
Bush pledges faith in Tenet

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US President George W Bush said yesterday he had confidence in CIA director George Tenet and considered a controversy about false US claims that Iraq tried to buy African uranium to be closed.

Tenet took responsibility on Friday for the false claim by Bush over Iraq's nuclear ambitions, which raised embarrassing questions about the way he made the case for war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

"I've got confidence in George Tenet. I've got confidence in the men and women who work at the CIA and I ... look forward to working with them as we win this war on terror," Bush said in Abuja on the last leg of a five-day five-nation African tour.

Asked if he considered the controversy that dogged his African tour over, he said: "I do."

Bush, seeking to win backing for the invasion of Iraq that US-led forces launched in March, cited the uranium deal in his State of the Union address in January, calling it evidence that Saddam was trying to develop nuclear weapons.

The White House has acknowledged that the accusation should not have been in the speech because documents it was based on proved to be forged.

Meanwhile, another of Bush's pre-war assertions is coming under fire: the alleged link between Saddam's regime and Al Qaeda.

Bush and members of his cabinet claimed Saddam was harbouring top Al Qaeda operatives.

Critics attacked those assertions from the beginning for being counter to the ideologies of Saddam and Al Qaeda and short on corroborating evidence. Now, two former Bush administration intelligence officials say the evidence linking Saddam to the group responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks was never more than sketchy.

"There was no significant pattern of co-operation between Iraq and the Al Qaeda terrorist operation," former State Department intelligence official Greg Thielmann said.
