

# Tangled Web, Foreign Entanglement: Iraq and the Negotiation of Accounts

This paper takes the approach developed in my early 2001 book *War Stories*<sup>1</sup> and asks: does this approach enrich our understanding of the events which followed 9.11, and especially the GW Bush administration's war in Iraq?

In a nutshell, *War Stories* argues that accounts and plans are like each other. They are stories, albeit stories of different kinds. They are 'fictional' in the sense that neither accounts of wars past nor plans for war future can be founded on some notion of a determinate, objective reality.

## [1] *The Approach of War Stories*

"The world has changed." So the White House, locating itself after 9.11, insisted. From that first week the White House has told us stories about how 9.11 was undertaken and what it means. The greater part of White House resources, however, have been directed to the Iraq War, which also demands justifications and explanations. How the GW Bush administration has represented 9.11 and the Iraq War is abundantly familiar.

This paper brings the approach of my book *War Stories* to White House accounts of 9.11 and the Iraq War. Among the assertions in *War Stories* are that

- we can usefully talk of 'war scripts' and 'civic scripts'
- political stories are of two principal kinds, accounts—of the past—and plans—for the future
- plans look like accounts
- but have the form 'if the polity chooses to do exx, then it {will | may | might} bring about outcome wye' or '... avoid undesired outcome zee'
- choosing among plans—'deciding'—is a central practice in the polity
- central to any account or plan are claims for objects, sets, and causes
- both accounts and plans are selective sketches, typically summarized even more concisely, and may be invoked by a word or phrase
- accounts and plans *interpret* experience and possibilities
- in a living polity, both accounts and plans invite—even require—that claims are

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of *War Stories* (Zurich and New York: Peter Lang, 2001) is on line, with the permission of the publisher, at <http://www.learnworld.com/WarStories/WarStories.pdf> for personal, non-commercial use.

accompanied by answers to the question ‘why?’

These assertions, or assertions akin to them, are commonplace, perhaps too general to be interesting. But let us add that political discourse is carried on through accounts and plans, and that plans are largely shaped by choices from among the possible narratives of germane experience. Accounts matter for plans, and therefore for decision. And plans look most like narratives of imagined experience ... subject of course to the understanding that as the narrative is enacted circumstance will change.

For this inquiry to be worth our time we need to do more than simply observe White House stories and plans. We could pursue some of the following questions, and will. Was an identifiable ‘war script’ current among GW Bush’s ‘national security’ appointees? On what objects, and sets of objects, do their narratives focus? What causal claims do they make? How may these accounts have been drawn upon in casting White House plans? And when confronted by the question ‘why?’—for example, ‘why do you believe it necessary to war against Iraq?’ and ‘why do you believe there are WMD (or ‘WMD programs’) in Iraq?’—what kinds of reasons were adduced? And what do those choices imply for the ‘culture of argument’ then current in the GW Bush White House?

In a world of reason, one in which claims are followed by the question ‘why?’, and the response ‘because’ may be followed by another ‘why?’, until the conversation partners tire or the doubter is satisfied, there is a premium on asking critical questions and placing persuasive evidence on the table. We have reason to suspect, however, that White House public discourse after 9.11 did not wholly keep to the standard of arguments ‘made in good-faith, reasoned, and evidenced.’ We have reason to suspect that not all the engines of action were acknowledged, or acknowledged prominently. Even if we were to set aside effects of selection, to explore White House practice since 9.11 we must address the issue of *deception*. Did the White House lie? Even if it did not, did it fail to meet the standard required to be sure that what it said, and what it sought to bring others to understand, was true?

## [2] *An Attributed Narrative*

The White House has not offered clear, candid stories, neither accounts nor plans. But we can guess what the main lines of their narratives would be. In that vein, underscoring that this is a speculative construction, consider this:

The Reagan-era commitment to arming broke the back of the Soviet Union, but US timidity allowed Saddam Hussein to escape in 1991. Without question the United States is the world’s *only superpower*. Over time, others will challenge the United States, put its economy and even its people at risk. There is one path—only one path—by which the United States can ensure that it is secure into the future, and that is to prepare and use armed preeminence to insist on its global control. Today the United States has the technological capacity, conventional forces, and ultimate nuclear weaponry to assert its judgments and enforce them if opposed.

The United States must follow an assertive understanding of its national interest.

Anything less imperils it. After all, there are now more than 6,000,000,000 people in the world, of whom the United States counts fewer than 5%. As information access and economic exploitation expand—globalization—others will have capabilities to challenge and compete with the United States in previously unseen ways.

We can draw on a full panel of measures when other's cooperation or consent is desired. Inducements, threats, appeals to principle, whatever we choose. When we want them we will recruit governments into temporary coalitions. Where governments are weak or hostile we can create the preconditions for decisive intervention. Over the long term, the United States will preemptively prevent enemy attack, ensure access to resources, and guarantee the routes over which trade and resources move.

Just as Israel protects itself in a hostile environment, keeping enemies at bay, by parading and using its decisive military forces—intelligence, conventional arms, the nuclear threat, so the United States can regulate its frontier and threaten any noncompliant foreign state with unbounded destruction and disruption. Iraq attests to that.

This may be an artificial, compressed summary of the White House position, but it is not inaccurate. It helps by setting the broader framework in which more focused, particular narratives play their parts.

### [3] *Early Texts*

The keel of White House 2001 policy was laid in the winter of 1992. A Defence Planning Guidance was drafted, while 'Dick' Cheney was US Secretary of Defense, under the supervision of the then Under Secretary for Policy, Paul D. Wolfowitz. It was designated a secret document, summarizing policy worked out in an interagency process, but was leaked to the press. "The classified document makes the case," summarizes *New York Times* reporter Patrick E. Tyler, "for a world dominated by one superpower whose position can be perpetuated by constructive behavior and sufficient military might to deter any nation or group of nations from challenging American primacy."<sup>2</sup> He quotes the document that "the United States should be postured to act independently when collective action cannot be orchestrated." The guidance, scheduled for issuance in March 1992, was accompanied by "illustrative" scenarios for future conflict, one of which postulated war with Iraq.<sup>3</sup>

The draft document sets out these guidelines for policy:

Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union. This is a dominant consideration underlying the new regional defense strategy and requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power. These regions include Western Europe, East Asia, the territory of the former Soviet Union, and Southwest Asia.

There are three additional aspects to this objective: First, the U.S. must show the leadership

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<sup>2</sup> Patrick E. Tyler, "U.S. Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop: A One-Superpower World," *The New York Times*, 8 March 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Tyler states that these scenarios were issued to the services on 4 February. See Patrick E. Tyler, "Pentagon Imagines New Enemies to Fight in Post-Cold-War Era," *The New York Times*, 17 February 1992.

necessary to establish and protect a new order that holds the promise of convincing potential competitors that they need not aspire to a greater role or pursue a more aggressive posture to protect their legitimate interests. Second, in the non-defense areas, we must account sufficiently for the interests of the advanced industrial nations to discourage them from challenging our leadership or seeking to overturn the established political and economic order. Finally, we must maintain the mechanisms for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role. An effective reconstitution capability is important here, since it implies that a potential rival could not hope to quickly or easily gain a predominant military position in the world.

The second objective is to address sources of regional conflict and instability in such a way as to promote increasing respect for international law, limit international violence, and encourage the spread of democratic forms of government and open economic systems. These objectives are especially important in deterring conflicts or threats in regions of security importance to the United States because of their proximity (such as Latin America), or where we have treaty obligations or security commitments to other nations. While the U.S. cannot become the world's "policeman," by assuming responsibility for righting every wrong, we will retain the pre-eminent responsibility for addressing selectively those wrongs which threaten not only our interests, but those of our allies or friends, or which could seriously unsettle international relations. Various types of U.S. interests may be involved in such instances: access to vital raw materials, primarily Persian Gulf oil; proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, threats to U.S. citizens from terrorism or regional or local conflict, and threats to U.S. society from narcotics trafficking.

And, in language which could only encourage those who think the 2003 Iraq War is primarily about oil,

In the Middle East and Southwest Asia, our overall objective is to remain the predominant outside power in the region and preserve U.S. and Western access to the region's oil. We also seek to deter further aggression in the region, foster regional stability, protect U.S. nationals and property, and safeguard our access to international air and seaways.<sup>4</sup>

The story implied by the draft Guidance is that the United States is the only superpower still standing in 1992, but is in a world of potential threats. In this world, resources—especially oil—matter. The United States—not the several powers and multitude of states acting through the UN Security Council—has the responsibilities of ultimate guarantor, which it will *retain*: “we will retain the pre-eminent responsibility for addressing selectively those wrongs which threaten not only our interests, but those of our allies or friends, or which could seriously unsettle international relations.”

The draft Guidance provoked criticism, and when a Guidance was subsequently issued it was deliberately mellowed. In the draft 1992 version one hypothetical postulates Iraq's invading Kuwait and Saudi Arabia: but some experts cited by Tyler saw the exercise as an inflated effort to justify the military budget, just a work of fiction putting the possibility of “two simultaneous major regional wars” on the table.

But if we turn to 1998, we find a document that sets its sights squarely on Iraq.

A group styling itself the ‘Project for the New American Century’ sponsored a letter sent to President Bill Clinton, from eighteen figures many of whom we would now call ‘neo-conservatives’, on 18 January 1998. Beginning with the assertion that “current American policy toward Iraq is not succeeding, and that we may soon face a threat in the Middle East more

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<sup>4</sup> Verbatim excerpts from the draft Defense Planning Guidance, published in *The New York Times*, 8 March 1992.

serious than any we have known since the end of the Cold War” the authors find “containment” of Saddam Hussein eroding, and call for “military action”, “removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power.” Weapons of mass destruction are the problem. Signers include key architects of the 2003- .. war against Iraq.<sup>5</sup>

In 2000, as the presidential election approached, the same Project issued a report titled “Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century.”<sup>6</sup> It prefigures claims to come from the GW Bush administration in the next two years:

adversaries like Iran, Iraq and North Korea are rushing to develop ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons as a deterrent to American intervention in regions they seek to dominate.<sup>7</sup>

And

the analyses done of the requirement to defeat an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia almost certainly overestimates the level of force required.<sup>8</sup>

### *[3.0] What narratives advanced by the White House embody the ‘War Script’?*

The White House set out a handful of reasons for launching the 2003 war against Iraq. They are

- weapons of mass destruction
- need to protect the United States and its capabilities abroad
- need to protect ‘allies’
- Iraqi collaboration with ‘terrorists’
- duty to remove a cruel dictator

The first four were interwoven and their content blurred. The effect was to intensify the claim of risk, danger and urgency. The central claim was that Iraqi WMD, and ‘programs’ of WMD, could be used to attack the United States and its ‘allies’, that WMD could be used by Iraq or the ‘terrorists’ whom it would supply, and that as the WMD ‘programs’ matured the threat would only grow greater. And lest you thought Sadaam Hussein would not do these things, remember his cruel ruthlessness, his use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq War and against his own people, and his rocket attacks on Israel in the Gulf War.

Some notes:

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.newamericancentury.org/iraqclintonletter.htm> The signers are Elliott Abrams, Richard L. Armitage, William J. Bennett, Jeffrey Bergner, John Bolton, Paula Dobriansky, Francis Fukuyama, Robert Kagan, Zalmay Khalilzad, William Kristol, Richard Perle, Peter W. Rodman, Donald Rumsfeld, William Schneider, Jr., Vin Weber, Paul Wolfowitz, R. James Woolsey, and Robert B. Zoellick.

<sup>6</sup> September 2000. <http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

- WMD. Part of the blurring here is to conflate chemical and biological weapons—ugly, deadly, dangerous but limited—and nuclear weapons—ugly, deadly, and capable of wreaking horrendous destruction and destroying whole cities.

- US ‘capabilities’. These are, in part, and of special interest to Pentagon civilians, military capabilities.

- ‘allies’. Israel. Perhaps also Arab states which offered some degrees of support to the United States, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and Kuwait.

- ‘terrorists’, including any group so-labeled by Israeli political figures, or added to the US terrorist list with Israeli encouragement.

### [3a] ‘Dick’ Cheney, 26 August 2002

Each of these ‘reasons’ is conveyed as part of a story, or as elements that imply the larger story but from which other elements are excluded. . To begin we will look at some of the remarks of Administration officials, illustrating—dare we call them this?—storoids.

Vice-President ‘Dick’ Cheney on 26 August 2002:

... old doctrines of security do not apply. In the days of the Cold War, we were able to manage the threat with strategies of deterrence and containment. But it’s a lot tougher to deter enemies who have no country to defend. And containment is not possible when dictators obtain weapons of mass destruction, and are prepared to share them with terrorists who intend to inflict catastrophic casualties on the United States.

The case of Saddam Hussein, a sworn enemy of our country, requires a candid appraisal of the facts. After his defeat in the Gulf War in 1991, Saddam agreed under to U.N. Security Council Resolution 687 to cease all development of weapons of mass destruction. He agreed to end his nuclear weapons program. He agreed to destroy his chemical and his biological weapons. He further agreed to admit U.N. inspection teams into his country to ensure that he was in fact complying with these terms.

In the past decade, Saddam has systematically broken each of these agreements. The Iraqi regime has in fact been very busy enhancing its capabilities in the field of chemical and biological agents. And they continue to pursue the nuclear program they began so many years ago. These are not weapons for the purpose of defending Iraq; these are offensive weapons for the purpose of inflicting death on a massive scale, developed so that Saddam can hold the threat over the head of anyone he chooses, in his own region or beyond.

On the nuclear question, many of you will recall that Saddam's nuclear ambitions suffered a severe setback in 1981 when the Israelis bombed the Osirak reactor. They suffered another major blow in Desert Storm and its aftermath.

But we now know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons ...

We now understand that ‘Dick’ Cheney’s principal claims were false. They were, however, ‘believable’, because Saddam Hussein’s Iraq had *at one time* sought chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them, and had repeatedly put obstacles in the way of inspections required by the Security Council. Since *no inspections were taking*

*place in August 2002* and none had been conducted since 1998, and since there was no reliable equivalent source of information about what Iraq might or might not be doing, the door was open to unsound judgment and undisciplined claims. The question that should have been asked, in assessing Cheney's assertions at the time, was whether the necessarily fictive narrative that Cheney had constructed and uttered was candid in acknowledging *what was not known*. But the public does not have access to ongoing intelligence and there is a presumption senior government officials not only have the benefit of that intelligence but will make policy in light of it. Instead, Cheney offered flat-out assertions about an Iraq "very busy enhancing" CW and BW capabilities, and that "we now know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons." The rhetorical flourish "we now know" suggests very specific information.

In addition to claiming Iraq was at work on all three forms of WMD, Cheney told the audience to anticipate—without actually saying this had taken place or that there was an evidenced Iraqi intent to do so—that Iraq would share its WMD with 'terrorists', and that those terrorists "intend to inflict catastrophic casualties in the United States." Saddam is a "sworn enemy of the United States." While the language goes to the future, Cheney's painting represents Iraq *in fact*. And he follows immediately with another rhetorical flourish, insisting on a "candid appraisal of the facts."

### *[3b] The Administration's Narrative of 8 November 2002*

About a month after Congress granted GW Bush "authorization" to launch war against Iraq, the White House supplied *New York Times* reporters Michael Gordon and Judith Miller with a story, which they duly set before the readership.<sup>9</sup> Their article attributes to "Bush administration officials" and "senior administration officials" several contentions:

- Iraq has "stepped up its quest for nuclear weapons"
- Iraq has "embarked on a worldwide hunt for materials to make an atomic bomb"
- "In the last 14 months, Iraq has sought to buy thousands of specially designed aluminum tubes, which American officials believe were intended as components of centrifuges to enrich uranium."
- "Iraqi defectors who once worked for the nuclear weapons establishment have told American officials that acquiring nuclear arms is again a top Iraqi priority."
- US intelligence agencies are "monitoring construction at nuclear sites."
- "Hard-liners are alarmed that American intelligence underestimated the pace and scale of Iraq's nuclear program before Baghdad's defeat in the gulf war. Conscious of this lapse in the past, they argue that Washington dare not wait until analysts have found hard evidence that Mr. Hussein has acquired a nuclear weapon. The first sign of a 'smoking gun', they argue, may be a mushroom cloud.

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<sup>9</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Judith Miller, "Threats and Responses: the Iraqis; U.S. Says Hussein Intensifies Quest for A-Bomb Parts," *The New York Times*, 8 September 2002. The article is featured in James Bamford's account of what he terms the "disinformation blitz" of late summer and autumn 2002. *A Pretext for War* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), pp. 323 ff. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9402EFDE1E3EF93BA3575AC0A9649C8B63&sec=health&pagewanted=all>

- “The jewel in the crown is nuclear,” Gordon and Miller cite a “senior administration official” as having said. “The closer he gets to a nuclear capability, the more credible is his threat to use chemical or biological weapons. Nuclear weapons are his hole card.”
- “The Central Intelligence Agency still says it would take Iraq five to seven years to make a nuclear weapon if it must produce its own supply of highly enriched uranium for a bomb, an administration official said. American intelligence officials believe that Iraq could assemble a nuclear device in a year or somewhat less if it obtained the nuclear material for a bomb on the black market. But they say there are no signs that Iraq has acquired such a supply.”
- “Mr. Hussein’s dogged insistence on pursuing his nuclear ambitions, along with what defectors described in interviews as Iraq’s push to improve and expand Baghdad’s chemical and biological arsenals, have brought Iraq and the United States to the brink of war.”

Other defector information is cited, as are “critics” of Administration and “hard-line” views.

As James Bamford observes, the sources are deliberately leaking. Or we might say ‘funneling’. We also know, in retrospect, that almost all the details are wrong, and that the multi-stranded story they appear to support is completely wrong. Our interest here, however, is to see just what the story is that was told and why it was so resistant to challenge.

The most important point is that no source was *identified*, and therefore there was no person to call on for further details, and no one responsible—accountable—for the claims that were made. Despite clear attributions to White House officials the claims were in some sense anonymous. So there was no one to ask “how do you know this?” In its place was the blurry understanding that the claims were supported by ‘intelligence’, and some supplied by unnamed ‘defectors’, but again without anyone to ask “is this what you told the White House?” In short, the claims cannot be challenged because there is no one to challenge, and no way to trace back. Unstated are some widely held expectations about the relationship between intelligence and policy. The norm is that going to war requires sound, reliable sources whose ‘information’ has been subjected to serious tests and which has been subjected to rigorous, skeptical analysis. So for the White House to bring forth a war policy, and refer to intelligence sources in doing so, is to imply that the tests of sources and skeptical analysis have been applied: the norms have been followed. In retrospect we know that the White House broke the norms for use of intelligence.

### [3c] *Condoleezza Rice, and the ‘Mushroom Cloud’*

Cheney implies a present in anticipating futures. The audience is invited to read back from future attacks to believe that there are ‘terrorists’ in the *present* who are preparing them. If there is to be a ‘mushroom cloud’ in the future, the ‘terrorists’ must be hard at work acquiring or constructing the nuclear device that will be used. And if they are not at work today, they will be at work tomorrow.

Cheney contents himself with invoking “the terrorists who intend to inflict catastrophic

casualties on the United States,” leaving the method to imagination. But someone, somewhere seems to have been distributing talking points to White House staff.

[Source says: during an October 7, 2002, [speech](#) in Cincinnati, Bush said, “America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof — the smoking gun — that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.” But I need to find original. ]

[There is a well-known Rice quote about ‘mushroom cloud’ too.]

### *Attributed Plans and Intentions: Stories About the Future*

Accounts which tell of people and their lived lives necessarily convey some sense, however hinted or fragmentary, of the ways in which those people acknowledge their futures. We talk or write of ‘character’ attributing to men and women in our stories some persistent dispositions that may ‘characterize’ their interests, responses, and choices as their stories unfold. A narrative of performed actions enables us to attribute intentions retrospectively. The centrality of time is even clearer in our attributing, or leaving to a reader to attribute, ‘motive’ to characters, that which moves them to act in some way.

The characters in our stories may attribute plans and intentions to other characters, and often do.

Just this feature is one strong marking of White House statements after 9.11. While the 9.11 attackers had committed acts that ‘spoke for themselves’ none of the nineteen remained. Therefore US attention turned to those who led them, trained them, supplied them, encouraged them, applauded them, and imagined committing similar acts. These were the ‘terrorists’, some with names but most John Does, the unknown numerous but uncounted of ‘radical Islam’, and the states which ‘harbored terrorists’. Understandably, the White House sought to prevent any attack akin to that which it had failed to prevent on 9.11, and it looked in the first instance at those who identified with the 9.11 attackers. In that first phase, the immediate response to 9.11, the White House cited 9.11 to justify military action against Al Qaeda and the Taliban of Afghanistan. The second phase, focused on Iraq, required that intentions and plans be attributed to the Iraqi leadership, as prelude to ‘regime change’. Whether there will be a third phase remains to be seen.

### *‘Dick’ Cheney: “Purposely misled”? 21 November 2005*

‘Dick’ Cheney offered a refined version of GW Bush’s 2005 Veterans’ Day charge that “Some democrats and anti-war critics are now claiming we manipulated the intelligence and misled the American people about why we went to war.” Cheney told the American Enterprise Institute on

21 November 2005 that

“What is not legitimate, and what I will again say is dishonest and reprehensible, is the suggestion by some U.S. senators that the president of the United States or any member of his administration purposely misled the American people on prewar intelligence.”

This is not a casual phrasing.

Note how narrowly drawn is his denial: ‘purposely misled’ (inserting an issue of intent, which only the suspected liar can know for sure), but even more importantly ‘on prewar intelligence’.

Cheney and Bush misled on many factual matters: WMD, Iraq-Al Qaeda connection, quality of IAEA and UNMOVIC inspections, and the necessity to go to war.

Moreover, it is a reasonable inference that they ‘purposely misled’ the American people about both their intent to war against Iraq and their reasons for doing so.

They ‘misled’ by suggesting they wanted authorization to war only as a last resort, when it is a reasonable reading of their actions that they were bent on war no matter what. And that deceit was ‘on purpose’. [Remember: they could not persuade the UN Security Council of the need for war, and they deliberately disrupted the ongoing IAEA and UNMOVIC inspections, which were not finished.] They ‘misled’ by failing to explain clearly the broader geostrategic objectives that they sought, including long-term US military basing and development of a client Iraqi government. They have not explained a connection many suspect: the intimate parallels between their choices and the objectives of Israel’s Likud.

They ‘misled’ by repeatedly talking of ‘weapons of mass destruction’ as if their claims were about nuclear weapons (‘mushroom cloud’), when on the most generous understanding they might have referred to chemical and biological weapons, nasty and dangerous but not strategically significant. They could have made that distinction clear, as many specialists have: they did not do so.

On other reasons to go to war, the White House certainly ‘purposely misled’ about the Iraq-Al Qaeda connection: there was never any information, nor any ‘intelligence’, to show a significant connection. It was pure fear-mongering. Cheney was foremost in that, and so he ‘purposely misled’. And there are the reasons never, or rarely, acknowledged. Recall Paul Wolfowitz saying that WMD was brought forward as the reason because it was the one thing agencies within the US Government could agree on: that is, no agency representative was prepared to take the burden for saying there was no WMD threat, lest the agency be proven wrong.

But the most compelling deceit, and the most incontestable, was their deliberate concealment of ignorance. They ‘purposely misled’ the American people by never telling them—not the public, not the Congress—that they did not have positive, convincing intelligence from proven sources to support their contentions about WMD and Iraqi intentions. No agency—not the

DIA, not the CIA, not the NSA-claimed to have ‘intelligence’ which met that standard. But that’s the minimum standard which must be met to go to war, the minimum standard. Cheney and Bush knew-knew-that they had no such evidence. And yet they claimed the need to launch a war. They ‘purposely misled’ the public and the Congress about what they did not know.

So we might paraphrase ‘Dick’ Cheney’s denial. It would run something like this. “We may have inadvertently misled the American people. But we didn’t mean to. Anyway, only we know what was in our minds, so if we say it wasn’t ‘on purpose’ you just have to accept that. But this is really about ‘prewar intelligence.’ The intelligence reports which we made public were authored by the agencies; we said so; we simply told the American people what we’d been told; we never lied about that.” Does that help explain why his denial is no narrowly drawn?

### *Disrupted Attacks*

One story that recurs in White House accounts is that the United States, in conjunction with others, have disrupted and prevented planned ‘terrorist attacks’. For example, on Veterans’ Day 2005 GW Bush declared that

Together with our partners, we’ve disrupted a number of serious al Qaeda terrorist plots since September the 11th -- including several plots to attack inside the United States. Our coalition against terror has killed or captured nearly all those directly responsible for the September the 11th attacks. We’ve captured or killed several of bin Laden’s most serious deputies, al Qaeda managers and operatives in more than 24 countries; the mastermind of the USS Cole bombing, who was chief of al Qaeda’s operations in the Persian Gulf; the mastermind of the bombings in Jakarta and Bali; a senior Zarqawi terrorist planner, who was planning attacks in Turkey; and many of their senior leaders in Saudi Arabia.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps taken by surprise, the White House press office released, later that day, a list of ten such attacks. Examined closely, the list consists of six episodes outside the United States and four inside; and while the four domestic led to prosecutions only one concerns a convincing effort to mount an actual attack (actual target, actual intending bomber, actual explosives). The rest are confined to charges of ‘aid’ and ‘training’.

### *Stories Broad and Narrow*

A main argument of *War Stories* is that plans—going to the future—are homologous with accounts of the past. We can refine our image by distinguishing ‘broad’ and ‘narrow’ stories, both of past and of future. Our subject, post-9.11 White House claims and policies, offers good illustrations.

The broad account of the past, the world up to today, centers on a ‘determined enemy’

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/11/20051111-1.html>

seeking to ‘attack America’. The broad plan is the ‘war on terrorism’, the ‘global war on terror’, achieving ‘homeland security’ domestically, and latterly framed as extending ‘democracy’ to recalcitrants.

Narrow accounts privilege 9.11 itself, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, then attacks in Bali, Madrid, London and elsewhere, and a cast of characters identified as ‘terrorists’ some in detention, others sought, augmented—after 19 March 2003—by those resisting US forces and ‘stability’ in Iraq. Narrow plans, focused plans, have been most importantly military action in Afghanistan against Al Qaeda and the Taliban, war in Iraq, and striving for ‘regime change’ in Iran.

The White House’s has adopted reckless measures without being called to account. It can do so because its broad story is hard to assail. Challenges to the main premises—the hidden enemy seeking to attack—are turned aside by invoking 9.11. Calibrating who are the ‘enemy’, how limited are their resources, and hence the kinds of attacks of which they are capable is dismissed by dwelling on worst-case scenarios.

### *Framing the Circumstances*

In providing its stories a fabric of *believability* the White House relies on a small number of notions that have long figured in US views of the world in which it finds itself: foreign threat, surprise attack, exclusion, suspicion of immigrants,<sup>11</sup> show of force, ‘national security secrets’, America’s noble purpose, sleeper cell, and—most empowering—war. All of these assumed *states* as threat’s source.<sup>12</sup> But now “*after 9.11 everything has changed.*” Each notion is now transferred to a world in which the threat emanates from shadowy groups, loose affiliations, even lone individuals, and the old notions are transformed to fit the post-9.11 ‘terrorist’ threat. Now the National Security Agency strives to listen to the telephone calls of persons ‘related to Al Qaeda’ rather than to the state traffic of the Soviet Union and China.

In this post-9.11 world, the White House insists, not only has the world changed, but the powers necessary to prevent further attack are at least as broad-ranging as powers in a World War, and in some respects even greater. Hence the ‘unitary executive’, claims of ‘implied powers’, refusals to inform Congress. And because “*after 9.11 everything has changed*” the accountabilities that at one time slowed the hand of Executive power have grown mute. And only those who can see the dangers, the dangers requiring an unlimited ‘war on terrorism’, are heard.

Incorporated without question into White House stories, these notions render natural the unusual claims to which the stories lead. That is: there are *implied plans*.

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<sup>11</sup> Some anti-immigrant feeling was prompted by fear of states (as in internment of Japanese in WWII), some by fear of foreign movements (anarchism, communism) seen as hostile; some had social or religious sources.

<sup>12</sup> On ‘believability’ of narratives, see Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986).

### *The Characters*

There is, first of all, the ‘enemy’. It is simple enough to mark as ‘enemy’ those who commit themselves to a program of attacks like the 9.11 attack. For sake of naming, the White House identifies them as ‘Al Qaeda’.

But the ‘enemy’ is also any ‘terrorist’. While all ‘Al Qaeda’ are ‘terrorists’, not all ‘terrorists’ are ‘Al Qaeda’ or ‘members of Al Qaeda’.

These labels conceal a difficult practical problem. The White House does not know who are the actual people whom it identifies in this way. It talks of a ‘leadership of Al Qaeda’ but if ‘Al Qaeda’ is understood as a collection of like-minded groups which need not give allegiance to any hierarchical structure, then it is a question of choice whom the White House counts ‘in’ and whom might be ‘out’.

The problem of identifying the ‘enemy’ already manifests itself in two important ways. Not all those held in camps and prisons by the United States Government have proven even to be lowly ‘members of Al Qaeda or the Taliban’, despite being characterized as ‘terrorists’ and ‘killers’ by senior US officials. Now some, harmless or seized mistakenly, and others “determined” to have “no further value for intelligence gathering” and posing “no long-term security threat” have been released: they total 267, roughly 40% of those held. Release of a further 16 is anticipated.<sup>13</sup> In the longer run it will be consequential how the United States draws the line between those who commit themselves to a program of attacks like the 9.11 attack, on the one hand, and those who identify themselves with radical Islam or with some of the objectives sought by radical Islamists but who would not commit, and would not counsel, violence.

There is another embedded difficulty. Some countries, including the United States, have chosen as a matter of law and convenience to designate groups as ‘terrorist organizations’ and in some cases to prohibit actions alleged to support them. In what sense are these groups, or any among these groups, best understood as among the ‘enemy’ of which the White House speaks? To what extent is it politically convenient for China, or Israel, to win designation of its internal enemies as ‘terrorists’ as part of an essentially internal argument? In particular, is Hamas best understood as a ‘terrorist organization’ with which the United States is ‘at war’, or as a political organization among Palestinians striving to achieve justice against an alien and oppressive regime?

Does the ‘enemy’ include states that decline to give the United States cooperation which the White House judges useful in the ‘war on terrorism’? After all, soon after 9.11 the President said, in effect, ‘you’re either with us or against us’. Does that mean that Italy is an ‘enemy’

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<sup>13</sup> Steven R. Weisman, “U.S. to Turn Over 16 Saudis from Guantánamo to Riyadh,” *The New York Times*, 18 May 2006, reports the figure 267 and attributes to “the military” the “determination” of no intelligence value or security threat.

because its prosecutors have brought criminal actions against a group of alleged CIA agents for kidnap?

### *Plights*

Between 11 September 2001 and the summer of 2003 the declared plight or plights motivating the White House to action rose and fell, shifting as the White House sought footing for its acts.

The 9.11 attack, and fear of further attacks of that ilk, set the initial problem for the White House. America's first plight was that 9.11 might be repeated. But more was at stake than 'another 9.11'. The US Government had *failed to prevent* the 9.11 attack, a failure for which, as Harry Truman declared, the buck stops at the Oval Office. But this second plight—that Republicans could lose the House in the elections of November 2002, and lose the Presidency in November 2004—could not be admitted. Prompt military action in Afghanistan, insofar as it targeted Bin Laden's system, responded directly to 9.11. It also forced together the theme of 'war on terrorism' and the fact of war on the ground.

There is now abundant evidence that Administration officials hoped, even before 9.11, to oust Saddam Hussein and sponsor a pliant Iraqi government, by force if Saddam would not go quietly. The evidence in hand, however, does not permit dismissing the possibility that 'Dick' Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld truly feared that Iraq was seeking and, with time, would obtain mass terror weapons. But—and this is controlling—they had no evidence, of the type and extent required to launch a war, that terror weapons were within his grasp. Lacking that, but for whatever reasons wanting war, they constructed and broadcast a discourse of plight.

The third major plight, then, was that Iraq would obtain chemical or biological or nuclear weapons, threaten Israel, and be able to attack the United States, or give the weapons to a terrorist group that would attack the United States.

When no WMD were found in Iraq the White House story shifted to place greater emphasis on Saddam Hussein's record as a tyrant. The White House's problem was to justify having taken the United States into war.

But it was about to face a fourth plight: resistance, and breakdown, in Iraq. Simply to leave would expose the White House to the charge that it had acted frivolously, but to stay made it responsible for what took place under its aegis. Once again the electoral calendar imposed the unacknowledgable problem: that the White House had to look to November 2006, and November 2008, in choosing among unpromising alternatives in Iraq.

A fifth: revelation of indecencies and tortures at Abu Ghraib, and ensuing indictment of Guantanamo and other US facilities. Was this the White House of torture? Criticism was deflected by 'studies' and 'reports' ordered by the US military and the White House itself.

### *The Nature of Argument*

In *When Words Lose Their Meaning* James Boyd White invites us to look at the arguments internal to a text, and to ask what it is to which the characters appeal. Is it justice? Revenge? Collaboration. Norms of altruism?

Early post-9.11 statements by GW Bush and ‘Dick’ Cheney spoke of ‘justice’, but a kind of elemental frontier justice. “Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done.”<sup>14</sup> We heard something like ‘we’ll bring them to justice, or bring justice to them’, leaving it to the listener to understand that if justice were brought to them it would be deadly justice.<sup>15</sup> Cheney said if offered “Bin Laden’s head on a platter” he would “take it today.”<sup>16</sup> These were calls to revenge 9.11. After all, the American public wanted its

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<sup>14</sup> GW Bush, Address to a Joint Session of Congress on the Terrorist Attacks, 20 September 2001. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911jointsessionspeech.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Almost a year after 9.11 ‘Dick’ Cheney, speaking about Osama Bin Laden remaining unaccounted for, remarked that “President Bush said recently – ‘If he’s alive, we’ll get him. If he’s not alive—we already got him.’ ” 103<sup>rd</sup> Convention, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Cincinnati, 26 August 2002. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/08/20020826.html>

<sup>16</sup> ‘Dick’ Cheney in interview with Tim Russert of NBC, “Meet the Press”, 16 September 2001. <http://msnbc.com/news/629714.asp?cp1=1>

MR. RUSSERT: Even if we take out Osama bin Laden, that will not stop terrorism.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: No. No. He’s the target at the moment. But I don’t want to convey the impression that somehow, you know, if we had his head on a platter today, that that would solve the problem. It won’t. You’ve got this organization, as I say, called al-Qaida. It’s — somebody described it the other day as — it’s like an Internet chat room, that people who come and participate in it, for one reason or another, engage in terrorism, have sometimes different motives and ideologies, but the tactics they use, the way they operate, their targets, that will continue until we go out, basically, and make the world unsafe for terrorists. And that’s a key part of the strategy, in terms of working aggressively with those nations that have previously provided support and sustenance and sanctuary, to see to it that they no longer do that.

MR. RUSSERT: You wouldn’t mind having his head on a platter.

VICE PRES. CHENEY: I would take it today.

MR. RUSSERT: Saddam Hussein, your old friend, his government had this to say: “The American cowboy is rearing the fruits of crime against humanity.” If we determine that Saddam Hussein is also harboring terrorists, and there’s a track record there, would we have any reluctance of going after Saddam Hussein?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: No.

MR. RUSSERT: Do we have evidence that he’s harboring terrorists?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: There is — in the past, there have been some activities related to terrorism by Saddam Hussein. But at this stage, you know, the focus is over here on al-Qaida and the most recent events in New York. Saddam Hussein’s bottled up, at

elected Executive to do *something*.

It is not going too far to say that the White House asserted the *rights of the bully*, to do whatever it chose and could do.

As we will explore in our discussion of deception, we now appreciate that the White House made arguments, and uttered characterizations (“Axis of Evil”), which were inflammatory and insufficiently supported by evidence.

### *Does Distinguishing ‘War Scripts’ and ‘Civic Scripts’ Help?*

Is the pair ‘war scripts’ ‘civic scripts’ exemplified in the narratives? As I am writing this, the White House is responding to claims by Seymour Hersh that there is extensive planning for air war against Iran, and that one option still on the table is to use ‘bunker buster’ nuclear weapons against underground Iranian facilities. The White House terms this a “wild speculation.” GW Bush, responding to questions after a major address, said that

my first advice is, never use force until you've exhausted all diplomacy ...

The doctrine of prevention is to work together to prevent the Iranians from having a nuclear weapon. I know—I know here in Washington prevention means force. It doesn't mean force, necessarily. In this case, it means diplomacy. And by the way, I read the articles in the newspapers this weekend. It was just wild speculation, by the way. What you're reading is wild speculation ... <sup>17</sup>

So we could understand that GW Bush's policy is drawn from the civic script, not from the war script. But that would be hasty. Other officials, speaking artfully, do not rule out force. And there is a certain harmony between GW Bush's comments in April 2006 and what he said—about using means short of force in Iraq—during 2002 and early 2003. Since we know that he began war against Iraq before the IAEA and UNMOVIC completed their inspections, we know one burning case in which he ignored the maxim “never use force until you've exhausted all diplomacy.”

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this point, but clearly, we continue to have a fairly tough policy where the Iraqis are concerned.

MR. RUSSERT: Do we have any evidence linking Saddam Hussein or Iraqis to this operation?

VICE PRES. CHENEY: No.

<sup>17</sup>

GW Bush, 10 April 2006, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/04/20060410-1.html>

*Fragments of Narrative: Example 1: GW Bush, September 2001*

GW Bush *insisted on* a war script. The framing of the response to 9.11 as a ‘war’ began the following day, when GW Bush addressed the nation, saying in part

The deliberate and deadly attacks, which were carried out yesterday against our country, were more than acts of terror. They were acts of war.<sup>18</sup>

And that theme was repeated when GW Bush spoke to the Congress on 20 September:

On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. Americans have known wars—but for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign soil, except for one Sunday in 1941.<sup>19</sup>

And three days after 9.11, speaking at the National Cathedral, GW Bush declared “our responsibility [to] ... rid the world of evil”:

our responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil. ...

God’s signs are not always the ones we look for. We learn in tragedy that his purposes are not always our own ...

This world He created is of moral design.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, addressing Congress on 20 September 2001, GW Bush associated the “rightness of our cause” with a God who “is not neutral” between freedom and fear, justice and cruelty:

I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people. The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.

Fellow citizens, we'll meet violence with patient justice -- assured of the rightness of our cause, and confident of the victories to come. In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom, and may He watch over the United States of America. Thank you.

*Fragments of Narrative: Example 2: ‘Dick Cheney’, 26 August 2002*

No speech by White House officials in 2002 was more electric than ‘Dick’ Cheney’s to the VFW

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<sup>18</sup> GW Bush, Address from the Cabinet Room, 12 September 2001. Source: americanrhetoric.com, citing www.foxnews.com.

<sup>19</sup> GW Bush, 20 September 2001, Address to a Joint Session of Congress on the Terrorist Attacks. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911jointsessionspeech.htm> Bush’s speechwriters were apparently unaware of the Aleutian campaign of WWII, and of Wake and Midway.

<sup>20</sup> GW Bush, 14 September 2001, address at the National Cathedral, “The Warm Courage of National Unity.” <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911prayer&memorialaddress.htm>

National Convention. He made a number of startling claims and offered disturbing prospects:

- that Al Qaeda was ‘seeking’ WMD
- that Al Qaeda “would not hesitate to use them against us” if it could.

Nine-eleven and its aftermath awakened this nation to danger, to the true ambitions of the global terror network, and to the reality that weapons of mass destruction are being sought by determined enemies who would not hesitate to use them against us. ...

Those terrorists who remain at large are determined to use these capabilities against the United States and our friends and allies around the world. ... <sup>21</sup>

- that “old doctrines of security do not apply”
- the prospect of WMD flowing from dictators to terrorists to an attack on the United States:

containment is not possible when dictators obtain weapons of mass destruction, and are prepared to share them with terrorists who intend to inflict catastrophic casualties on the United States.

- the prospect of Saddam Hussein armed with “terror weapons” and subjecting the United States to “nuclear blackmail”
- that there is “no doubt” Saddam Hussein “now has weapons of mass destruction”

What he wants is time and more time to husband his resources, to invest in his ongoing chemical and biological weapons programs, and to gain possession of nuclear arms.

Should all his ambitions be realized, the implications would be enormous for the Middle East, for the United States, and for the peace of the world. The whole range of weapons of mass destruction then would rest in the hands of a dictator who has already shown his willingness to use such weapons, and has done so, both in his war with Iran and against his own people. Armed with an arsenal of these weapons of terror, and seated atop ten percent of the world's oil reserves, Saddam Hussein could then be expected to seek domination of the entire Middle East, take control of a great portion of the world's energy supplies, directly threaten America's friends throughout the region, and subject the United States or any other nation to nuclear blackmail.

Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us. And there is no doubt that his aggressive regional ambitions will lead him into future confrontations with his neighbors ...

- claim that “the risks of inaction are far greater than the risk of action,” without acknowledging that whether that would prove true depends on the actions taken

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Dick’ Cheney, VFW 103<sup>rd</sup> National Convention, Cincinnati, Ohio, 26 August 2002.  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/08/20020826.html>

and foregone

- emphasis on the prospect of “deliverable weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a terror network, or a murderous dictator, or the two working together”
- assertion that the aim “to deny terrorists and their state sponsors the materials, technology, and expertise to make and deliver weapons of mass destruction”
- claim that missile defense is germane and an effective system will be deployed
- prospect of the United States taking “whatever action is necessary to defend our freedom and our security”

What we must not do in the face of a mortal threat is give in to wishful thinking or willful blindness. We will not simply look away, hope for the best, and leave the matter for some future administration to resolve. As President Bush has said, time is not on our side. Deliverable weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a terror network, or a murderous dictator, or the two working together, constitutes as grave a threat as can be imagined. The risks of inaction are far greater than the risk of action.

Now and in the future, the United States will work closely with the global coalition to deny terrorists and their state sponsors the materials, technology, and expertise to make and deliver weapons of mass destruction. We will develop and deploy effective missile defenses to protect America and our allies from sudden attack. And the entire world must know that we will take whatever action is necessary to defend our freedom and our security.

What is wrong with this story? It’s about the future—plans—but each aim is problematic. Consider it point by point.

The claim that “the risks of inaction are far greater than the risk of action” is meaningless without knowing the actions to be taken and foregone: so this claim, rather than a serious point about policy, attempts to legitimize *whatever* the White House might choose to do.

Talking of “deliverable weapons of mass destruction”, having said there is “no doubt” Iraq possessed them, went far beyond the evidence Cheney had in hand.

Cheney proposes to deny access to that which is widely distributed, such as equipment in which pathogens could be cultivated, and chemicals that are both in common use and could be used as precursors to dangerous gases. Information is abundant.

As no terrorists have missiles, and as US ‘missile defense’ is an unproven concept, there is only a wishful connection between White House plans for ‘missile defense’ and anti-terrorism.

Taking “whatever action is necessary” implies a test of ‘necessity’. Cheney omits to say that the White House, under the claim of ‘inherent authority’, will also be judge of necessity. The problem here is that there could also be compelling reasons *not* to take actions the White House judged ‘necessary’: for example, incarceration immune from judicial review, torturing and degrading prisoners, intercepting domestic communications without warrant, unsanctioned war, and threatening use of nuclear weapons.

### *What Are Deliberate Deceptions?*

*War Stories*, after noting that accounts and plans are homologous in many respects, distinguishes them as

- accounts: *fictions required by the need to talk*
- plans: *fictions required by the need to act*

But there is something old-fashioned about my approach. It assumes that these fictions spring from good-faith efforts. The tale-tellers are members of a community of good-faith participants in talking and listening. When they become planners they are good-faith participants in a joint venture to choose and to act.

In these distinctions there is no assumption that they agree. Their accounts may be radically different. One big reason to tell stories about public affairs is to change how people judge proposals, a purpose which assumes difference. And when we picture decision-makers seated around a table, or milling in a conference hall, anticipating choice, we understand that each one has his or her idiosyncratic sense of what should be done—which may include unreported personal aims wholly at odds with declared purposes—and preferences among tactical and strategic moves and postures.

Does it contradict planners' being "good-faith participants in a joint venture" that they have private goals, such as profit, pleasure, and advancement? This is the great undecided court case of Selfishness v. Altruism. I propose to put it aside, but not forget it.

Instead, I want to ask about *deliberate deception*. Consider how we talk about deception. 'Politicians' are said to be 'manipulative', to 'spin', to be 'mendacious'. "An ambassador," it was once famously said, "is a man of virtue sent to lie abroad for his country."<sup>22</sup> It is thought normal for a candidate for office to 'remake herself', adopting new positions to 'appeal' to voters more numerous than hitherto. 'Election promise' carries the connotation of insincerity, of unlikely performance.

So we have two corresponding forms, altogether tiresome,

- untruths: fictions used to misrepresent the past and present

and their analog in the world of promises and future actions,

- deceptions: fictions used to hide true purpose

to which we can add another, which may not require untruth in the strict sense, but which serves to route the citizenry away from an informed and defensible understanding of the larger episode:

- diversions: framing which carries attention away from untruth and deceit

While accounts and plans are authored, their persuasiveness drawing in part from the readiness

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<sup>22</sup>

Henry Wotton, Sr.

of authors to accept responsibility for what they say and propose, it is of the essence of untruths and deceptions that even the authorship may be misrepresented. Hence we have a political discourse charging falsehood—not merely mistake, but deliberate falsehood—and deceit, prompting denial and countercharges. Hence ‘Swift Boat Veterans for Truth,’<sup>23</sup> and efforts to evaluate their claims and purposes.<sup>24</sup>

### *Discussions of Deception*

From the moment the 9.11 attacks took place competing characterizations of precautions and responses have prompted charges of inattention, analytic failure, and uttering lies. In this section we will illustrate episodes *about* the official narrative and a counter-narrative of ongoing untruth and deceit.

#### *[a] David Corn, The Lies of George W. Bush: Mastering the Politics of Deception*

David Corn is Washington editor of *The Nation*. In *The Lies of George W. Bush* he assembles a host of GW Bush and GW Bush Administration statements and explains why he judges those claims to be mistruths or misrepresentations of many kinds. Here we are interested in that part of Corn’s conclusions in which he asks “does Bush believe his own lies?”<sup>25</sup> This matters because we typically—almost always—require that knowing intent to tell a mistruth be present for an erroneous claim to be called a ‘lie’.

Corn answers himself in this vein:

Did he truly consider a WMD-loaded Saddam Hussein an imminent threat to the United States? Or was he knowingly employing dramatic license because he wanted war for other reasons? ...

It’s hard to tell. Bush’s public statements do suggest he is a binary thinker who views the world in black-and-white terms. You’re either for freedom or against it. With the United States or not. ...

It is hard to know whether Bush considers his fibs, embellishments, and misrepresentations the honest-to-God truth or whether he cynically hurls falsehoods to fool the public. But a believer or a deceiver, the result is the same.

With his misrepresentations and false assertions, Bush has dramatically changed the nation and the world.<sup>26</sup>

#### *[b] Donald Rumsfeld — Ray McGovern Exchange [4 May 2006]*

In May 2006 Ray McGovern, who worked for the CIA for 27 years and is well known as a public critic of the Administration, used the occasion of Donald Rumsfeld’s speaking to

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.swiftvets.com/index.php>

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Swift\\_Boat\\_Veterans\\_for\\_Truth](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Swift_Boat_Veterans_for_Truth)

<sup>25</sup> David Corn, *The Lies of George W. Bush: Mastering the Politics of Deception* (New York: Crown, 2003), p. 320.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 320, 322.

interrupt Rumsfeld with a series of questions. This is a part of the transcript, according to *Editor & Publisher*.<sup>27</sup>

Why did you lie to get us into a war that caused these kind of casualties and was not necessary?" asked Ray McGovern, a 27-year analyst.

"I did not lie," shot back Rumsfeld, who waved off security guards ready to remove McGovern from the hall at the Southern Center for International Studies. ...

RUMSFELD: Well, first of all, I haven't lied. I did not lie then. Colin Powell didn't lie. He spent weeks and weeks with the Central Intelligence Agency people and prepared a presentation that I know he believed was accurate, and he presented that to the United Nations. The president spent weeks and weeks with the Central Intelligence people and he went to the American people and made a presentation. I'm not in the intelligence business. They gave the world their honest opinion. It appears that there were not weapons of mass destruction there.

QUESTION: You said you knew where they were.

RUMSFELD: I did not. I said I knew where suspect sites were and –

QUESTION: You said you knew where they were-- Tikrit, Baghdad, northeast, south, west of there. Those are your words.

RUMSFELD: My words — my words were that — no, no, wait a minute, wait a minute. Let him stay one second. Just a second.

QUESTION: This is America.

RUMSFELD: You're getting plenty of play, sir.

QUESTION: I'd just like an honest answer.

RUMSFELD: I'm giving it to you.

QUESTION: Well we're talking about lies and your allegation there was bulletproof evidence of ties between al Qaeda and Iraq.

RUMSFELD: Zarqawi was in Baghdad during the prewar period. That is a fact.

QUESTION: Zarqawi? He was in the north of Iraq in a place where Saddam Hussein had no rule. That's also...

RUMSFELD: He was also in Baghdad.

QUESTION: Yes, when he needed to go to the hospital. Come on, these people aren't idiots. They know the story.

(PROTESTER INTERRUPTS)

RUMSFELD: Let me give you an example. It's easy for you to make a charge, but why do you think that the men and women in uniform every day, when they came out of Kuwait and went into Iraq, put on chemical weapon protective suits? Because they liked the style? They honestly believed that there were chemical weapons. We believed he had those weapons.

QUESTION: That's what we call a non sequitur. It doesn't matter what the troops believe; it matters what you believe.

MODERATOR: I think, Mr. Secretary, the debate is over. We have other questions, courtesy to the audience.

### *Editor & Publisher* comments that

McGovern had opened by mentioning that top CIA officials had accused Rumsfeld of manipulating the facts and misleading the public; that Rumsfeld had firmly claimed "bulletproof evidence" that linked Iraq to al-

<sup>27</sup>

*Editor & Publisher*, 4 May 2006. Speech by Donald Rumsfeld to the Southern Center for International Studies, Atlanta. [http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1002463146](http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1002463146)

Qaeda before the war, and that he had said the he knew where WMDs were located.

Rumsfeld denied all this, but fact-checking by news outlets later, including CNN and MSNBC, showed that Rumsfeld had made the “bulletproof” statement to *The New York Times* and that when he appeared on ABC on March 30, 2003, he said about WMD: “We know where they are. They’re in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad and east, west, south and north somewhat.”

But we can conclude nothing about *intent* from this exchange, nothing about whether Rumsfeld believed what he was saying, about Al Qaeda and WMD in Iraq, when he said it, or whether he believed his denials in Atlanta in 2006. On the other hand, we can accept McGovern’s point: that Rumsfeld was *reckless* in saying what he did in 2003. He must have known that the threads by which he was linking Al Qaeda and Iraq were so slender that they were crushed by other evidence showing there was no substantial or significant collaboration. Had Washington found any evidence of substantial or significant collaboration, it would have been raced to Rumsfeld’s door. And he *could not have had firm evidence that “we knew” where WMD were located in Iraq*, because no such evidence has been shown to have existed. If we have reason to suspect intent, it is that Rumsfeld gave every indication of wanting to sell the policy that his claims supported. Still, no clear evidence of intent. Perhaps he was self-deceived. The charge which sticks is *reckless*.

### [c] US Senate Committee on Intelligence: Inquiry into the Iraq War

*The New York Times* editorialized on Rumsfeld’s responses to McGovern, responses the *Times* termed “bizarre.” The editorial then turned to the Senate Intelligence Committee and the maneuvers of its chairman, Pat Roberts, to confine and blunt the second part of the committee’s inquiry into intelligence and the Iraq War.

Discussing Rumsfeld, the *Times* introduces another norm: telling the ‘full truth’, reminding us that there is a reason witnesses are sworn to tell ‘the whole truth and nothing but the truth’.

On the Senate committee, the *Times* complains about what we could call *deliberate deflection of accountability*; in the absence of a good faith inquiry mistruths and deceits, as well as simple bad judgment, remain uncontested, or less vigorously contested.

EDITORIAL

## The Intelligence Business

Published: May 7, 2006

We've been waiting for well over two years for the Senate Intelligence Committee to finally hold the Bush administration accountable for the fairy tales it told about Saddam Hussein's weapons. Republican leaders keep saying it is a waste of time to find out whether President Bush and other top officials deliberately misled the world. But Defense

Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's bizarre responses the other day to questions about that very issue were a timely reminder of why this investigation needs to be completed promptly, thoroughly and fairly.

Unfortunately, Pat Roberts, the chairman of the Senate panel, is running it in a way that makes it unlikely that anything useful will come of it.

It is bad enough that Mr. Rumsfeld and others did not tell Americans the full truth — to take the best-case situation — before the war. But they are still doing it. Just look at the profoundly twisted version of events that the defense secretary offered last week at a public event in Atlanta.

Ray McGovern, an analyst for 27 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, stood in the audience and asked why Mr. Rumsfeld lied about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The secretary shot back, “I did not lie.” Then, even though no one asked about them, he said Colin Powell and Mr. Bush offered “their honest opinion” based on “weeks and weeks” of time with the C.I.A. “I’m not in the intelligence business,” he said, adding, “It appears that there were not weapons of mass destruction there.”

First, there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Period. Second, neither Mr. Bush nor Mr. Powell spent long weeks with the C.I.A., whose analysts were largely cut out of the decision making. And that was because, third, Mr. Rumsfeld was, and is, very much in the intelligence business.

The Defense Department controls most of the intelligence budget and is the biggest user of intelligence. Mr. Rumsfeld also set up his own intelligence agency within the Pentagon when the C.I.A. and the State Department refused to tell him what he wanted to hear about Iraq. It was that office’s distortions that formed the basis for what the administration told Congress and the public.

In Atlanta, Mr. Rumsfeld denied ever saying flatly that there were dangerous weapons in Iraq. Actually, he did, many times, even as late as March 30, 2003. On Sept. 27, 2002, Mr. Rumsfeld said there was “bulletproof” evidence of ties between Al Qaeda and Iraq, including that Iraq had trained Qaeda agents in chemical and biological warfare, and he repeated that myth in response to Mr. McGovern.

Which brings us back to the Senate committee. In 2004, Democratic members agreed to split the investigation of Iraq intelligence. The committee issued a report on how bad the information was, but put off until after the 2004 election the question of whether the administration deliberately hyped the evidence. **Mr. Roberts tried to kill the investigation entirely, and after the Democrats forced him to proceed, he set rules that seem a lot like the recipe for a whitewash.**

The investigation, known as Phase 2, is divided into five parts: Did officials’ public statements reflect the actual intelligence? Why did the government fail to anticipate the postwar disaster in Iraq? Were there actually any W.M.D. in Iraq? Was the Pentagon’s mini-C.I.A. a proper and legal operation? And did any of the disinformation provided by the Iraqi exile leader Ahmad Chalabi get into any “intelligence product”?

Mr. Roberts has so gummed up the first part of the investigation that it is going to take forever to complete and is unlikely to be of much clarity. The only public statements that matter are those by Mr. Bush and his top aides. But Mr. Roberts included any statement, by any public official, including members of Congress, going back to 1991.

Beyond dragging out the process further, the intent, obviously, is to suggest that Mr. Bush said the same things that Democratic senators and others did. That has no significance. They did not decide to have a war and had access only to the sanitized intelligence fed to them by the administration. Bill Clinton and Mr. Bush's father did think there were dangerous weapons in Iraq — back in the 20th century. By the time the war started, those weapons had long been eliminated by inspections and sanctions.

It is worth knowing why policy makers failed to anticipate the insurgency and other postwar nightmares, but the structure of this part of the investigation is flawed as well. The Senate investigation of Mr. Chalabi's involvement is limited to "intelligence products," which the C.I.A. produces. But it was not the C.I.A. that predicted rose petals in Baghdad and a virtually problem-free transition to democracy; it was Mr. Chalabi and his henchmen, creatures of Mr. Rumsfeld's team at the Pentagon. And it was the intelligence business that Mr. Rumsfeld now pretends not to run that used Mr. Chalabi's myths in an attempt to rebut the skeptical State Department and make dubious information seem more reliable.

It was helpful of Mr. Rumsfeld to remind us why this inquiry is still so important. The least Mr. Roberts and his committee can do is to finish the flawed investigation and make the results public.

### *Why Was the Democratic Party Unable to Develop Competing Narratives?*

There are four main reasons why the Democrats lost their voice after 9.11 and then were unable to regain it.

- The White House declared the "war on terrorism", implicitly demanding that all unite behind the President.
- Democrats feared that if they withheld support they would face defeat in the upcoming election, and Republicans invoked patriotism to marginalize any opposition.
- The White House had a monopoly on information—intelligence—and how it was made public. Information could be withheld by crying 'national security'.
- From January 2003 the Republicans controlled both House and Senate, and used that control to deny Democrats leverage on policy.

Moreover, many Democrats became trapped in supporting the Iraq War, forced to vote in the first days of October as the White House claimed evidence of WMD, but unable to stay Bush's hand though UNMOVIC and IAEA inspections found nothing.

It would be wrong, of course, to think that the Administration's critics could not contest

White House claims, critique White House policy choices, and suggest alternatives. Some doubted representations of war on Iraq as any part of the ‘war on terrorism’, opposed the Iraq war, and insisted that resources should be focused instead on Al Qaeda and its look-alikes. On this specific issue, the White House blurred the picture by its talk of an alleged Iraqi meeting with Mohamed Atta and supposed ‘terrorist ties’. Similarly, questioning whether Rumsfeld had sent enough troops was blurred by Bush’s and Rumsfeld’s contending—however unconvincingly—that they were guided by the judgment of senior military on the ground.

Above all, the White House belittled, from the first days after 9.11, treating the ‘terrorist’ problem as a problem of collaborative intelligence and policing. Though in practice the United States does appear to have brought forth unprecedented collaboration with foreign services and police, the White House chose instead to insist that only ‘preemptive’ war,<sup>28</sup> striking first, could prevent subsequent terrorist strikes. An effective competing narrative would have had to rely on intelligence and police work.

### *Conclusions*

The grand White House narrative, incorporating key sub-narratives and narratives of repair, displayed these characteristics:

[1] it ‘made sense’ of a profoundly disturbing event, the attacks of 9.11;

[2] it provided reasons for the White House to undertake measures, ostensibly in response to 9.11, which both addressed and inflamed the widespread US wish for action in response to 9.11;

[3] while denying any anti-Muslim intent, the White House narrative encouraged the spectre of a shadowy, clandestine, fanatic, and growing conspiracy among Muslims within and outside the United States which was radically hostile to the United States and its people;

[4] it cultivated among Americans a fear of attack;

[5] it defined criticism and critics as unpatriotic, even treasonous;

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<sup>28</sup> Properly, instead, ‘preventive war’. Preventive war is war undertaken in the absence of an immediate threat, in the belief that war will ‘come’ and that it is advantageous to fight now rather than later. Preemptive war assumes firm evidence that the ‘enemy’ intends to attack in the immediate future; preemption assumes there is no obligation to give the ‘enemy’ the advantages of striking first,

[6] it emphasised assertions—such as those about Iraqi WMD—which were not adequately grounded, which were then used to win authorizations, approvals, funds, and immunity from oversight and criticism;

[7] it promised outcomes which it then failed to deliver, or delivered incompletely;

[8] it largely silenced the Democratic Party;

[9] it came to include improvised evasions, diversions, and stonewalls against exposure of shortcomings and failures;

[10] it laid claim to successes, many of which are illusory or temporary, and to success in general, despite contrary evidence;

[11] it justified squandering vast sums of public money, tens of thousands of lives, reputation, and US military and civilian institutional capacities;

A bit more abstractly, we can find methods and patterns in the narrative and how it was used:

[a] some central claims were ‘nondisconfirmable’, or nondisconfirmable in the short- or medium-term (e.g. through March 2003, claims about Iraqi WMD);

[b] critics’ charges and proposals were systematically distorted (e.g. Congressman Murtha’s proposal for a measured withdrawal characterized as ‘cut and run’);

[c] the White House claimed patriotism and the flag;

[d] categories were abused, and events and categories twisted to muddy sequence and possible causalities (e.g. Iraqi resisters were characterized as ‘terrorists’, part of the ‘war on terror’ which justified attacking Iraq in the first place);

[e] critics could not get a firm footing, despite suspicion of White House wrongdoing, because the White House concealed facts and maintained claims that it had to do so in fighting the ‘war on terrorism’;

[f] critics failed to offer an alternative narrative which both (i) addressed acknowledged plights and (ii) was adequately shielded from cries of ‘treasonous’, ‘unpatriotic’, or ‘naive’. (Cf. George Lakoff’s arguments about framing.)

The main White House move was to insist that 9.11 required ‘war’, the ‘war on terrorism’. In turn it declared that it had war powers. It fully employed a war script. It escaped being contested at the outset and won years—certainly through the 2004 election—during which it was never required to explain misrepresentations and failures. It precluded—for ‘enough’ of the public—any robust competing narrative. Was it Honest George who said “just fool enough of the people enough of the time”?

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