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Intelligence and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Editor

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Abstract: The author discusses the ramifications of the lack of epistemological underpinnings from which the rightness or wrongness regarding WMD in Iraq can be constructed and adjudicated.

Some supporters and opponents of the Bush Administration decry attacks on it pertaining to the seeming absence of what was posited to be present before the 2003 United States-led preemptive war in Iraq. As long as the books weren't cooked and stated beliefs about the presence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) were shared by enough governmental policy makers, intelligence agencies, and self- and other-appointed experts throughout the world, nothing wrong has happened. Or so some Administration supporters and opponents claim.

On the other hand, some supporters and opponents of the Bush Administration stipulate that wrong must have occurred because a posited presence of WMD so far is absent. This wrong is predicated on an inference of malign intention of the Bush Administration and/or an inference that being inaccurate is damning regardless of intentions underlying behaviors leading to WMD estimates or the behaviors themselves.

The former concatenation of Bush Administration supporters and opponents are largely using a conclusion's reasonableness and consensus within an expert community as standards of right, even if intelligence capabilities are supposed to be constituted to transcend reasonableness and consensus towards the goal of accuracy. The latter concatenation of Bush supporters and opponents are using a conclusion's presumed inaccuracy as the sine-qua-non standard of wrong, as though there is an unquestioned validity to an inference of a material world independent of human perception and to a correspondence theory between human perception and that material world as a thing in itself.

In fact, both concatenations of supporters and opponents are ignoring, discounting, or rejecting factors of potential deception and coercion, ambiguity, incompleteness, time pressure, context dependency, and conscious and unconscious conflation with other human needs that permeate the life of any human perceiver whether socially sanctioned expert or lay analyst. Just one example from such factors—the social construction of perception—suggests that both the sense and meaning of information may continuously change in parallel at any point in time and in series through time based on an interaction of features of the human perceiver analyst and of the contexts in which information may be embedded. This can be the case even as the information itself may be presumed to stay the same.

For those observers who believe that public discourse on Iraqi WMD serves only to exemplify or represent politics, an inconvenient fact is the population of Bush Administration supporters and opponents in both camps of opinion. That the underlying philosophical psychology of opinionated adversaries is so submerged by political attributions is a salient manifestation of terror management. That is, something more horrifying than wrongness on mortal threat from WMD is an absence of valid epistemological underpinnings from which rightness and wrongness can be constructed and adjudicated. (Burris, C. T., & Rempel, J. K. (2004). "It's the End of the World as We Know It": Threat and the Spatial-Symbolic Self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86, 19-42; Corn, D. (February

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Foucault, M. (1981). 'The Order of Discourse' (I. McLeod, Trans.). In *Untying the Text: A Poststructuralist Reader*. (Ed., R. Young). Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 48-78; Peacocke, C. (2004). Interrelations: Concepts, knowledge, reference and structure. *Mind & Language*, 19, 85-98.) (Keywords: Bush, Epistemology, Intelligence, Iraq, Metaphysics, Terrorism, WMD.)