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Trends. Intelligence and Weapons of Mass Destruction in a World With No Truth

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

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Author: Editor

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Abstract: This Trends article discusses questions surrounding whether the Bush administration intentionally did not tell the truth about the threat of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

At the time of this writing, the two main questions still remain. Did the Bush administration intentionally not tell the truth about the threat of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (WMD)? And did it not tell the truth so as to increase support for a war against Iraq?

This article concludes that the Bush administration, other political organizations and leaders, and, in fact, all of us—regardless of our protestations to the contrary—cannot adequately defend against allegations and innuendos that we tell bald faced lies, bend the facts, and act by any means necessary to achieve a goal. In this day and age, the very meaning of truth has imploded and been subverted by all of us who profess to be truth-tellers. What's more, protestations of truth-telling—especially about the putative lies of others—has become the first and last refuge not only of scoundrels but of us all.

Before readers pray for the wrath of hail and brimstone upon the author or, perhaps, sigh with relief that the author has provided a free pass for misconduct and transgression, please consider the following.

To intentionally lie, bend the facts, and act by any means necessary, one must know the truth that will be hidden even if this truth is that the truth is unknown. The Bush administration has been accused of knowing some sort of truth about WMD and selectively using intelligence to support this truth. This might be “smoking gun” evidence of intentionally lying, bending the facts, and acting by any means necessary if all extant intelligence clearly supported some other truth and the Bush administration knew this.

Yet there have been previous times when all extant intelligence clearly supported some truth and the truth it supported turned out not to be the truth. This occurs quite simply because—even with the best of intentions—intelligence officers and the policymakers who are the primary consumers of intelligence are ineluctably victims of imperfect methods of collecting, analyzing, producing, and transmitting information. A preponderance of intelligence can strongly support one picture of the world, but this very preponderance is but an artifact constructed through the very absence of other information that was not collected or was inappropriately construed or discounted. A case in point is the intelligence before the Persian Gulf War that seriously underestimated the scope of Iraqi nuclear weapons programs.

Moreover, a strong case can be made that the Bush administration believed that WMD were an imminent threat or could be imminently enough to endanger United States (US) security interests unless the 2003 military invasion occurred. And a strong case also can be made that the administration's belief was based on a selective marshalling of intelligence, much as are the beliefs of intelligence analysts. This selective marshalling encompasses conscious and unconscious employment of other sensations, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, feelings, and motives—the constituents of the mind

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even if the employment may be more suggestive of mindlessness. Intentional lying, bending the facts, and acting by any means necessary are not an Issue here.

However, let's assume that the above exposition did not wash and there still remained the viable contention that the Bush administration did know that WMD did not exist or were not remotely representative of a significant threat to the US suggests—and still pressed on with the converse to increase support for the war. What then?

The history of the philosophy of ethics gives us several choices. Means might supersede ends. Ends might supersede means. Both are extremely significant and merit consideration. Both are irrelevant and anything or nothing goes. Suffice it to say that we are all confronted with all choices concerning our own behavior and that of others on a daily basis. The choices we make say something about how we are human but do not allow us to avoid being human.

And tarring something or someone—the Bush administration, other political organizations and leaders, or any or all of us—with the brush of truth violator? There are many truths that are congruent and contradictory, that talk to each other but also above and below and around and through each other, that apply to the actor but also the observer, that seem to last and seem to never even be transitory. Whole academic fields of inquiry—e.g., historiography, hermeneutics, semiotics, exegesis, philosophy of science, epistemology, logic, and objective and projective psychological assessment—are dedicated to which truths, if any, may be applicable in answering specific questions.

The plain truth of the matter, as I hoist myself on my own truth petard, is that the only still-remaining constant of truth is not its meaning but its function. Our truth professing—including asserting the truth violating of others—serves as means to achieve ends and, at times, means as an end. The latter does not involve the quest for what, if anything, is real or what, if anything, is Good, but largely the experience of taking on a truth-telling role.

One further conclusion. In supporting or opposing the Bush administration on the questions of intelligence and WMD and the quest for war, we are supporting or opposing ourselves. And that's the truth. (See Corn, D. (July 21/28, 2003). WMD; Who knew what? *The Nation*, pp. 6, 8; Kerr, P. (July/August 2003). Bush administration defends intelligence findings on Iraq. *Arms Control Today*. <http://www.armscontrol.org> ; Knowlton, B. (July 17, 2003). Bush and Blair defend decision to wage war in Iraq. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Loughlin, S. (June 4, 2003). Bush administration: Intelligence data on Iraq was not manipulated. *CNN.com*. <http://www.cnn.com> ; Moore, J. (June 12, 2003). Democrats talk of WMD intelligence investigation. *RepublicanDailyNews.com*. <http://www.gopusa.com> ; Sanger, D.E., & Miller, J. (July 23, 2003). National security aide says he's to blame for speech error. *The New York Times*, p. A11; Stevenson, R.W. (July 19, 2003). White House tells how Bush came to talk of Iraq uranium. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; US Senate opens Iraq weapons probe. *BBC News*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.) (Key Words: Bush Administration, Iraq, Weapons of Mass Destruction, WMD.)