

Accountability of President Bush

Fifteen months ago, Congress voted to authorize President Bush to launch a preemptive war against the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Congress relinquished this authority because the President and his highest officers had convinced Americans that Iraq was an immediate and major military threat to the US. Particularly in matters of war and peace, the President is required to exercise good judgment, be well informed and speak sober truth. Congress, in believing the President's assertions regarding Iraq, was profoundly deceived.

It has become evident, since the invasion and occupation of Iraq by American and British forces, that the chief justifications for war advanced by the Administration were counterfeit. According to the October Kay Report, development and production programs for weapons of mass destruction, and the weapons themselves, have not been found, and the 1400-member US weapons inspection team is soon to disband. The much acclaimed mobile germ laboratories proved to be hydrogen generation units built and sold to Iraq by the British twenty years ago. The fleets of germ-disseminating drones were merely a couple of dysfunctional model airplanes. The capability to launch chemical and biological weapons on short notice was fictional. The story about Iraq's attempted purchase of uranium oxide from Niger was a forgery. The much-publicized aluminum tubes for use in uranium isotope centrifuges proved to be for use in Medusa 81 artillery rockets. The alleged operational connection between Iraq and al Qaeda remains unsubstantiated and extremely unlikely.

The Administration would have us believe that the false statements used as justification for the war were due to faulty intelligence. This is highly implausible. The sources of information available to the Administration are enormous, and include the CIA, FBI, NSA, military intelligence, and exchanges with the intelligence agencies of many nations. In the case of Iraq, they were also informed by more than twelve years of intensive satellite and aerial imaging and extensive interception of telephone and radio communications. After the Gulf War, UN inspection reports from 1991-1998 were highly informative. Iraq's nuclear and chemical weapons programs were terminated by 1992. Remnants of its biological weapons program were stamped out by 1995. All or nearly all SCUD missiles and munitions of a chemical or biological nature remaining after the Gulf War were destroyed in the early 1990s. UN inspectors found no evidence for biological, chemical or nuclear weapons or their production programs from September 2002 through February 2003. The UN also kept detailed records of Iraqi imports and exports from 1991-2002. These records support the view that Iraq was militarily weak and not engaged in production of proscribed weapons. That Iraq was a destitute and ruined country -- albeit under the control of a cruel dictator who was once our ally -- was well known to the intelligence communities of the world. Iraq posed no tactical or strategic threat to the US or to its neighbors. This conclusion has been reached in a number of independent reports, including recent ones by organizations as diverse as the US Army War College and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The only plausible explanation for the false justifications for war is that the Administration conspired methodically to distort and misrepresent truth. As Senator Kennedy said in a speech in October, the Administration committed "...lie after lie after lie...". And President Bush continues to misrepresent, as exemplified by his assertion in his State of the Union speech on 20 Jan 2004, that the Kay Report identified "dozens of weapons of mass destruction program activities" in Iraq. In fact, nothing of military significance was cited in the Report, which reinforces the conclusion that proscribed weapons programs were inactivated by Iraq years ago. Furthermore, there is evidence from former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill, that the plan to attack Iraq was initiated in secret shortly after President Bush took office in 2001, and what followed was little more than a public relations effort to make an unnecessary war acceptable.

By our unprovoked aggression we violated the UN Charter, and in our treatment of war prisoners

and civilians, we violate the Geneva Conventions. Both are treaty laws of this nation that the President is obliged to uphold and enforce. We have largely dissipated the world's support for the fight against terrorism, alienated long-standing allies, provoked the suspicion of the Moslem world, and incurred great monetary and societal costs. We are badly stuck in Iraq without much hope of early extrication. North Korea and Iran, having noted the American view that might makes right, might develop their own nuclear weapons. President Bush has made the world a more lawless and dangerous place, with terrorism a continuing threat.

What accountability is there for the President who distorts and misrepresents in matters of war and peace, who has needlessly brought about thousands of Iraqi and 3000 American casualties? What can be done with the President who deceives the legislative branch of government in order to obtain its concurrence in an act of war? This must constitute one of the clearest examples of what our Founding Fathers meant by the Constitution's phrase 'High Crimes'. It is certainly much worse -- with far graver implications for our nation -- than the actions that led to impeachment proceedings against Presidents Andrew Johnson, Richard Nixon, and William Clinton. When a President commits such an act, Article II, section 4 of the Constitution requires that he "shall be removed from office". Congress has a Constitutional responsibility to investigate in detail the path to war and to consider whether there are grounds, as we believe, for impeachment.

For a nation to be led into an unnecessary war through presidential deceit is most ominous. Can democracy long survive under a President who hides behind secrecy and has demonstrated such casual disregard for truth and due process?