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Chapter Twelve **Decision Making, Intelligence, and the Iraq War**

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In his decision to go to war in Iraq, President Bush did not follow the same path that he did during his decision to attack the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Immediately after 9/11 he met with his major national security policy team, deliberated with them about what to do, and made clear decisions about how to proceed in Afghanistan. In contrast, the decision to go to war in Iraq was seemingly spread over the course of a year or more. President Bush and his major advisors carefully considered operational decisions as well as the short-term military aspects of an invasion. But the overall decision about whether to go to war in Iraq, was not explicitly confronted in any formal NSC or cabinet meeting.

President Bush's decision making (as far as we know, based on public sources) was non-deliberative, sequential, and informal. The administration neglected to plan for an occupation of the country, the creation of a new Iraqi government, or the political implications of a power vacuum after Saddam Hussein had been deposed.¹ In addition, President Bush did not heed the advice of many in the professional officer corps about the wisdom of invading Iraq, the number of troops necessary, or the need for planning for a lengthy occupation of the country.² Neither did he listen to the advice from many intelligence professionals who called into doubt the supposed link between Saddam and al Qaeda and Iraq's nuclear capacity.³

This chapter will begin with an account of the run-up to the war in Iraq. It will then turn to a critique of the national security decision making process that led up to the war. Next, it will take up the role of intelligence and how it was used before the the war. Finally, the conclusion will abstract some lessons that might be learned about presidential decision making about going to war.

The March to War

In contrast to the President decision to go to war in Afghanistan, which was made during a relatively short time period, the decision to invade Iraq seems to have been made during the course of a year or so and was characterized by incremental decision making along the way, with no formal cabinet-level debate about the overall wisdom of initiating the war. President Bush was aware of disagreements with his seeming intention to go to war, but most of these came from outside the administration. The only serious reservation from within was voiced by Colin Powell during a dinner with President Bush (and Rice) in August of 2002.⁴

It is not clear when President Bush finally decided to go to war with Iraq, but his orders for planning for war began shortly after the terrorist attacks of 9/11.⁵ Security advisor Richard Clarke reported that the president ordered him to find any ties between 9/11 and Saddam Hussein, even though Clarke had told the president that such links had been explored and not found.⁶ At the war cabinet meeting at Camp David on September 15, 2001, the issue of Iraq was raised by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz who strongly favored going after Saddam Hussein and argued that war in Iraq might be easier than war in Afghanistan. Powell argued that the coalition backing the United States would not hold if the target was shifted to Iraq. Cheney said, “If we go after Saddam Hussein, we lose our rightful place as good guy.” Tenet and Card agreed against attacking Iraq. The president finally decided not to pursue Iraq at that time and recalled, “If we tried to do too many things . . . the lack of focus would have been a huge risk.”⁷

On September 17, 2001, President Bush signed a top-secret plan for the war in Afghanistan that also contained a direction for the Defense Department to begin to plan for a war with Iraq.⁸ In 2003 White House officials said that Bush decided soon after the terrorist attacks that Iraq had to be confronted, but that he did not make his decision public because “he didn’t think the country could handle the shock of 9/11 and a lot of talk about dealing with states that had weapons of mass destruction.”⁹

The president decided to take more concerted action on November 21, 2001, when he told Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld to develop operational plans for war with Iraq.¹⁰ General Tommy Franks’s initial reaction to Rumsfeld’s order to shift priorities was consternation, because it would detract significantly from the war he was then conducting in Afghanistan; but he set up top-secret teams in the Pentagon to develop the plans. On February 7, General Franks presented to President Bush the formal plan in operational form, that is, rather than a working draft, Franks presented a concrete set of plans that could be carried out.¹¹

President Bush hinted in public about his decision to pursue Iraq until the State of the Union message on January 29, 2002. His reference was somewhat vague about the way in which he stated his intention, imbuing it with a high level of generality with his inclusion of Iraq, Iran, and North Korea in what he called an “axis of evil.”¹² In the speech Bush declared: “I will not wait on events while dangers gather. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer.”¹³ In April the administration started talking about “regime change” in Iraq, and Bush told a British reporter, “I made up my mind that Saddam needs to go.”¹⁴

Senator Bob Graham reported that he was shocked when he visited U.S. Central Command in Florida on February 19 and spoke with General Tommy Franks about the war in Afghanistan. Franks told him that the war was being scaled back to a manhunt and that resources were being shifted to Iraq. According to Graham, Franks did not see Iraq as the next logical move in the war on terror. Graham said, “I had been informed that the decision to go to war with Iraq had not only been made but was being implemented, to the substantial disadvantage of the war in Afghanistan.”¹⁵ On the weekend of April 6-7 at

Crawford, Texas, when he was hosting Prime Minister Tony Blair, President Bush told a British news reporter, "I have no plans to attack on my desk." Later, on May 23 and 26, he repeated this at press conferences: "I have no war plans on my desk."¹⁶

The next major public pronouncement by the president on national security and Iraq came at the June 1, 2002, commencement address he gave at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. The president said: "The war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy."¹⁷ The president was narrowing his consideration of ways of dealing with Iraq. According to State Department Director of Policy and Planning Richard Haass (who had worked on the NSC staff on Middle East issues for George H. W. Bush), Condoleezza Rice told him that the president had made up his mind by July 2002. Haass said that he broached the issue of war with Iraq with Rice: "I raised this issue about were we really sure that we wanted to put Iraq front and center at this point, given the war on terrorism and other issues. And she said, essentially, that that decision's been made, don't waste your breath."¹⁸

During the summer of 2002 some of the professional military began to voice reservations about U.S. plans to attack Iraq. *Washington Post* articles cited "senior U.S. military officers" and "some top generals and admirals in the military establishment, including members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," who argued for a cautious approach to Iraq. They were not convinced that Iraq had any connection to the 9/11 terrorist attacks; they believed that containment had worked up until then; they thought a military invasion would be costly; and they thought that a likely U.S. victory would entail a lengthy occupation of Iraq.¹⁹ Echoing another president from Texas, Lyndon Johnson, who similarly minimized the concerns of opponents of the Vietnam War, George Bush dismissed the concerns of the professional military: "There's a lot of nervous nellys at the Pentagon."²⁰

In August, members of former President George H. W. Bush's administration came out publicly against war with Iraq. Brent Scowcroft, the senior Bush's national security advisor and Rice's mentor, wrote an op-ed piece entitled "Don't Attack Saddam."²¹ James Baker, secretary of state for G. H. W. Bush, also expressed reservations about an attack on Iraq: "If we are to change the regime in Iraq, we will have to occupy the country militarily. The costs of doing so, politically, economically and in terms of casualties, could be great."²² Reservations about an attack on Iraq were also expressed by retired General Anthony Zinni (senior advisor to Secretary of State Powell and former chief of U.S. Central Command),²³ General Wesley Clark (former NATO Supreme Allied Commander),²⁴ and General H. Norman Schwarzkopf (commander of U.S. forces in the 1991 Gulf War).²⁵

The Bush administration sensed that opposition to war with Iraq was building and had to be countered, so Vice President Cheney took the occasion of an address to the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention on August 26, 2002, to lay out the administration's case in blunt terms: "Saddam Hussein could . . . be expected to seek domination of the entire Middle East . . . and subject the United States or any other nation to nuclear blackmail."²⁶

After the administration convinced Congress to give the president authority to attack Iraq, Colin Powell and U.S. diplomats went to work building a coalition to convince the UN Security Council to pass a new resolution on Iraq. After the resolution passed, the UN weapons inspectors searched Iraq with seeming carte blanche, making surprise visits to sites of possible weapons manufacture, but by late January they had found no “smoking gun.” Chief UN inspector Hans Blix said that he needed more time to do a thorough job, but the United States began to deploy troops to the Middle East in preparation for war with Iraq.²⁷ In his State of the Union address on January 28, 2003, President Bush said that the UN had given Saddam Hussein his “final chance to disarm.”²⁸

The Decision Making Process

The striking thing about the decision to go to war was that there seemed to be no overall meeting of the principals in which the issue of whether to go to war with Iraq was debated. As mentioned, when Haass wanted to raise the question of the wisdom of invading Iraq in July 2002, Rice told him that the decision had already been made. One of the few points at which a high-level aide to President Bush raised objections was in the summer of 2002 when Secretary of State Powell questioned the wisdom of invading Iraq during a meeting with the president and Rice.

On August 5, 2002, at Powell’s initiative, Rice arranged for him to spend two hours with the president in order to explain his own reservations about war with Iraq. He argued that war with Iraq would destabilize the whole Middle East, an American occupation would be seen as hostile by the Muslim world, and an invasion of Iraq should not be undertaken by the United States unilaterally. Powell didn’t think the president understood the full implications of an American invasion. He told the president that if the United States invaded Iraq, it would tie down most of the army and the United States would be responsible for twenty-five million people: “You will become the government until you get a new government.”²⁹

Part of the reason for the lack of systematic analysis of the need for war with Iraq (as opposed to operational plans) was the lack of a regularized national security policy process, which was consistent with the general approach of the Bush administration to policy making. In most presidencies, there is a systematic way that policy options are developed and evaluated. President Eisenhower initiated a national security policy making process that was based on his extensive experience with large organizations and international relations.³⁰

The Eisenhower process was relatively formal, with the second level Planning Board reporting policy options to the principals on the National Security Council, and then the Operations Coordinating Board would deal with implementation of policy. Eisenhower expected full and open debate among his staffers, but more importantly, he encouraged it and sent clear signals to his advisers that disagreement would not be punished and that frank analysis would be rewarded. In his words:

I know of only one way in which you can be sure you've done your best to make a wise decision. That is to get all of the people who have partial and definable responsibility in this particular field, whatever it may be. Get them with their different viewpoints in front of you, and listen to them debate. I do not believe in bringing them in one at a time, and therefore being more impressed by the most recent one you hear than the earlier ones. You must get courageous men, men of strong views, and let them debate and argue with each other.³¹

According to Burke and Greenstein, Eisenhower's policy deliberations "put a high premium on vigorous, informed debate. . . .the advisers managed to state their disagreements with one another and with the president clearly and forcefully in Eisenhower's presence."³²

President Kennedy learned a difficult lesson in the disaster of the Bay of Pigs invasion, due in part to the lack of a coherent policy process. He put that hard lesson to work during the Cuban Missile Crisis, when careful deliberations led him to change his mind from his initial inclination to order a military attack on Cuba. The deliberations of his civilian and military advisers led him to impose a blockade on Cuba rather than commence a military attack, thus averting a possible nuclear war. One measure of the effectiveness of the deliberations over the 13 days of the crisis was that most of the member of the Ex Comm changed their minds at least once over the course of their deliberations.³³ The Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, and George W. Bush presidencies all developed a systematic national security policy process.

In contrast, the Bush White House did not adhere to any regularized policy development process. The president eschewed detailed deliberation, and preferred to consult with only a small group of advisers before making policy decisions. Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill thought that the Bush White House had no serious domestic policy process. "It was a broken process. . . or rather no process at all; there seemed to be no apparatus to assess policy and deliberate effectively, to create coherent governance."³⁴ John DiIulio, who worked in the Bush White House on faith-based initiatives for the first eight months of the administration, said: "There is no precedent in any modern White House for what is going on in this one: a complete lack of a policy apparatus."³⁵

The national security policy process was even worse. According to Lawrence Wilkerson, chief of staff to Colin Powell, what "I saw for four-plus years was a case that I have never seen in my studies of aberrations, bastardizations, perturbations, changes to the national security decision-making process. What I saw was a cabal between the vice president of the United States, Richard Cheney, and the secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld on critical issues that made decisions that the bureaucracy did not know were being made. . . . the bureaucracy often didn't know what it was doing as it moved to carry them out."³⁶ His judgment was echoed by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, who when asked about the Bush administration policy process, said: "There was never any policy process to break, by Condi or anyone else." "There was never one from the start. Bush didn't want one, for whatever reason."³⁷ Henry Kissinger, who had been advising President Bush on Iraq, felt that in contrast to previous administrations there was

no regularized process or attempt to evaluate the possible pitfalls of invading Iraq. Chief of staff Andrew Card admitted to Bob Woodward that he could not remember any formal meetings that evaluated the overall wisdom of going to war.³⁸

The lack of a formal process of decision making is highlighted by the fact that the president had to be prompted by Rice to inform Powell that he had made up his mind to go to war. (The president had already asked Rice and White House counselor Karen Hughes their opinion.) So, on January 13 the president brought Powell in for a twelve-minute meeting to inform him of the decision to go to war and ask him to support his decision. The president stressed that it was a “cordial” conversation and that “I didn’t need his permission.”³⁹ Interestingly, the president informed Prince Bandar, the Saudi Arabian ambassador to the United States, of his decision before he informed Powell.⁴⁰ What is striking about all of this is that the deliberations about war were not definitive enough or inclusive enough for the secretary of state (the only principal with combat experience) to know that the decision had been made.

The president thought that he did not need to ask Cheney, Powell, or Rumsfeld about their judgments because “I could tell what they thought. . . . I think we’ve got an environment where people feel free to express themselves.”⁴¹ Though there were many meetings on tactical and operational decisions, there seemed to be no meetings where the entire staff engaged in face-to-face discussions about all the options including the pros and cons of whether to go to war. In part, this may have been due to the shift in Rice’s role away from the honest broker role she played in the decisions about Afghanistan. According to John Burke, in the decisions about Iraq, Rice did not act as a broker.⁴² Instead, the president decided to use her talents as an advisor.

In addition to the overall lack of deliberate decision making about whether to go to war, several other aspects of the administration’s deliberations were problematic.

1. Condoleezza Rice said that she was not aware, and thus did not tell the president, of doubts by the Departments of State and Energy (expressed in the National Intelligence Estimate of October 2002) about the existence of a nuclear-weapons program in Iraq.
2. Some dissenting views from within the administration were ignored or met with hostility. General Eric Shinseki’s congressional testimony that about two hundred thousand troops would be needed in Iraq was denounced, and he was forced to retire without the customary honors. After White House economic advisor Lawrence Lindsey predicted that the war would cost about \$200 billion, he was fired. Planning for the occupation and reconstruction of Iraq by the State Department was ignored or suppressed.⁴³
3. After his top two CIA officials gave a presentation of evidence for WMD in Iraq, President Bush told them, “Nice try. I don’t think this is quite—it’s not something that Joe Public would understand or would gain a lot of confidence from . . . is this the best we’ve got?”⁴⁴ But this was not followed up by a high-level reevaluation of the evidence.

In making the decision to invade Iraq, the administration would have benefited from a more thorough deliberation of the issues, such as that employed in making the decision to invade Afghanistan. It is quite possible Bush really did not know what to do about Afghanistan and so went into his sessions with his war cabinet with an open mind and chose the best solution. By contrast, when making his decision on Iraq, he did not fully consider dissenting opinions like those of Powell, Haass, or Scowcroft. Bush and his neoconservative advisors were committed to regime change in Iraq for a variety of reasons and thus did not approach the question of whether to invade Iraq with open minds.

The Use of Intelligence

The lack of deliberation about whether to go to war with Iraq was compounded by the administration's use and abuse of intelligence in the year before the war.⁴⁵ The administration was so convinced that Iraq was an imminent threat to the United States that it attempted to use the intelligence process to bolster its case for war. Some of its pressure on the intelligence community was legitimate, but some of it went beyond the normal relationship between intelligence professionals and their political superiors. In the end, the distortions of intelligence about Iraq led to the United States going to war based in part on incorrect assumptions.

When Senator Biden held hearings on WMD, he asked CIA Director Tenet if the intelligence community had any "technically collected" evidence concerning Iraqi WMD. That is, he wanted to know if there were any physical evidence, such as electronic intercepts, radioactive readings, or biological agents. Director Tenet replied, "None, Senator."⁴⁶ The committee's science advisor who had a PhD in physics, Peter Zimmerman, was at the hearing and asked to see one of the aluminum tubes that the CIA claimed Saddam was going to use for nuclear centrifuges. The State and Energy Departments had argued that the tubes were not suitable for nuclear centrifuges, and Zimmerman's personal inspection confirmed their judgment for himself. Thus the Bush administration was relying on circumstantial evidence based on Saddam's pre-1991 capabilities, the human intelligence it got from the suspect Iraqi defectors brought to the Defense Department by Chalabi, and Curveball, the fabricating Iraqi defector the Germans were holding. Zimmerman concluded that "They're going to war and there's not a damn piece of evidence to substantiate it."⁴⁷

In addition to using dubious evidence to support its intention of going to war with Iraq, the Bush administration attempted to politicize the intelligence process in the run-up to the Iraq War in several ways: 1) by creating new bureaucratic units to bypass the intelligence community; 2) by "stovepiping" raw intelligence directly to the White House; and 3) by pressuring the CIA to adjust its analysis to support the administration's policy goal of war with Iraq. The traditional public administration division of labor calls for career professionals to give their best judgment to their political superiors and for political officials to make policy decisions. It is the prerogative of political appointees to make policy decisions, whether or not their decisions seem to be supported by the analysis of the career professionals. But politicians are often tempted to

try to distort the evidence in order to make their policy decisions seem to be based on solid evidence and advice from the career experts.

The obligation of career professionals in this dichotomy is to “speak truth to power.” That is, to present their best professional analysis and judgment to political leaders whether or not it seems that their conclusions support the politicians’ policy preferences, and then to carry out legitimate orders regardless of their own judgments about the wisdom of the order.

A more pithy definition of the politicization in the WMD case was articulated by the head of Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) when he reported in July 2002 that, after his meeting in Washington with U.S. officials, “Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. *But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.*”⁴⁸ (emphasis added) Thus the judgment at the highest levels of the British government, the most important ally of the United States, was that the intelligence upon which the Bush administration was acting was not solid.

The normal intelligence process calls for all “raw” reports from the field to be carefully vetted by analysts to ensure that the sources are credible and that the information fits with what else is known about the particular issue. This might include examining the history of the issue or checking with other U.S. or allied intelligence agencies. In 2002 the political leadership in the Department of Defense and in the White House had become convinced that the U.S. intelligence community, and the CIA in particular, was discounting the link between Saddam and Osama bin Laden and ignoring the information coming from Ahmed Chalabi and his associates.

This led Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith to use the Office of Special Plans and the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group, created shortly after 9/11, to provide alternative analytic perspectives to those being produced by the CIA.⁴⁹ Feith’s units had close working relationship with the Iraqi National Congress, which the United States had funded, and which was headed by Ahmad Chalabi. The CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) at the State Department, however, had become skeptical of the reliability of Chalabi and the defectors from Iraq that he referred to Feith’s office. The other intelligence agencies concluded that Chalabi was unreliable and that the defectors had a stake in overthrowing Saddam and thus were exaggerating or fabricating reports of Saddam’s WMD. Feith, however, thought the defectors were reporting accurately and that the CIA was ignoring a valuable intelligence source.

So instead of allowing the CIA to vet the intelligence from Chalabi and the defectors, Feith “stovepiped” the reports of the Iraqi defectors straight to the White House (Vice President’s staff and NSC staff) without any opportunity for comments by career intelligence professionals. According to Kenneth Pollack, who wrote a book supporting the war with Iraq, the Bush administration: “dismantled the existing filtering process that for fifty years had been preventing the policy makers from getting bad

information. They created stovepipes to get the information they wanted directly to the top leadership. Their position is that the professional bureaucracy is deliberately and maliciously keeping information from them.”⁵⁰

The point here is not that White House officials should not get raw intelligence or direct reports from the field, but rather that to be fully informed, they ought to also get the best judgment of career intelligence professionals about the credibility of the sources and interpretation of the information. Thus the White House officials, who were predisposed to believe Feith and Chalabi and pressured the CIA to support their predispositions, used faulty evidence and non-credible intelligence in decision making about going to war with Iraq and obtaining public support for it.

In 2007, the Department of Defense Inspector General criticized Feith’s use of the specially created units to send intelligence directly to the White House without any input from the CIA. The IG concluded that, “While such actions were not illegal or unauthorized, the actions were, in our opinion, inappropriate given that the intelligence assessments were intelligence products and did not clearly show the variance with the consensus of the intelligence Community.”⁵¹ The point here is not that the special units’ views were inconsistent with the conclusions of the intelligence community; disagreement and questioning assumptions are healthy. But in this case, policy makers were deprived of the considered judgment of career intelligence professionals on the reliability of Chalabi and the Iraqi exiles.

Intelligence may also have been politicized by pressure placed upon intelligence analysts to arrive at the conclusions favored by political levels of the Bush administration. During the summer and fall of 2002 Vice President Cheney made multiple visits to CIA headquarters in Langley in order to ask sharp questions about CIA analysis of intelligence relating to Iraq. Although it is appropriate for the Vice President or other high level officials to question intelligence conclusions, there is a fine line between skeptical questioning and pressure for a specific outcome.⁵²

Despite the findings of no political interference by the Senate Select Committee and the Robb-Silberman Commission, some intelligence officials said they felt pressure from these visits to write reports that would help the administration make the case for war.⁵³ One “senior Bush administration official told Seymour Hersh: “They got pounded on, day after day. . . . Pretty soon. . . they began to provide the intelligence that was wanted.”⁵⁴ Some intelligence professionals felt that “intense questioning” and “repetitive tasking” created pressure to conform with administration expectations. One intelligence veteran said that the pressure on analysts was greater than what he had seen at the CIA in his 32 year career.⁵⁵ “They were the browbeaters” according to a former DIA official who was at some of the meetings. “In interagency meetings Wolfowitz treated the analysts’ work with contempt.”⁵⁶

In one important case of political priorities driving the intelligence process was the case of a supposed Iraqi defector that the Germans held. This source, code named Curveball provided virtually all of the contemporary evidence for Saddam’s biological

weapons program. Curveball was the source of Colin Powell's claim in his speech to the United Nations on February 5, 2003 that Saddam possessed biological weapons.⁵⁷ Despite doubts about his reliability, the CIA assured Colin Powell before his UN speech that the sources were multiple and credible. Yet senior German officials of the Federal Intelligence Service (BND) said that they had warned U.S. intelligence officials in the fall of 2002 that Curveball was unreliable. According to them, Curveball was "not a stable, psychologically stable guy." "This was not substantial evidence. We made it clear that we could not verify the things he said." After hearing the U.S. claims about chemical and biological weapons, the Germans said "We were shocked. Mein Gott! We had always told them it was not proven. . . .It was not hard intelligence."⁵⁸

When one DOD biological weapons analyst (the only U.S. intelligence official who had met the only source of the Iraqi biological weapons, Curveball) went over Colin Powell's draft speech to the UN, he felt he had to warn Powell that Curveball, the source of the reports of the mobile biological weapons labs, was not reliable. But the deputy chief of the Iraqi Task Force wrote him an e-mail saying: "Let's keep in mind the fact that this war's going to happen regardless of what Curveball said or didn't say, and that the Powers That Be probably aren't terribly interested in whether Curveball knows what he's talking about."⁵⁹ The CIA later admitted that the mobile trailers were intended for producing hydrogen rather than biological weapons.

The German judgment that Curveball was not reliable was also passed on to the CIA through Tyler Drumheller, chief of the Directorate of Operations of the European Division of the CIA.⁶⁰ After he had read a draft of Colin Powell's upcoming speech to the United Nations. Drumheller tried to warn Deputy CIA Director John McLaughlin that the Germans doubted Curveball's mental stability and reliability. McLaughlin reportedly said that Curveball was at "the heart of the case" for Iraq's biological weapons programs. Drumheller also warned Tenet on the night before Powell's speech that Curveball's information was not reliable. Later, Tenet and McLaughlin told the Robb-Silberman Commission that they did not remember Drumheller's warnings about Curveball.⁶¹

One of the major criticisms of the CIA regarding the Iraq war was the lack of "humint," that is human agents who have penetrated the enemy's government. But in several cases, the CIA did have inside information based on human contacts. In the summer of 2002 the CIA located relatives of Iraqi scientists and convinced them to contact their relatives in Iraq to get information on Saddam's WMD programs. One of them was Dr. Sawsan Alhaddad whose brother had worked in Saddam's nuclear program in the 1980s. She traveled to Baghdad to talk with her brother and reported back to the CIA that her brother said that Iraq's nuclear program had been abandoned in the 1990s. In total, thirty relatives of Iraqi scientists reported back to the CIA that Saddam had no nuclear programs of which the scientists were aware. The CIA, however, was convinced that Saddam was pursuing a nuclear program, and they did not forward the reports to senior policy makers in the administration.⁶²

In another case, the United States had a source inside Saddam's regime. The political levels of the Bush administration, however, did not pay attention to the accurate intelligence from this source when it did not fit their own preconceptions about Saddam's regime. The French intelligence agency had managed to recruit a source at the highest levels of Saddam's government: the Foreign Minister, Naji Sabri. There could be few more valuable intelligence sources of inside information about Iraq. The implication from the intelligence from Sabri was that Saddam did not possess WMD, especially nuclear, and that they had been destroyed after the first Gulf War.⁶³ This meant that Saddam was bluffing about his WMD, probably in order to scare his enemies in the Middle East.

But when this crucial intelligence was communicated back to CIA headquarters and the White House, it was ignored. The administration was interested in the source if he wanted to defect, but not in his information that Saddam was bluffing about his supposed WMD. (Sabri refused to defect for fear that Saddam would kill his family.) When asked why the CIA was not following up on this important (and accurate) intelligence, Drumheller's CIA colleague was told: "It's time you learned it's not about intelligence anymore. It's about regime change."⁶⁴ Drumheller said that ". . . President Bush heard directly about our attempts to talk to the Iraqi, who knew the weapons programs were virtually nonexistent, and our leader was clearly not interested in pursuing him. . . ."⁶⁵

Drumheller, a 30 year veteran of the CIA who had served on several continents and in its highest post in Europe, concluded in his memoirs after he retired, that the political leadership of the Bush administration did not use intelligence from the CIA in a responsible way. ". . .the CIA has been made a scapegoat for one foreign policy disaster after another. . . .never have I seen the manipulation of intelligence that has played out since the second President Bush took office. . . .the White House deliberately tried to draw a cloak over its own misjudgments"⁶⁶ Although Drumheller admits that the CIA made mistakes in its intelligence conclusions about Iraq, the most important problem with pre-war intelligence was "that the policy was shaping the intelligence and not the other way around."⁶⁷ Drumheller concluded that the White House saw the CIA "as a political tool rather than a place to turn for information," and that before the war, "the nation was about to embark on a war based on intelligence I knew was false. . . ."⁶⁸

Perhaps the most authoritative evidence that political officers of the Bush administration tried to politicize intelligence prior to the Iraq War is the testimony of Paul R. Pillar. Pillar was the National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia who directed the coordination of the intelligence community's assessments of Iraq. In an article in *Foreign Affairs*, Pillar charged that 1) "official intelligence analysis was not relied on in making even the most significant national security decisions;" 2) "intelligence was misused publicly to justify decisions already made; and 3) "the intelligence community's own work was politicized."⁶⁹ Pillar concluded: "The administration used intelligence not to inform decision-making, but to justify a decision already made. It went to war without requesting – and evidently without being influenced by – any strategic-level intelligence assessments on any aspect of Iraq."⁷⁰

Conclusion: Lessons about National Security Decision Making

President Bush's decision to go to war in Iraq was based in part on several faulty assumptions, some of which were pointed out in advance. The assumption that the war would be easily successful in deposing Saddam and replacing his tyrannical regime with a democratic government was questioned by Colin Powell (as well as other former generals with experience in Iraq). But President Bush did not directly confront the issues in a cabinet or NSC meeting. The assumption that Saddam had robust biological weapons stockpiles and capabilities was undercut by the unreliability of the source of that intelligence (Curveball). But the CIA was so certain of the President's determination to go to war that it did not heed the warnings of Drumheller and others about the unreliability of Curveball. The assumption that Saddam was rebuilding his nuclear capacity was undercut by the intelligence analysis of the Departments of Energy and State, but these assessments were not weighted heavily by President Bush.

The inaccuracy of these assumptions might have been exposed, or at least their consequences explored through the use of a systematic policy process. In deliberations about war and peace the president can benefit from formal meetings with his principal advisors. The deliberations should be marked by face-to-face give-and-take and frank evaluations of the range of options available to the president, as President Eisenhower advocated. President Bush, in contrast, made his decision about going to war over an extended period of time. Each step may have been considered carefully by itself, but the broader strategic context was neglected.⁷¹

President Bush's White House might also have benefited from the presence of a "neutral broker" to ensure that the process benefited from "multiple advocacy," an idea developed by Alexander George. He argued that it is useful to have a "custodian manager" of the decision making process in order to insure that the advocates for different policy positions have comparable resources and sufficient opportunity to present their views to the president.⁷² The natural person to take this role is the National Security Adviser, but Condoleezza Rice did not play that role in the run-up to the Iraq War.⁷³ Another device that might have been used is the "devil's advocate," in which one presidential adviser is assigned the role of arguing against the group consensus in order to force members of the group to reexamine their basic premises. Colin Powell, in a sense, played this role for President Bush by taking a less hawkish position on Iraq. But he did not make his arguments with the rest of the advisers present. Powell's decision to support President Bush rather than object publicly was paralleled by the ambiguous position of CIA Director George Tenet.

In April 2007 George Tenet's book, *At the Center of the Storm*, was released to the public. Shortly afterwards, several former CIA and intelligence officers wrote a public letter charging Tenet with abdicating his duty to the country in supporting the Bush administration's decision to go to war with Iraq. They charged that the CIA had solid evidence that Saddam had no stockpiles of WMD, but that Tenet did not convey this fully to the president. They also charged that CIA officers had learned from a high level official in Saddam's inner circle that there was no collaboration between Saddam and al

Qaeda, and that al Qaeda was seen as an enemy by Saddam. On the basis of these and other charges, the former officers argued that Tenet should have resigned in 2003, and called on him to return the Medal of Freedom that President Bush had awarded him. Although embarrassing to Tenet, this alternative perspective demonstrates the difficulty faced by intelligence agencies when faced with a political leader fixed upon a certain policy objective. Specifically, it points to the pressure that can exist at the intelligence community-customer interface, and it expresses the anger which some in the intelligence community felt toward what they perceived to be a failure of Tenet to convey to the president an objective analysis of the evidence and intelligence analysis.⁷⁴ (The letter is reproduced in Appendix A.)

Finally the experience of the Bush administration illustrates the importance of questioning the basic assumptions upon which the decisions rest. In revisiting the mistakes that were made by the United States before the war in Vietnam, Robert McNamara stressed the importance of taking a close look at the fundamental reasoning in the case for war. He noted that the United States had few allies who supported the war in Vietnam and said, ‘if we can’t convince our allies of the merit of our cause, we had better reexamine our reasoning.’⁷⁵

The design of the policy process and presidential use of advisors, however, cannot guarantee good decisions. At the end of the day, the president has to make the crucial decisions about war (subject to congressional agreement), and there is no substitute for good judgment on the part of the president.

¹ This does not mean that no planning was done. The Department of State conducted a large planning exercise; the CIA did planning for the aftermath of war; and Army analysts at the Strategic Studies Institute at Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania did planning before the invasion. The administration, however, did not take any of these efforts seriously. See James P. Pfiffner, “The First MBA President,” *Public Administration Review* (January/February 2007), pp.6-20, esp.p.9.

² For an argument that President Bush often ignored the advice of career professionals, see Pfiffner, “The First MBA President”.

³ For an analysis of how the Bush administration used intelligence before the war in Iraq, see James P. Pfiffner, “The Use of U.S. Intelligence Before the War with Iraq,” in,

George C. Edwards and Desmond King (eds.), *The Polarized Presidency of George W. Bush* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴ Secretary of State Powell was the only top level official in the Bush administration with combat experience. President Bush was in the National Guard, Vice President Cheney had “other priorities” during the Vietnam War, neither Condoleezza Rice nor Paul Wolfowitz had military experience, and Donald Rumsfeld flew jets for the Navy in the 1950s but not in combat.

⁵ Bush’s Secretary of the Treasury, Paul O’Neill, reported that Iraq was a major focus of the Bush administration’s first two meetings of the NSC on January 30 and February 1 of 2001. Ron Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the Education of Paul O’Neill* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), pp.70-74, 82-86.

⁶ Richard Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America’s War on Terror* (New York: Free Press, 2004), pp.32-33.

⁷ Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), pp.84-91.

⁸ Glenn Kessler, “U.S. Decision on Iraq Has Puzzling Past: Opponents of War Wonder When, How Policy Was Set,” *Washington Post* (12 January 2003), pp.1, A20.

⁹ Kessler, “U.S. Decision on Iraq,” p.A20.

¹⁰ Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), pp.30-31.

¹¹ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp.77, 80, 96, 98. On March 21, 2003, General Franks told his top commanders that the United States was going to war with Iraq unless Saddam left the country. To emphasize his seriousness, he said: “You know, if you guys think this is not going to happen, you’re wrong.” CIA Director George Tenet in March also told

Kurdish leaders that there would be a military attack in Iraq. Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp.115-116.

¹² According to David Frum, a speechwriter was assigned to “provide a justification for war” with Iraq. David Frum, *The Right Man: The Surprise Presidency of George W. Bush* (New York: Random House, 2003), pp.224, 238-240.

¹³ Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, *Administration of George W. Bush, 2002* (29 January 2002), pp.133-139.

¹⁴ Kessler, “U.S. Decision on Iraq,” p. A20; Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p.119.

¹⁵ Bob Graham with Jeff Nussbaum, *Intelligence Matters: The CIA, the FBI, Saudi Arabia, and the Failure of America’s War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2004), p.126.

¹⁶ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp.120, 127. General Franks also stated on May 21 that “my boss has not yet asked me to put together a plan to do that [attack Iraq],” p.130.

¹⁷ Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, *Administration of George W. Bush, 2002*, “Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York” (1 June 2002), pp.944-948.

¹⁸ Nicholas Lemann, “How It Came to War,” *New Yorker*, Vol. 79, No. 6 (31 March 2003), p.36. For Haass’s criticisms of the decision to go to war with Iraq, see Richard Haass, *The Opportunity: America’s Moment to Alter History’s Course* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), pp.182-194.

¹⁹ Thomas E. Ricks, “Some Top Military Brass Favor Status Quo in Iraq: Containment Seen Less Risky Than Attack,” *Washington Post* (28 July 2002), pp.1, A23. Also,

Thomas E. Ricks, "Timing, Tactics on Iraq War Disputed; Top Bush Officials Criticize Generals' Conventional Views," *Washington Post* (1 August 2002), p.1, A24, in which he says, "Much of the senior uniformed military, with the notable exception of some top Air Force and Marine generals, opposes going to war anytime soon, a stance that is provoking frustration among civilian officials in the Pentagon and in the White House."

²⁰ Weisman, Steven R., "History Lessons for Wartime Presidents and Their Generals," *New York Times* (15 September 2002), section 4, p.14.

²¹ Brent Scowcroft, "Don't Attack Saddam," *Wall Street Journal* (15 August 2002), p.A12.

²² James A. Baker III, "The Right Way to Change a Regime," *New York Times* (25 August 2002), section 4, p.9.

²³ *Washington Post*, "Powell Aide Disputes Views on Iraq" (28 August 2002), p.A16.

²⁴ Tara Tuckwiller, "Don't invade yet, ex-NATO chief says," *Charleston Gazette* (15 October 2002), p.1A.

²⁵ Thomas E. Ricks, "Desert Caution: Once 'Stormin' Norman,' Gen. Schwarzkopf Is Skeptical About U.S. Action in Iraq," *Washington Post* (28 January 2003), p.C1.

Schwarzkopf remarked that "the thought of Saddam Hussein with a sophisticated nuclear capability is a frightening thought, okay?" Nevertheless, he argued that UN weapons inspectors should be given more time to determine if Saddam Hussein really had weapons of mass destruction.

²⁶ Dana Milbank, "Cheney Says Iraqi Strike Is Justified: Hussein Poses Threat, He Declares," *Washington Post* (27 August 2002), pp.1, A8.

²⁷ Erick Schmitt, "U.S. Force in Gulf Is Said to be Rising to 150,000 Troops," *New York Times* (12 January 2003), p.1.

²⁸ State of the Union Address (28 January 2003), printed in *Washington Post* (29 January 2003), pp.A10-A11.

²⁹ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp.150-151.

³⁰ An excellent account of the Eisenhower administration's deliberations about whether to intervene in Vietnam in 1953 is John Burke and Fred Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam, 1954 and 1965* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1991), upon which much of this discussion is based.

³¹ Quoted in Burke and Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality*, pp.54-55.

³² *Ibid*, p.288.

³³ Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1973), p.152.

³⁴ Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty*, p.97.

³⁵ Ron Suskind "Why are these men laughing?" *Esquire* (January 1, 2003), posted on Ron Suskind website.

³⁶ Lawrence Wilkerson, "Weighing the Uniqueness of the Bush Administration's National Security Decision-Making Process: Boon or Danger to American Democracy?" New America Foundation Policy Forum (October 19, 2005), Transcript of remarks, p.8.

³⁷ Quoted by Mark Danner, "Iraq: The War of the Imagination," *New York Review of Books* (December 21, 1006), p.87.

³⁸ Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2006), p.455.

³⁹ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp.269-74.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp.251-252, 265.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp.251-252.

⁴² John Burke, “The Contemporary Presidency: Condoleezza Rice as NSC Advisor: A Case Study of the Honest Broker Role,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol.35, No.3 (September 2005), pp.554-575.

⁴³ See James Fallows, “Blind Into Baghdad,” *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 293, No. 1 (January/February 2004), pp.52-74. See also Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, pp.280-285.

⁴⁴ Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, p.249.

⁴⁵ This section is based on the analyses in Pfiffner, “The First MBA President,” and “The Use of Intelligence Before the War with Iraq.”

⁴⁶ Michael Isikoff and David Corn, *Hubris* (NY: Crown Publishers, 2006), p.118.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.119.

⁴⁸ Downing Street Memo. 2002. Memo: 23 July 2002 “Secret and Strictly Personal – UK Eyes Only. To: David Manning, From Matthew Rycroft S 195/021 Re: Iraq: Prime Minister’s Meeting, 23 July.” Published by the *Times of London* (www.timesonline.co.uk) accessed June 21, 2005.

⁴⁹ See Jeffrey Goldberg, “A Little Learning,” *New Yorker* (May 9, 2005), pp.36-41; Seymour Hersh, “The Stovepipe” *New Yorker*, (October 27, 2005), p.87; David Phillips, “Listening to the Wrong Iraqi” *New York Times*, (September 20, 2003).

⁵⁰ Hersh, “The Stovepipe”, p.87.

⁵¹ Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, “Review of Pre-Iraqi War Activities of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy,” Report No. 07-INTEL-04 (February 9, 2007), Executive Summary (the Executive Summary was the only part of the report that was declassified and made public).

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- ⁵² Tyler Drumheller, *On the Brink* (NY Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), p.43.
- ⁵³ James Risen, "C.I.A. Aides Feel Pressure In Preparing Iraqi Reports," *New York Times* (March 23, 2003), p.B10.
- ⁵⁴ Hersh, "The Stovepipe", p.80.
- ⁵⁵ T. Christian Miller and Maura Reynolds, "Senate Intelligence Report: Question of Pressure Splits Panel," *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 2004), website.
- ⁵⁶ Walter Pincus and Dana Priest, "Some Iraq Analysts Felt Pressure From Cheney Visits," *Washington Post* (June 5, 2003), p.1.
- ⁵⁷ The Kerr Report said that "different descriptions of the same source" often led "analysts to believe they had more confirmatory information from more sources than was actually the case." See Chapter Twelve, pp. xx. MORI DocID: 1245667 (29 July 2004) published on the National Security Archives website and in the CIA's *Studies in Intelligence* Vol.49, No.3.
- ⁵⁸ Bob Drogin and John Goetz, "How U.S. Fell Under the Spell of 'Curveball,'" *Los Angeles Times* (November 20, - 2005), Los Angeles Times website, accessed 27 November 2005. Also, Bob Drogin and John Goetz, "CIA Was Warned On Iraq Informer," *Washington Post* (November 21, 2005), p.A10. David Kay raised the interesting question that "if the BND [German intelligence service] thought he was a fabricator why did not they just throw him to the US instead of trying to protect him as if he was a valuable source??" Personal e-mail to the author, December 13, 2005.
- ⁵⁹ David Johnston, "Powell's 'Solid' C.I.A. Tips Were Soft, Committee Says," *New York Times* (July 11, 2004), p.11.

⁶⁰ In explaining the problems with Curveball's stories, Drumheller said that "Curveball had neglected to mention that he had been fired from the job that supposedly gave him access to sensitive sites and that he had been out of the country [Iraq] on the date he claimed to have witnessed the 1998 accident that killed twelve of his fellow workers." Drumheller, *On the Brink*, p.105.

⁶¹ James Risen, *State of War* (NY: Free Press, 2006), p.116-120. In the fall of 2003, the CIA discovered that Curveball had been fired in 1995, before the time that he claimed to have been working on biological weapons in Iraq. In May 2004 the CIA sent out a notice admitting the Curveball was not a solid source: "Discrepancies surfaced regarding the information provided by . . . Curveball in this stream of reporting, which indicate that he lost his claimed access in 1995. Our assessment, therefore, is that Curveball appears to be fabricating in this stream of reporting." Drogin and Goetz, "How U.S. Fell Under the Spell of 'Curveball,'" p.14. See also, Bob Drogin and Greg Miller, "'Curveball' Debacle Reignites CIA Feud," *Los Angeles Times* (April 2, 2005).

⁶² Risen, *State of War*, pp.106, 185-208.

⁶³ Drumheller, *On the Brink*, pp.89-97; neither Sabri's name nor the nation of the intelligence service was mentioned in Drumheller's book.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.95.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.194.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp.2, 4, 5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.77.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp.107, 104,

⁶⁹ Chapter Thirteen, pp.xx

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp.xx

⁷¹ For an analysis of presidential decision making, see the special issue of *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, edited by James P. Pfiffner: *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol.35, No.2 (June 2005). See particularly, Andrew Rudalevige, “The Structure of Leadership: Presidents, Hierarchies, and Information Flow,” pp.333-360; and Matthew J. Dickinson, “Neustadt, New Institutionalism, and Presidential Decision Making: A Theory and Test,” pp.259-288.

⁷² Alexander George, “The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy”, *American Political Science Review*. Vol.66, No.3 (1972); and *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980).

⁷³ For a thorough analysis of the neutral or honest broker role, see John Burke, “The Neutral/Honest Broker Role in Foreign-Policy Decision Making: A Reassessment,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol.35, No.2 (June 2005), pp.229-258. For an insightful application of the concept to Condoleezza Rice during President Bush’s first term, see Burke, “The Contemporary Presidency: Condoleezza Rice as NSC Advisor”.

⁷⁴ Michael Hirsh, “Intel Agents Call for Tenet’s Medal,” *Newsweek*, web site, April 30, 2007: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18399374/site/newsweek/?nav=slate?from=rss>.

⁷⁵ The quote comes from the documentary film, *Fog of War*. Single quotation marks are used because McNamara’s words were written down by the author as he watched the film and may be accurate and not verbatim.