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## NEWS

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February 1, 2004

### A scandal greater than Watergate

By ERIC MARGOLIS -- Contributing Foreign Editor



"We were all wrong," White House chief weapons hunter and longtime war booster David Kay admitted last week. There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, as the U.S. and Britain had long alleged.

Iraq's nuclear weapons, death rays, vans of death, drones of death, mobile germ labs, poison gas factories, hidden weapons depots, long-range missiles, links to al-Qaida - all were bogus.

The only thing real is Iraq's oil.

If Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction (WMD), as it long insisted, we must draw one of two conclusions.

Either President George Bush, and secretaries Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld, lied about the global threat they claimed Iraq posed, and deceived Congress and the American people. Or, they were grossly misinformed by their intelligence experts and must be judged fools of the first order.

If Bush and his team of chest-thumping, self-proclaimed national security experts were really misinformed about Iraq's weapons and capabilities, then they started a war by mistake - and presided over the two biggest national security fiascos since Pearl Harbor: the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Iraq.

It turns out President Saddam Hussein, whom Bush repeatedly branded a "liar," was in fact telling the truth all along when he said all of Iraq's old weapons systems had been destroyed. It was Bush and British PM Tony Blair who weren't telling the truth.

Saddam should hire attorney Johnny Cochrane and sue the U.S. and Britain for all they're worth.

So, take your pick.

The Iraq war either was the Mother of All Lies, or the Mother of All Fiascos.

Confronted by these ugly facts, Bush tried to rebrand the unprovoked war against Iraq by claiming it was justified because Saddam was such a horrid man.

What arrant hypocrisy.

When Saddam committed his worst deeds - in the 1980s - he was a close U.S. ally, secretly supported by Washington and

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London with arms, intelligence, technicians and cash.

Now, the White House is trying to blame the Central Intelligence Agency for the Iraq fiasco.

CIA director George Tenet may have wronged his agency and the nation by not going public to debunk White House war propaganda over Iraq.

But active and retired CIA officers kept warning the public and media (including this writer) that intelligence on Iraq had been deeply manipulated and politicized by a cabal of pro-war neo-conservative ideologues in the Pentagon and the vice president's office.

They were ignored.

A shadowy Pentagon intelligence unit was created by the neo-cons to whip up war fever against Iraq.

It fed either fake or wildly exaggerated reports about Iraq to the White House and Pentagon, which were then trumpeted by the neo-con media.

This column has maintained for the past 10 years that a campaign of lies and disinformation was being waged against Iraq.

Though I detested Saddam, whose brutal secret police once threatened to hang me, I was incensed to see western democracies fabricating war propaganda.

I watched with disgust as so-called "Iraq experts" and neo-con propagandists, few of whom had ever been to Iraq, warned night after night on U.S. TV about the "deadly threat" from Iraq.

Genuine Mideast specialists were systematically excluded from U.S. media commentary.

By challenging war propaganda, I became the object of attacks by colleagues at this newspaper chain, and by other media pundits in the U.S. and Canada.

Each week, I was flooded with hate e-mail.

"Don't be on the losing side," a close friend warned last year. "Why risk your career and reputation by insisting Iraq has no WMD?"

Why? Because I was absolutely convinced of my position, and I passionately hate propaganda of all kinds - especially when it comes from western democracies.

"Do you feel vindicated?" a radio show host asked me last week. "You predicted a year ago that no WMD would be found in Iraq."

Not vindicated. Just dismayed.

Dismayed by the continuing widespread indifference - or even approval - by many Americans of the aggression against Iraq that violated international law and basic norms of civilized behaviour.

Dismayed by the craven attitude of the U.S. Congress and mainstream media.

And deeply concerned by growing hatred for the U.S. around the globe.

Too few Americans seem troubled their president either lied or blundered into a horrible mess in Iraq, so far costing 520 American dead, nearly 10,000 casualties and \$200 billion US for 2003-04.

This is an historic malfeasance far exceeding in gravity Nixon's Watergate scandal or Bill Clinton's prevarications about sex.

The war fever and xenophobia fostered by the Bush administration continues to grip America.

I am not comparing the U.S. to Nazi Germany.

But one does begin to understand in all this how the Germans, another educated and highly civilized people, were driven in the 1930s by a campaign of fear and lies, into supporting a policy of aggression, religious hatred and racism.

 E-MAIL TO A FRIEND

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