stated that ***"Baghdad has attempted to convert some of its L-29 jet trainer aircraft into UAVs that can be fitted with chemical and biological warfare (CBW) spray tanks"***. (National Intelligence Estimate, October 2002) The issue was raised again in Powell's UN speech, while no one seemed to notice that the drones never had the range to even reach Europe, let alone the United States. In reality the drones were so out of date and primitive, that after the invasion when US troops investigated the drones, the LA times reported ***"They quickly found the 'drones': five burned and blackened 9-foot wings dumped near the front gate. 'It could have been a student project, or maybe a model,' the team's expert, U.S. Air Force Capt. Libbie Boehm, said with a shrug"*** (emphasis added). (Drogin, June 15, 2003)

The NIE of October 2002 only added fuel to the fire. NIE reports are drawn from the cumulative intelligence of the 16 intelligence agencies of the United States. NIEs are highly regarded both domestically and internationally. After the report was published Congress authorized the use of force against Iraq. Interestingly enough the "Anthrax" card was used for an American public and Congress that had just recovered from a highly publicized Anthrax scare. The report states:

"Iraq has continued its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs in defiance of UN resolutions and restrictions. Baghdad has chemical and biological weapons as well as missiles with ranges in excess of UN restrictions" later on stressing that ***"Baghdad has begun renewed production of chemical warfare agents, probably including mustard, sarin, cyclosarin, and VX.....All key aspects—R&D, production, and***

weaponization—of Iraq’s offensive BW (Biological Weapons) program are active and most elements are larger and more advanced than they were before the (Persian) Gulf war....Iraq has some lethal and incapacitating BW agents and is capable of quickly producing and weaponizing a variety of such agents, including anthrax, for delivery by bombs, missiles, aerial sprayers, and covert operatives, including potentially against the US Homeland” (Parentheses and emphasis added). (National Intelligence Estimate, 2002)

The most important claim the administration made with regards to Iraq’s WMD was its nuclear weapons program, which was repeatedly presented to the American people to give a sense of urgency to “deal” with Iraq as well as to amplify the threat posed by it. While many administration officials talked of a “nuclear weapons program” which would shortly result in a nuclear weapon, some people like Dick Cheney went even further by saying that Iraq already possessed “reconstituted nuclear weapons” in March 2002 on *Meet the Press*. All of these allegations were based on the infamous ‘Aluminum Tubes’ and ‘Niger Yellow Cake’ stories both of which were proven utterly false later on. In the first story, Iraq’s purchase of a large quantity of aluminum tubes were presented to the public as evidence that Iraq was using the tubes to build centrifuges for enriching uranium, even though the IAEA head Mohamed El-Baradei said that “*we have to date found no evidence or plausible indication of the revival of a nuclear weapons program in Iraq*” and also adding that the aluminum tubes “*unless modified, would not be suitable for manufacturing centrifuges*”. (Alterman, & Green, 2004)

The Niger story was about an alleged purchase of five hundred tons of uranium oxide from Nigeria. The CIA allegedly on the orders of the Vice President’s office, sent a former US ambassador named Joseph C. Wilson to Nigeria in January 2002 to investigate the matter only to find that the documents about the deal were forgeries and that no such deal had taken place. Nevertheless the administration

still kept on using the story until two weeks before the start of the War in March 2003, when Wilson publicly came forward and announced the documents were forged and the whole story was unsubstantiated. The administration subsequently through 'Scooter Libby' the highly influential chief of staff for the Vice President leaked the identity of Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, who had been an undercover CIA agent. This resulted in a very controversial affair that ultimately helped accelerate the downward moving public approval rating of Bush in the years following the invasion of Iraq. (Rich, 2006)

Even though the two pillars of the administration's nuclear case against Iraq were completely unfounded however the administration kept beating the drum with the President saying in the UN on September 12th 2002 that Iraq had made *"several attempts to buy high-strength aluminum tubes used to enrich uranium for a nuclear weapon"* and that *"should Iraq acquire fissile material, it would be able to build a nuclear weapon within a year"*. The NIE report in the following October also stated the *"within a year"* timeline. In another statement at Camp David, alongside British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, President Bush said that to the press, *"I would remind you that when the inspectors first went into Iraq and were denied- finally denied access, a report came out of the Atomic-the IAEA, that they were six months away from developing a [nuclear] weapon. I do not know what more evidence we need"*. NBC News tried to confirm the report with the IAEA, only to find out that the report, issued in 1998, was talking about Iraq before the 1991 Persian Gulf War, with the IAEA spokesman telling NBC that *"there is no conclusive proof that Iraq has restarted its nuclear weapons program"*. (Rich, 2006, 65) The IAEA had also reported that the Niger documents were forgeries, although it was never investigated or revealed who had forged the documents.

The constant bombardment of the public with "Iraqi WMD" worked, with 90 per cent of the American public agreeing that it is likely that Saddam was "currently developing weapons of mass

destruction”, an LA Times poll found in December 2002. (Pinkus, December 17, 2002) Another poll conducted by Gallup in January 2003 found that 41 per cent of Americans were certain that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, 45 per cent think that Iraq has WMD but have some doubts, 10 per cent had a lot of doubt, while only 1 per cent were certain that Iraq did not have WMD. (Moore, March 17, 2006) Statements and speeches from administration officials played an important role in creating this consensus. For example a Zogby poll found that Two-thirds (67 per cent) of Americans had seen Colin Powell’s presentation to the United Nations Security Council, and nearly three out of four (72 per cent) said Powell had made a convincing case for war with Iraq. The same poll found (44 per cent) of those surveyed said Powell’s speech made them more likely to support a war in Iraq. Just under 5 per cent said it made them less likely to support a war, and nearly half (48 per cent) said it made no difference. (Zogby International, February 9, 2003)

Establishing the Iraq – Al-Qaeda Link

The ‘National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States’ or better known as the 9/11 commission, in its June 16th 2004 report, put to rest what had been a long assumption of many analysts that Iraq had no connection to the 9/11 attacks. The report stated that “We have no credible evidence that Iraq and al Qaeda cooperated on attacks against the United States”. (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, June 16, 2004) In fact Bin Laden’s ultra religious Al-Qaeda network was pretty much opposed to Saddam Hussein’s secular Baath government in Iraq, which according to them was to blame for American presence in Saudi Arabia, due to its invasion of Kuwait. Bin Laden even proclaimed this publicly in 1997 when he stated in an interview that Hussein was a “*bad Muslim*” who “*took Kuwait for his own self-aggrandizement*”. (Alterman, 2004, 277) In June 2003 the top investigator of a special

UN terrorism committee which was investigating Al-Qaeda, clearly stated that ***“nothing has come to our notice that would indicate links between Iraq and Al-Qaeda”***. (Alterman, 2004, 279) Even President Bush acknowledged the lack of Iraqi involvement in the 9/11 attacks by saying in September 11th 2006: ***“I am often asked why we are in Iraq when Saddam Hussein was not responsible for the 9/11 attacks. The answer is that the regime of Saddam Hussein was a clear threat”***. (Bush, September 11, 2006)

Establishing a link between Iraq and Al-Qaeda and subsequently the attacks of 9/11, as false as it may have been, was essential for the Bush administration to win public consent for an invasion of Iraq. Even if the public was largely convinced on Iraq having Weapons of Mass Destruction, it would not qualify the country as a target for invasion. The WMD argument on its own would not declare Iraq as an immediate threat to the United States. Many countries like North Korea, Pakistan, India, Israel, etc, have WMDs and are not considered immediate threats to the United States. In fact the WMD argument would only fit into place, if a clear relationship between Iraq and Terrorism and Iraq and Al-Qaeda would be established. If this link could be established then the public would see Iraq as a) A terrorist threat which had already attacked the United States on 9/11 and b) This threat was severe due to the stockpile of weapons the Iraqi regime possessed (WMDs, particularly nuclear weapons).

Due to the shakiness and lack of evidence for the argument of an Iraq-Al-Qaeda relationship, the administration, was careful not to explicitly announce Iraq as complicit in the 9/11 attacks. This was especially true in public Presidential statements, which are prepared very carefully by the White House. For example on January 31st 2003, less than six weeks before the US invasion of Iraq, a reporter asked Bush ***“Do you believe that there is a link between Saddam Hussein, a direct link, and the men who attacked on September the 11th?”***, Bush replied, ***“I can’t make that claim”***. (Bush, January 31, 2003) However by implicitly

implying the existence of a relationship between Iraq and Al-Qaeda repeatedly by the administration including the President, the American public was largely led to believe that such a relationship as well as complicity in the 9/11 attacks by Iraq, did in fact exist.

The first implications of Iraqi involvement in the 9/11 attacks came from the Vice President Dick Cheney. Although Cheney had clearly stated on the first weekend after the 9/11 attacks on Meet the Press to Tim Russert that there was no evidence linking Saddam Hussein or Iraqis to the attacks, however a couple of months later on December 6th, Cheney told the same reporter that *“it’s pretty well confirmed”* that the lead hijacker Mohammad Atta had met with a senior member of the Iraqi Intelligence Service a couple of months before the attacks, in Prague, Czechoslovakia. (Rich, 2006, 40)

Although the intelligence on the Prague meeting was highly dubious and later proven to be wrong however it was repeatedly used by the administration as “evidence” for the Iraq-Al-Qaeda link. In fact the New York Times revealed in October 2002 that the Czech President had told the White House that there was no evidence to support the Prague meeting incident, and even though George Tenet, the director of the CIA at the time, had testified to Congress that there was no evidence to support the Atta meeting in Prague, however Cheney kept using it until 2004 when the report of the 9/11 commission repeated what had already been known, the fact that the Prague meeting had never taken place. (Rich, 2006)

On October 7th, Bush in a speech proclaimed that the link between Al-Qaeda and Iraq by saying *“We know that Iraq and Al-Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back a decade”*. He also said that a *“very senior Al-Qaeda leader”*, had received medical treatment in Baghdad. The person Bush was referring to was Abu Mussab Al-Zarqawi, who headed his own organization, independently from Al-Qaeda. More importantly Zarqawi’s terrorist network was operating outside of the autonomous Kurdish area, north of Iraq, which was outside of

Saddam's control since the first Persian Gulf War. (Alterman, 2004) If anyone was to blame for "harboring" Zarqawi, it would be the Kurds and their ally the United States which controlled northern Iraq. In the same speech, Bush added that ***"Iraq has trained Al-Qaeda members in bomb making and poisons and deadly gases"*** which linked the Iraq - Al-Qaeda argument with the WMD argument, repeating accusation which had never been proven.

In the 2003 State of the Union addresses, which is arguably the most important presidential address, Bush stressed his point again by saying ***"Saddam Hussein aids and protects terrorist including members of Al-Qaeda....he could provide one of his hidden weapons to terrorists"***. (Bush, January 29, 2003) Again we see the linking of Iraq's relationship with terrorism to its alleged build up of WMD. In another important section of the state of the union speech which according to Neilson Media Research attracted a record 62 million TV viewers, the highest state of the union rating during Bush's tenure, Bush said ***"Before September the 11th, many in the world believed that Saddam Hussein could be contained. But chemical agents, lethal viruses and shadowy terrorist networks are not easily contained. Imagine those nineteen hijackers with other weapons and other plans, this time armed by Saddam Hussein....It would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known"***. (New York Times, January 30, 2008)

According to a poll done by the CBS, the 2003 State of the Union Address was very successful for the war effort, in which support for military action against Iraq climbed by 10 per cent (from 67 per cent before the speech to 77 per cent after the speech) among the American public. (CBS News, January 29, 2003)

Other than Bush and Cheney who made the Iraq-Al-Qaeda link repeatedly, others in the administration including Rice, Powel, Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld also made the link repeatedly. One of the most notorious and closely watched speeches of the Iraq campaign

was Collin Powell's speech to the United Nations Security Council. In it Powell talked about a *"sinister nexus between Iraq and Al-Qaeda terrorist network, a nexus that combines classic terrorist organizations and modern methods of murder"*. As an example of the link he talked about the training camp "inside Iraq" making poison and being run by Abu Mussab Al-Zarqawi, again excluding the fact that the alleged training camp was inside Kurdish controlled northern Iraq where Saddam had no control. (Alterman, 2004)

By August 2003, 69 per cent of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein personal involvement in the 9/11 attacks to be *"very or somewhat likely"*. (Washington Post, September 6, 2003) Another poll conducted in January 2003 by the Princeton Survey Research Associates for Knight Ridder newspaper showed that 65 per cent of Americans believed that Iraq and Al-Qaeda were closely collaborating allies. The same poll asked Americans about the whether the 9/11 attackers were of Iraqi nationality, only 17 per cent knew the correct answer: that none of the hijackers were Iraqi. 44 per cent of Americans believed that most or some of the hijackers were Iraqi; another 6 per cent believe that one of the hijackers was an Iraqi. That leaves 33 per cent who did not know enough to offer an answer. (Zeller, March 3, 2003) & (Pryor, February 6, 2003) A poll conducted by ABC/Washington Post also in January 2003 found that 81 per cent of Americans believed Iraq posed a threat to the United States. (Alterman, 2004, 266)

Using the Fear Factor

All of the administration efforts to convince the American public that Saddam's Iraq was an imminent threat to the United States and needs to be attacked preemptively, must be understood against the backdrop of the events of September the 11th and the ensuing 'War on Terror'. On September 11th the United States mainland was attacked after nearly two hundred years. The psychological impact of the

attacks were tremendous as Americans had not witnessed any attacks on the mainland for generations, and the sight of people jumping off to their death from the World Trade Center truly shocked them. Other more minor acts of terrorism in the following months including the 'Anthrax letters' as well as the 'Sniper Attacks in Washington D.C.' only heightened the tense atmosphere, even though it was later revealed in both cases that they were domestic terrorism.

A Pew poll conducted after the September 11th attacks, on September 13th to September 17th, found that 71 per cent of Americans have felt depressed, 49 per cent have difficulty concentrating, and 33 per cent report having trouble sleeping at night. 81 per cent of those polled say they are constantly tuned in to news reports while 69 per cent say they are praying more as a result of the attacks. (The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, September 19, 2001) Another Pew poll conducted two weeks after the attacks found that 53 per cent of Americans were worried that they or their families will be a victim of terrorism. (The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, September 27, 2001) The feeling of being under threat and attack also gave in way for more support for military actions and more acceptance of sacrifice. The first Pew poll found that 77 per cent of Americans backed military force *“even if it means thousands of casualties”*. (The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, September 19, 2001)

The attacks also led to more hawkish views and acceptance of extreme measures, for example the first Pew poll after September 11th found that 67 per cent of Americans favor CIA assassinations overseas in pursuing suspected enemies of the United States. (The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, September 19, 2001) Another more interesting survey done by Zogby on November 3-5th, nearly two months after the attacks, found that 54 per cent of Americans believed that the use of “Strategic Nuclear Weapons” by the United States would be “effective” in America’s fight against

terrorism, while 42 per cent thought the use of “Biological Warfare” would be effective. (Zogby International, November 7, 2001) Even though according to Zogby, the percentage of Americans supporting the use of strategic nuclear weapons had dropped to 21 per cent by March 2002, (Zogby International, March 14, 2002) however the fact that a majority of Americans, in the following months of the attacks, believed in using such extreme measures in order to fight terrorism, speaks volumes of the physiological status of Americans and the extent they were willing to go in order to protect America.

This sense of fear of new terrorist attacks and the urgency to fight it, brought about an overwhelming support for measures to “combat terrorism”, whatever they may have been. By looking at the poll data from Gallup which frequently polled the American public on the amount of support for invading Iraq to remove Saddam from power, one can see that the highest percentage of approval for the measure was in November 2001, when it was 74 per cent, which was much higher than the second highest approval rating of the measure, which was on the eve of the war in March 2003 (64 per cent). (Gallup, 2003, 349) Interestingly enough in November 2001, most administration officials including Bush had not even started their campaign to convince the American public to attack Iraq. In fact a New York Times/ CBS News poll done two weeks after the attacks found that only 6 per cent of Americans believed that Bin Laden had collaborated with Saddam Hussein for the attacks. (Berke & Elder, September 25, 2001)

The heightened sense of fear and urgency however was starting to decline in the months following the attacks. A Pew survey found that worries over new terrorist attacks had dropped to 52 per cent in December 2001, down from 73 per cent in October. The same poll found that 60 per cent of Americans were very closely following news regarding terrorist attacks in December, down from 78 per cent in October. (The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press,

December 20, 2001) The only thing necessary to sustain the overwhelming support for the “War against Terrorism” was for new terrorist attacks to take place or at least threats of new terrorist attacks to continue. That is exactly what the administration did. Whether this was done out of genuine fear of terrorist attacks or as a propaganda campaign to keep Americans scared and worried cannot be fully determined. Having said this, it is clear that in numerous instances the administration used these threats to its advantage.

Six months after the attacks a new Homeland Security Advisory System was established under Homeland Security Presidential Directive 3. Responsibility for developing, implementing and managing the system was given to the U.S. Attorney General, who was John Ashcroft at the time. The new system would alert federal, state and local governments as well as the American public on the current level of terrorism threat. The system which is often called the “terrorism threat level” has five colors signifying the threat level as:

Red (Severe): Sever Risk of Terrorist Attacks

Orange (High): High Risk of Terrorist Attacks

Yellow (Elevated): Significant Risk of Terrorist Attacks

Blue (Guarded): General Risk of Terrorist Attacks

Green (Low): Low Risk of Terrorist Attacks (US Department of Homeland Security, Accessed on February 17, 2009)

Each level triggers different actions by federal, state and local governments as well as different security levels at airports and public facilities. There are no published criteria for determining the threat levels so according to critics it has become a source of government manipulation. In fact research done at Columbia University has shown that raising the threat levels as well as public statement regarding terrorism threats by the administration, especially the president, had resulted in an increase of public fear on terrorism as well as a rise in Bush’s approval ratings. (Stannard, September 7, 2006)

Since the start of the terrorism alert system, the threat level has never been lowered to Green (Low), or Blue (Guarded), meaning that the lowest threat level since March 2002, when the system was established, has been Yellow which means a “Significant Risk of Terrorist Attacks”. (Strohm, January 8, 2008) The threat level has repeatedly been raised to Orange and has been raised to Red once in August 2006. In the months before the Iraq invasion the threat level was raised to orange in September 2002 on the first anniversary of the attacks. The threat level was again raised to orange for twenty days on February 7th to February 27th, just a month before the invasion. The raise in the threat level was announced by Attorney General John Ashcroft, Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge and FBI Director Robert Mueller Recent on February 7th. In the announcement which was highly publicized, Ashcroft said *“reporting indicates an increased likelihood that al-Qaeda may attempt to attack Americans in the United States and/or abroad in or around the end of the Haj, a Muslim religious period ending mid-February 2003...Recent intelligence reports suggests that al-Qaeda leaders have emphasized planning for attacks on apartment buildings, hotels and other soft or lightly secured targets in the United States”* (emphasis added). (CNN, February 7, 2003) Raising the threat level to high risk without any clear indication of where or how a terrorist attack may happen would raise the concerns of the American public. A poll done by Gallup on February 7th to 9th showed that the number of people concerned about becoming a victim of terrorism compared to those not worried, had doubled from a few weeks earlier. (Lee, August 15, 2004)

Issuing vague but provocative terrorism related alerts was in fact the way the Bush administration informed the public. For example in the days leading up to the Memorial Day holiday of 2002 (May 2002), Cheney said that terrorist attacks were *“almost a certainty, it could happen tomorrow, it could happen next week, it could happen next year”*. (Cheney, May 20, 2002) The next day FBI Robert Mueller said *“There*

will be another terrorist attack. We will not be able to stop it. It is something we all live with", at the same time intelligence officials told the American public that terrorists want to topple "tall apartment buildings" with explosives, telling Americans to report any suspicious behavior, (CNN, May 20, 2002) while a couple of days later Rumsfeld said "*We do face additional terrorist threats and the issue is not if but when and where and how*", also adding that terrorists will "*inevitably obtain weapons of mass destruction*". A couple of days later, John Ashcroft through a television hookup from Moscow announced that FBI agents had arrested a "known terrorist" that intended to explode a "dirty bomb" in the United States, even though the "terrorist" being referred to, 'Jose Padilla', was a Chicago gang member who had been arrested weeks earlier without any nuclear material what so ever. (Alterman, 2004, 243) The so called "threat" was announced four days after FBI whistle-blower Coleen Rowley testified before Congress that 9/11 might have been prevented if the FBI flight-school warning had reached federal agents investigating Moussaoui. (Dickinson, February 7, 2008)

Another example was raising the threat level to Orange in September 2002 which coincided exactly with president Bush's speech on the 9/11 anniversary in which the campaign to sell the war to the American public was started officially as noted earlier. The "threat" which was announced on September 10th was just a day before the speech. The threat was officially announced by Bush, while Cheney was flown to a "secure location", while Ashcroft announced that Al-Qaeda intended to target the "transportation and energy sectors", again using very vague language than can basically mean anywhere, anytime and with any means, enough to scare many people. (Dickinson, February 7, 2008)

Allegations for raising the threat level for political purposes were commonly pointed out by critics of the war and the Bush administration. Two years after the invasion, allegations were turned

into facts when Tom Ridge who had resigned as Homeland Security Secretary in February 2005, talked about the flimsy evidence used to elevate the threat level. He elaborated by saying "*Sometimes we disagreed with the intelligence assessment. There were times when some people in the administration were really aggressive about raising the threat level, and we said, 'For that?!'*" and adding that he often disagreed with officials who wanted to elevate the threat level, but was often overruled. (Hall, October 5, 2005)

An Intentional Propaganda Effort by the White House

Although one cannot prove that every single 'threat' announcement, as well as the demonization of Iraq, was all part of a campaign to sell the war, however what is certain is that the White House did have a major propaganda agenda to sell the Iraqi War to the American public. A highly secretive committee was formed in August 2002 in the White House by Bush's Chief of Staff, Andrew Card, called the White House Iraq Group (WHIG) to coordinate efforts to "educate the public" about the threat from Hussein, as a member of the group liked to put it. The group which met at least one a week in the White House Situation Room included national security advisor Condoleezza Rice, the president's senior political adviser Karl Rove, top aid to the president and communications strategists Karen Hughes, deputy national security advisor Stephen J. Hadley and Lewis 'scooter' Libby, Cheney's chief of staff as well as Ari Fleischer, the White House press secretary. After the formation of the group, according to the Washington Post a "strategic communications" task force under the group began to plan speeches and white papers with a special focus on Iraq's nuclear weapons program. (Gellman, August 10, 2003) According to Scott McClellan who later replaced Fleischer as press secretary, the group was set up in summer 2002 to "coordinate the marketing of the war to the public". Another mandate of the group was to push a resolution in Congress

authorizing the use of force against Iraq. (McClellan, 2008)

In an interview with the New York Times published on September 6th, Card said ***“from a marketing point of view, you do not introduce new products in August”***, which referred to the commonly marketing strategy in the US in which new products are introduced in September, after Americans are back from holidays. This is why the Bush administration waited until September to start their full fledged marathon to sell the war. Although the demonization of Iraq had started from months before, however September 2002 was the month the administration went behind the effort full force. Data from the Center for Public Integrity show that the administrations statements alleging Iraqi links with terrorism and possession of WMD more than tripled starting from September 2002. (Lewis & Reading-Smith, January 23, 2008) A day after Card’s remarks, Bush and nearly all his advisors started to talk about an Iraqi nuclear bomb. The notorious “mushroom cloud” also started to appear in their speeches and statements. (Gellman, August 10, 2003)

This well coordinated public relations, propaganda or psychological operations effort, depending on what wants to call it, was in parallel to a highly secretive effort to prepare military plans to invade Iraq. According to Bob Woodward’s book, ‘Plan of attack’, Bush secretly told Rumsfeld on November 21st 2001, just 72 days after the attacks to prepare a new “war plan for Iraq”. By July 2002, two months before the start of the full blown campaign to sell the war in September, the CIA was sending covert paramilitary teams into northern Iraq with the direct authorization of the president. (Woodward, 2004)

Conclusion

The campaign to sell the Iraq War to the American public was a well coordinated effort involving the highest levels of officials in the administration which used various arguments and techniques to convince the American public that Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was an

immediate and grave threat to the security of the United States. The administration's two main strategies was to reiterate in different arenas and by different individuals on multiple occasions, that Iraq was linked to terrorism and Al-Qaeda and that Iraq already possessed Chemical and Biological Weapons and was very close to obtaining a nuclear weapon. The nuclear weapon argument was very important in creating a sense of urgency that is why the administration would repeat that Iraq was six months to a year away from a nuclear weapon. The effort was conducted in a very professional manner by the White House Iraq Group and with the help of the highest caliber 'public relations' companies such as the Rendon Group. (Rich, 2006) The cumulative effect of all the speeches, statements, interviews, news stories, etc was that support for the invasion was gradually raised among the American public.

This campaign used the sense of fear and the need for protecting the nation against terrorism among the American public very consciously. An American public that was worried about new terrorist attacks was constantly being fed vague "terrorism alerts" without any clear details of what the American public should do in response. At the same time the threats from Iraq's WMDs were constantly repeated which was in effect linking the two issues together. In essence, fear of biological and nuclear terrorist attacks in major American cities was used to drum up support for the war, for example Bush in the highly important 2003 State of the Union address, which as indicated earlier raised support for the a military confrontation with Iraq by 10 per cent (from 67 per cent before the speech to 77 per cent after the speech), said ***"The United Nations concluded in 1999 Saddam Hussein had biological weapons materials sufficient to produce over 25,000 liters of anthrax; enough doses to kill several million people...Saddam Hussein had materials sufficient to produce more than 38,000 liters of botulinum toxin; enough to subject millions of people to death by respiratory failure... Saddam Hussein had the materials to***

produce as much as 500 tons of sarin, mustard and VX nerve agents. In such quantities, these chemical agents could also kill untold thousands”.

(Bush, January 29, 2003) Using such alarming language, while at the same time initiating a massive project called ‘Bioshield’ headed by Dick Cheney to protect the nation against biological attacks, while the memories of 9/11 were still fresh among many Americans, was a decisive factor in convincing Americans to attack Iraq.

The main strategy of the administration, which was conducted successfully, was to include the Iraq War as part of the ‘War on Terror’ and thus classify it as a response to the 9/11 attacks which had created feelings of depression, fear, patriotism as well as inclinations towards hawkish foreign policy interventions in an American public who traditionally had held isolationist views towards foreign policy and military issues. A Gallup poll conducted ten days after the start of the Iraq invasion in March 2003, asked the American public “***Do you feel that you have a clear idea of what the war in Iraq is all about -- that is, what we are fighting for?***”, 81 per cent said Yes. The number was even higher for the Afghanistan War, in which 89 per cent of Americans said Yes in November 2001. Compare these numbers with the same poll conducted in May 1967 with regards to the Vietnam War in which only 49 per cent of Americans knew what they were fighting for. Even the poll numbers from the Second World War which is termed “The Good War” in the US, with 73 per cent to 59 per cent saying “Yes” in November 1942 and March 1944 respectively, (Gallup, 2006, 387) could not compare with the overwhelming understanding and support for the war on terrorism which was fought supposedly in order to protect the American homeland. Framing the Iraq War as part of the War on Terror was in effect the administration’s key success in winning the consent of the American public for the invasion of March 2003.

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