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Lying and Logic on Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction and Linkages to al Qaeda

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Abstract: The author examines the following question in this article: Did the Bush administration lie in asserting that Iraq had operational weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and linkages to al Qaeda?

Did the Bush administration lie in asserting that Iraq had operational weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and linkages to al Qaeda? This question is a significant one in current public discourse but attempts to answer it largely founder on the shoals of logic.

Most people asserting that lying occurred point out that intelligence supporting the hypotheses of the presence of WMD and al Qaeda linkages was publicly communicated by administration representatives to the virtual exclusion of intelligence not supporting the hypotheses. This logic is based on the premise that a total amount of information can be segmented into data supporting the hypotheses, not supporting them, and being largely inconclusive. Once segmentation occurs, a public stance on the hypotheses should then be taken commensurate with the amount of information in all three categories. However, such logic discounts the security consequences of the presence or absence of WMD and al Qaeda linkages. Given that the presence of WMD and al Qaeda linkages would present vastly more significant security concerns than their absence, a weighting of the amounts of supporting data for each hypothesis based on the respective consequences could well suggest that what looks like lying was actually prudent communication about the nature of the threat.

Most people asserting that lying didn't occur point out that there were many sources—including the prior Democratic administration—espousing similar views. The probability of there being so many liars suggests that lying didn't occur among any of these sources. Other assertions supporting the non-lying hypothesis include the Bush administration being peopled with misperceivers and True Believers. While possible, such assertions are necessarily contingent on negative ascriptions of administration representatives. While, perhaps, accurate, such ascriptions are not necessary and do not have to be defended as applying to generally high-functioning people in the context of an argument that again links amount of information with severity of consequence. Moreover, with or without recognizing the severity of consequence of an hypothesis, one should also note a related observation: that going with the odds is not necessarily the most prudent decision. This is because the odds are based on situations at least somewhat different than the situation at hand, and because what may happen more often if enough situations occur may not happen at all in a specific situation.

In conclusion, supporters of the hypothesis of Bush administration lying may be right about all acts committed except the calling these acts lying. (See Ackerman, S., & Judis, J.B. (June 30, 2003). The first casualty. *The New Republic*, pp. 14-18, 23-25; Berthoud-Papandropoulou, I., & Kilcher, H. (2003). Is a false belief statement a lie or a truthful statement? *Judgments and explanations of children aged 3 to 8. Developmental Science*, 6, 173-177; Dong, A. The method of using logical traps for lie detection and its mathematical testing. *Acta Psychologica Sinica*, 26, 176-183; Newman, M. L., Pennebaker, J. W., Berry, D. S., & Richards, J. M. (2003). Lying words: Predicting deception from linguistic styles. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 665-675; Shanker, T. (June 25, 2003). Rumsfeld says all reports pointed to

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Iraq arms. The New York Times, p. A12.) (Keywords: al Qaeda, Bush Administration, Iraq, Lying, Weapons of Mass Destruction)