"The Whole Operation of Deception": Reconstructing President Bush's Rhetoric of Weapons of Mass Destruction

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Based on analyses of seven pre-war intelligence documents, we demonstrate that estimates of Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs were laced with ambiguities and contradictions. Yet President Bush turned this contested intelligence into a heroic rhetoric of certainty, hence dragging the U.S. into war on the basis of lies. Based on a comprehensive critique of their post-9/11 speeches and testimonies, we offer a four-step rhetorical schema for analyzing how President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell constructed these lies. We thus offer readers both a critique of Bush administration deceptions and the critical rhetorical tools necessary to recognize and decode future governmental deception. Then, focusing on the post-war revelations offered by Joseph Wilson, which in turn prompted a vicious administration attack on Wilson and his wife, Valerie Plame, we analyze the labyrinthine cover-up the Bush administration has used to conceal its lies about Iraqi WMD.

War is a grisly business: Bodies are ripped asunder, cities are leveled, families are broken, lives, nations, and entire cultures are shattered, yet wars are fought, over and over and over, each time for reasons that some set of leaders argue are pressing, nation threatening, unavoidable. Although the post-9/11 war against terrorism can plausibly be seen as an act of self-defense, we argue here that the war on Iraq was *a war of choice*. To demonstrate how terribly wrong that choice was, we offer a reconstruction and critique of the publicly stated reasons for choosing war, focusing in particular on President Bush's rhetoric regarding Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD). We conclude that the president's arguments were fabrications spun from evidence that was shaky at best, outright nonsense at worst, and that the labyrinthine cover-ups following these initial fabrications amount to a second, equally dangerous series of lies.

Although it is not the first time deceptions have been foisted on the world by a dissembling president, we demonstrate that President Bush's WMD rhetoric amounts to a pattern of lying that poses a serious threat to the foundational principles of democracy.

Furthermore, because the president's apocalyptic WMD rhetoric serves as the principal explanation for launching a new American empire, its results—more than most examples of political shading and spin—have been and will continue to be deadly. For example, as of December 1, 2003, we know of 139 American soldiers lost in the course of the war on Iraq; that death toll has been almost doubled by Americans killed during the course of occupation, bringing the total of dead U.S. troops to 434. Britain lost 33 soldiers in the war and has lost another 20 in the occupation; the total of "coalition" soldiers killed in Iraq is now 512. The death of Mazen Dana, shot by a U.S. soldier who mistook Dana's camera for a rocket-propelled grenade launcher, brings the number of reporters killed in Iraq to 18. No one knows how many Iraqi soldiers died during the war, with estimates ranging from a low of 13,500 to a high of 45,000. The most comprehensive estimates of Iraqi civilians killed in the war stand between a low of 7,918 and a high of 9,749; add to this another 2,000 civilian deaths coming in the occupation phase, and the Iraqi civilian death toll falls anywhere between 9,918 and 11,749. Furthermore, as many as 20,000 Iraqi civilians were injured in the war, including 8,000 in Baghdad alone. The president's war to preempt the use of WMD has thus caused massive death and destruction.[1]

Moreover, the president's war against supposed WMD has left Iraq devastated and lawless. Indeed, the August 29, 2003 car bombing of the UN headquarters in Baghdad killing 17 international civilians, the August 29 car bombing of the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf killing 95 Iraqis, the September 12 firefight outside the Jordanian Hospital in Falluja, where U.S. troops mistakenly killed at least 8 Iraqi policemen and a Jordanian security guard, the October 27 series of suicide bombings killing 34 and wounding over 200 innocents, the November 2 downing of a U.S. helicopter killing 16 and wounding 20 soldiers, the November 22 car bombings in Khan Bani Saad killing 14 civilians, and the daily assaults on U.S. troops and international aid workers—estimated in late November to total *33 attacks a day*—demonstrate that postwar Iraq is an incomprehensible disaster.[2]

To understand how the president dragged the nation into this deadly quagmire, we reconstruct the WMD arguments he used to justify waging war on Iraq. In so doing, we echo the anger Senator Robert Byrd voiced in his speech in the Senate on May 21, 2003, when he warned that

> the American people unfortunately are used to political shading, spin, and the usual chicanery. . . . But there is a line. . . . When it comes to shedding American blood—when it comes to wreaking havoc on civilians, on innocent men, women, and children, callous dissembling is not acceptable. Nothing is worth

that kind of lie. . . . [But] mark my words . . . the truth will emerge. And when it does, this house of cards, built of deceit, will fall. (Byrd, 2003, p. 3)

We hope this essay hastens the collapse of the Bush administration's house of cards.

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Ever since 9/11, President Bush's WMD rhetoric has been enmeshed in his larger goal of justifying the use of unilateral, preemptive U.S. military action. Conflating Afghanistan, Iraq, and a host of other "rogue states" and terrorists into one catch-all Axis of Evil, President Bush has proposed that the United States forego the entangling alliances that create a dawdling world community and instead strike where and when it chooses in the name of self-defense. In the September 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States* (NSSUS), the text articulating "the Bush doctrine," President Bush warns that "we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively" (p. 6). The NSSUS refers to this right to act preemptively as part of a larger strategy of "anticipatory action," by which the United States will attack enemies "before they are able to threaten or use WMD against the United States"[3] (pp. 15,14). Overturning 50 years of deterrence theory and multilateral security agreements, and returning again and again to 9/11 as the event catalyzing these transformations in U.S. foreign policy, the Bush doctrine sounds an audacious call for an American empire in which international security will be achieved by unilateral U.S. actions.[4]

Clearly assuming that the war against terrorism, the war in Afghanistan, and the war on Iraq are but the first three steps in fighting what the preface to the NSSUS calls "a global enterprise of uncertain duration," President Bush has supplemented his arguments regarding WMD and the use of unilateral preemptive military force with a series of broadly construed reasons for unrestrained U.S. power. Marshaling theological, historical, philosophical, and economic arguments, President Bush has promised that because the United States is God's agent of redemption, it will win the battle against evil and correct the course of history. This biblical triumph over evil will be won not through aggression but by promulgating righteousness, primarily in the form of free markets, which bring political democracy, legal justice, and economic opportunity to everyone everywhere.[5] Demonstrating the president's evangelical impulses, these arguments promise that a benevolent American empire, enforced by U.S. military and market supremacy and endorsed by both God and history, will rule over a remade world of decency and kindness. The implications of this vision are stunning, for they suggest that rather than prudently pursuing the containment of foes and the support of allies, henceforward the United States will be a unilateral engine of goodness, an evangelical, economic, and military machine spreading God's design far and wide. In short, since 9/11,

President Bush has sworn that the United States will pursue a course of renewal through benevolent empire.

Explicating the intricacies of President Bush's narrative of renewal through benevolent empire is a task that requires a book-length project. We propose here to tackle only the first plank of this narrative, focusing on his claims regarding WMD. To explicate and contextualize the president's WMD rhetoric, we proceed via four steps. First, to demonstrate to readers the complexity of the prewar intelligence regarding Iraq's alleged WMD, we review seven representative texts from establishment sources. Second, to illustrate how the president warped this intelligence, we offer both a chronological catalogue and a rhetorical critique of his (and many of his administration's key spokespersons') arguments about WMD. Third, we examine the available counterevidence to this WMD rhetoric by analyzing Secretary of State Colin Powell's crucial UN testimony of February 5, 2003. And fourth, by focusing on the administration's pattern of lies regarding Iraq's alleged attempt to purchase African uranium, we explain the public controversy regarding the president's WMD rhetoric, the turf wars that have surfaced between competing U.S. intelligence agencies, and the administration's elaborate postwar cover-up of its prewar lies. The essay closes with an epilogue in which we situate WMD discourse within larger questions regarding the production of violence and the backlash of terrorism caused by the pursuit of empire.[6]

In addition to reconstructing the arc of events and claims that led the United States into war in Iraq, our analysis demonstrates three key findings. First, whereas the intelligence community presented the president with a debate in flux, with materials steeped in cautionary prudence, President Bush translated this information into hyperbolic and frequently terrifying public pronouncements ringing with certainty. Second, by claiming utter certainty, regardless of both countervailing and missing evidence, the president's urgent pronouncements about the imminent threat posed by Iraqi WMD amount to fiction, not fact. We therefore show that President Bush is a skilled practitioner of what Wayne Booth (2003) has recently called "rhetrickery." Indeed, by studying his major public speeches since 9/11, we conclude that President Bush has grown beyond his standing as a bumbling oaf, a rhetorically challenged buffoon, to function instead as a cunning master of the rhetorical arts of *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, prolepsis, hyperbole, and the logical fallacy of "position to know."[7] Third, the president's WMD rhetrickery has been so controversial that it has both triggered a bitter public outcry about lying in politics and revealed a simmering turf war within his administration's many intelligence agencies.[8] Studying the administration's responses to this public outcry and its handling of these intelligence turf wars reveals some of the troubling political machinations that lay behind this presidency's rhetorical production and, more important, exposes an administration committed to circumventing the checks and balances that keep American democracy from sliding into tyranny.

Cynics will respond that lying and politics go hand in hand, that presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, Carter, Bush, and Clinton, for example, have bequeathed to the nation a rich tradition of White House lying. But as we demonstrate here, President Bush's WMD lies are in a class of their own, for they have not only dragged the nation into deadly quagmires in Afghanistan and Iraq but also served as the justifications for the implied future wars described by the president as necessary to "rid the world of evil" (NSSUS, 2002, p. 5). Following Hannah Arendt's (1969) classic analysis of *The Pentagon Papers*, we conclude—as foreshadowed in our title—that President Bush's rhetrickery is not the result of loose talk but of an administration-wide campaign, of what Arendt calls the "whole operation of deception" (p. 31). Considering the shameful status of reconstruction in Afghanistan, the escalating violence in Iraq, and the president's open-ended strategy of waging unilateral war, we conclude that the whole operation of deception has already produced, is currently fueling, and will continue to create misery on a global scale—for as we demonstrate here, *speech kills*.

Step 1: The Intelligence Community's Analysis of Iraq's Alleged WMD Programs

We review below seven of the key documents the president and his administration are likely to have relied upon for forming their arguments regarding Iraq's alleged WMD programs. This first section of the essay provides readers with a sense of the factual and rhetorical resources available to the president, thus supplying the necessary foreground for the rhetorical analyses that follow. This first section also counters the still prevalent assumption, lingering even months after the war, that President Bush was acting on irrefutable evidence. For example, in an article in *Time* magazine in September 2003, Charles Krauthammer blustered that "it is hard to credit the deception charge when every intelligence agency on the planet thought Iraq had these weapons and, indeed, when the weapons there still remain unaccounted for" (p. 84). Like so many of his fellow reporters, Krauthammer has not only accepted the president's allegations as facts but is so committed to defending them that he engages in both the whopping exaggeration that "every intelligence agency on the planet" agreed on the prewar intelligence regarding Iraqi WMD and in the counterfactual prophesy that even though no WMD have been found, *they must be there somewhere*. We make no claim to have studied every document produced by every intelligence agency on the planet, and we make no claim to know what may or may not be uncovered someday in Iraq, but we do show below that seven of the most elite sources of intelligence—including the CIA, the State Department, the Department of Energy (D.O.E.), and the British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC)—were in fact internally conflicted regarding the status of Iraqi WMD.

Because most of the October 2002 *National Intelligence Estimate* remains classified, we turn to the CIA's October 2002 report, *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs*. The CIA's report argues that Iraq is attempting to produce ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs); it claims that Iraq is "seeking nuclear weapons" (p. 1); and it demonstrates in grisly detail that Hussein used chemical weapons to "kill or injure more than 20,000 people" between 1983 and 1988 (p. 8). The CIA's report also contains, however, some cautionary moments that merit closer rhetorical attention. For example, when discussing Iraq's chemical weapons and their possible delivery systems, the report qualifies its claims in two places with the word "probably" (p. 2)—so the charges are not certainties, just probabilities. When discussing biological weapons, the report refers not to existing weapons but to Iraq's being "capable" (p. 2) of producing them—so they do not actually have the weapons, they might be capable of making them. In these two examples, as well as the two additional examples offered below, the CIA qualifies its arguments with subtle language that falls short of claiming certainty. The CIA is forced into this prudent position because it has little hard information. In fact, in a telling statement that is bolded in the report, the CIA acknowledges that "**Baghdad's vigorous concealment efforts have meant that specific information on many aspects of Iraq's WMD programs is yet to be uncovered**" (p. 5). Although these concealments clearly violate a series of UN sanctions (including Resolutions 687, 707, 715, 1051, 1060, 1154, and 1284; p. 4), notice that the CIA admits that *it has little specific information.*[9]

Furthermore, the fact that the CIA has little specific information leads to a series of rhetorically twisted passages that reveal uncertainty regarding the report's main claims. For example, consider the report's language concerning Iraq's nuclear weapons program and its alleged purchase of high-strength aluminum tubes for use in that program. "All intelligence experts agree that Iraq is seeking nuclear weapons and that these tubes could be used in a centrifuge enrichment program," the report claims categorically. But the CIA follows this sentence with the qualifying confession that "Most intelligence specialists assess this to be the intended use, but some believe that these tubes are probably intended for conventional weapons use" (p. 5). So in the course of two sentences the claim moves from *all* intelligence experts agreeing on the charge to *most* intelligence specialists agreeing on the charge to a qualifying and therefore doubt-raising *but*. And note that this slide from certainty to uncertainty follows the charge not that Hussein *is using* aluminum tubes to enrich uranium but that the tubes *could possibly be used* in this manner. These qualifying passages—exemplifying what Thomas Powers (2003) calls "that special verb form we might call the intelligence conditional" (p. 9)—wave before the careful reader warning signs indicating that these are assertions, strong assertions to be sure, but that they carry with them modifying buts, probablies, and other marks of uncertainty.

Considering the deeply entwined arguments of President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair regarding the reasons for waging war in Iraq, it is important to consider the WMD evidence provided by British intelligence in two key documents. The first is the September 24, 2002 *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government*; the dossier is the work of the JIC, a blue-ribbon group of officials from a wide variety of British agencies. Although the dossier argues that "uranium [amounting to "significant quantities" later in the text] has been sought from Africa" (p. 17), it provides no evidence supporting the claim. The most contested claim from the dossier is that "the Iraqi military are able to deploy these weapons [chemical and biological WMD] within 45 minutes of a decision to do so" (p. 17). Relying in many cases on the same information found in the CIA's October report—including an identical photograph in both documents of an L-29 fighter jet supposedly converted into an UAV capable of spreading chemical and biological weapons—the dossier makes an unqualified case that Iraq possesses vast amounts of ready-to-use chemical and biological WMD and is aggressively pursuing nuclear WMD. Bereft of any sense of caution or doubt, the dossier's aggressive tone of certainty goes a long way to explaining Prime Minister Blair's unflagging support for war in Iraq.[10]

The second important British document is the January 2003 report, *Iraq—Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation*, a 19-page indictment of Hussein's strategies for terrorizing his own people, hiding WMD, and complicating weapons inspections. We know the information in this document was considered persuasive—and perhaps even influential in shaping U.S. thinking regarding Iraq—for in his February 2003 testimony before the UN, Secretary of State Colin Powell said "I would call my colleagues' attention to the fine paper that the United Kingdom distributed yesterday" (p. 6). It turns out that this "fine paper" consists largely of plagiarized passages from outdated sources. Touted on its cover page as information based on "intelligence material," four pages of the document were not only plagiarized from an article by Ibrahim al-Marashi, a research associate of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, California, but al-Marashi's conclusions in the article—and hence the second British dossier's conclusions—are based on outdated information. In fact, other parts of the second dossier were plagiarized from articles in *Jane's Intelligence Review*, including one essay from 1997. Because this second dossier amounts to little more than a crude cut-and-paste job relying on outdated information, it casts serious doubts on the legitimacy of the claims found in the first dossier (Hinsliff, Bright, Beaumont, & Vulliamy, 2003; Whitaker, 2003). In fact, in September 2003 *The New York Times* reported that the claim that Hussein could deploy WMD within 45 minutes "applied only to short-range battlefield munitions," not long-range weapons, and certainly not WMD (Hodge, 2003b). But this postwar revelation should come as little surprise, for given our brief comments here, it is clear that prudent reasoning would have found it difficult to locate pressing needs for war in

either of these documents. Indeed, the web of fabrications and exaggerations is so dense in these texts, and the obfuscations used to explain them so devious that *The London Times* reported on July 28, 2003 that "trust in Britain's political leaders has almost vanished" ("The danger of doubt," p. 17).[11]

Given the compromised and outright bungled nature of these British documents, yet still hoping to convey the complexity of elite establishment arguments regarding Iraq's alleged WMD programs, we consider below four additional sources of prewar information. For example, consider "Iraq: Nuclear, Biological, Chemical, and Missile Capabilities and Programs," a 2001 research brief posted under the heading of *Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East* on the home page of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. Throughout this report, the CNS appears to lend support to President Bush's claim that regime change in Iraq is necessary to prevent its imminent use of WMD to destabilize the Middle East and perhaps blackmail or even attack the U.S. But careful readers will note that the CNS report is also laced with cautionary language, including the claims that Iraq "may retain" biological weapons, "may retain" and is "believed to possess" chemical weapons, and "may retain" long-range missiles. Thus, like the CIA's report discussed above, the CNS report foregrounds the fact that "precise assessment of Iraq's capabilities is difficult because most WMD programs remain secret and *cannot be verified* independently" (pp. 1, 2, 3, emphasis added).

In a similar vein, The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) (Cirincione, 2003) begins its *Iraq Biological and Chemical Weapons Fact Sheet* with the cautionary reminder that "No one knows for certain how many, if any, chemical or biological weapons Iraq still has." In a statement that accords with our argument in the final section of this essay, the CEIP notes that "some of the intelligence cited by officials before the war seems to have been based on defector information that so far has not proven accurate." And even if that information about alleged Iraqi WMD was accurate, the CEIP reports that chemical and biological weapons "have limited military utility, particularly against mechanized forces." Furthermore, whereas previous Iraqi uses of chemical and biological WMD relied on air delivery, the CEIP notes that "air delivery is all but impossible with manned aircraft given the U.S.-British air superiority." In short, the CEIP argues that Iraqi WMD, regardless of their contested amounts, pose little threat to regional stability and therefore serve poorly as a cause for war.[12]

Similar conclusions were reached by Anthony Cordesman in *If We Fight Iraq: Iraq and Its Weapons of Mass Destruction*, a June 2002 report for the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Cordesman is the Arleigh A. Burke Chair for Strategy at the CSIS and a well-respected expert on the questions addressed here. It is therefore significant that Cordesman essentially repeats the CEIP claim cited above, arguing that "Iraq's present holdings of delivery systems and chemical and biological weapons seem most likely to be so

limited in technology and operational lethality that they do not constrain U.S. freedom of action or do much to intimidate Iraq's neighbors" (p. 18). Cordesman catalogues Hussein's many previous uses of WMD, so like everyone cited here, he agrees that the Iraqi regime has a brutal past, yet like the CEIP, Cordesman notes that much of the prewar hysteria regarding Iraqi WMD was based on information provided by Iraqi exiles who "have little credibility" (p. 21). The CSIS report is exhausting, offering page after page of frequently contradictory information, yet it clearly lends credence to the conclusion that Iraq's alleged WMD capacities offered little immediate threat to U.S interests and therefore thin reasons for waging war.[13]

Finally, another example of ambivalent prewar intelligence is *Iraq: U.S. Efforts to Change the Regime*, an October 2002 Report for Congress prepared by Kenneth Katzman, the Congressional Research Service's specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs. Like his other work on the subject, Katzman's report is well researched and diligently balanced. One section of text, under the heading of "WMD Threat Perception," notes that

> even if UN weapons inspectors return to Iraq . . . inspections alone will not likely ensure that Iraq is free of WMD . . . [but] Some outside experts, including former United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) Chairman Rolf Ekeus, counter that inspections, even if not fully unfettered, would suppress Iraq's ability to reconstitute its WMD. Those taking this position maintain that the inspections (1991-1998) accounted for and dismantled a large portion of Iraq's WMD programs, although *substantial uncertainties remain* about Iraq's production of VX nerve agents, remaining chemical munitions, and the biological weapons Iraq produced. (pp. 10-11)

Katzman thus portrays a debate in flux, complete with *substantial uncertainties* about the central aspects of Iraq's alleged WMD programs. Like the CIA, CNS, CEIP, and CSIS reports cited above, then, Katzman understands that the possible threat of WMD is serious, but also that the situation is filled with uncertainty.

Many observers agree that such uncertainty is inherent to the intelligence-gathering process. A brief digression back to the cold war illustrates this point nicely. In 1976, at the height of U.S./Soviet tensions over nuclear weapons, President Jimmy Carter was presented with a CIA report regarding the accuracy of Soviet missiles. One passage in the report noted that "The uncertainty band would cover the entire range of happiness." As read by Thomas Powers (1982), this phrase means "you could read the figures any way you liked" (p. 103). This chilling story indicates that much of what passes for intelligence analysis is an inherently contested process of interpretation—it is not truth telling, not the collection of certainties, but the gathering of clues and hunches, the collection of shards that need careful siftings and cautious readings.[14]

In addition to the complexities of this hermeneutic process, experts note that the intelligence community is hampered by severe organizational prob-

lems as well. For example, in *Fixing Intelligence*, William Odom (2003), the former director of the National Security Agency, argues that one of the "major deficiencies" of the United States's intelligence community is "miscommunication" between agencies and even within agencies. Although Odom offers a series of suggestions intended to produce "a common understanding of community resource management," he nonetheless portrays the intelligence community as one—like most other vast organizational networks—riven with intellectual, political, and bureaucratic conflicts (pp. 48-50). As we shall see below, President Bush presented this complex intelligence community and its contested, interpretively dense field of intelligence as if it was univocal and steeped in certainty, thereby justifying war in Iraq by manipulating the available evidence to produce a simplistic tale of good versus evil.

Step 2: A Catalogue and Critique of President Bush's WMD Rhetoric

Indeed, the president's claims regarding Iraq's supposed WMD are voiced in terms of certainty, of categorical knowledge beyond the pale of doubt; they therefore do not reflect the CIA's, CNS's, CEIP's, CSIS's, and Congressional Research Service's cautionary and often contradictory thinking. The president's rhetoric regarding WMD was first aired in his January 29, 2002 State of the Union Address. Delivered in the midst of the war in Afghanistan and only 4½ months after the trauma of 9/11, the president spoke that night to an angry nation, to an audience of recently terrorized citizens, many of whom were clamoring for retribution. The president thus received loud and sustained applause throughout his address, particularly when he claimed that Iran, Iraq, and North Korea constitute an "Axis of Evil" (appendix, M, pp. 2, 3). Few details were provided regarding either the Axis of Evil's various WMD programs or their links to terrorists, yet the threat of rogue states and terrorists using WMD was portrayed as clear and chilling. Conflating terrorists and unnamed rogue states, and clearly relying on the nation's still-fresh memory of 9/11, the president warned that such "dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, . . . are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning" (appendix, M, p. 2).

The following months saw the president occupied with the war in Afghanistan and buttressing what has become known as homeland security. It was therefore not until October 7, 2002 that the president returned to the task of portraying Iraq as a major purveyor of WMD. Speaking from Cincinnati to a live television audience on the 1-year anniversary of America's initiating military actions in Afghanistan, President Bush warned that Iraq "possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons. It is seeking nuclear weapons." These "horrible poisons and diseases and gases and atomic weapons . . . are controlled by a murderous tyrant" (appendix, G, p. 1). This is where President Bush first tested out the rhetorical device of warning listeners that Hussein's

WMD are "capable of killing millions" and of sowing "mass death and destruction" (appendix, G, p. 2). Repeating one of the more dubious claims from both the CIA and JIC texts discussed above, President Bush argued that "Iraq possesses ballistic missiles with a likely range of hundreds of miles . . . [and] a growing fleet of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles that could be used to disperse chemical or biological weapons" (appendix, G, p. 2). The combination of these claims built the foundation for the president's theory of the need for preemptive U.S. military action against Iraq. Indeed, in a chilling comment that encapsulates many of the president's post-9/11 themes, he warned that "Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud" (appendix, G, p. 3).[15]

Apparently swayed by such terrifying images, it took Congress but 4 days following President Bush's Cincinnati speech to pass House Joint Resolution 114 (H. J. Res. 114) late on the night of October 11, 2002. Titled "Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of United States Armed Forces Against Iraq," H. J. Res. 114 granted the president sweeping powers to "use the Armed Forces of the United States as he determines to be necessary and appropriate in order to defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq." By granting the president the power to use military force without consulting Congress on a formal declaration of war—as mandated by Section 8 of Article I of the Constitution—H. J. Res. 114 both sidestepped the Constitution and handed the president a blank check for waging war in Iraq. This frightening abdication by Congress of its traditional role of enforcing checks and balances on executive power was made doubly shameful by the fact that H. J. Res. 114 included in its prologue a veritable catalog of the president's unsubstantiated claims. In fact, paragraphs 8, 9, and 10 of H. J. Res. 114 reproduce President Bush's assertions regarding Iraq's "capability and willingness to use weapons of mass destruction," its "willingness to attack the United States," and its links to both al Qaeda in general and 9/11 in particular. We address these charges in detail in the third and fourth sections of this essay and show that they are false, thus demonstrating that H. J. Res. 114 amounts to the legal embodiment of the Bush administration's operation of deception.[16]

Armed with unlimited war powers by a compliant Congress, President Bush nonetheless still needed to persuade doubtful national and international audiences of the need for waging war on Iraq. He thus expanded his existing claims about WMD in his January 28, 2003 State of the Union Address, where he reported that "the United Nations concluded in 1999 that Saddam Hussein had biological weapons sufficient to produce over 25,000 liters of anthrax—enough to kill several million people" (appendix, D, p. 6). Hussein was also charged with the capacity of producing "38,000 liters of botulinum toxin—enough to subject millions of people to death" (appendix, D, p. 6). Iraq's supposed cache of "500 tons of sarin, mustard and VX nerve agent" were portrayed as capable of killing "untold thousands" (appendix, D, p. 6). Perhaps the most terrifying aspect of the president's speech that night was his portrayal of Iraq as

a budding nuclear power. "The International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed in the 1990s," President Bush reported, "that Saddam Hussein had an advanced nuclear weapons development program, had a design for a nuclear weapon, and was working on five different methods of enriching uranium for a bomb." This sentence was followed by the one that has subsequently received much critical attention: "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa" (appendix, D, p. 6).

To make sure that the nation and the world understood that invading Iraq was necessary to prevent its imminent use of WMD, including nuclear weapons, President Bush repeated many of these charges in his eve-of-war speech on Monday night, March 17, 2003, when he delivered an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein ordering him to leave Iraq within 48 hours or face invasion. The president claimed here that "the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised" (appendix, C, p. 1). The function of the imminent U.S. invasion, then, the president claimed, was "to eliminate weapons of mass destruction" (appendix, C, p. 2). Air strikes against Baghdad began that Thursday night, March 19, 2003, with U.S. ground forces entering Iraq that Friday. Thus, roughly 18 months following 9/11, President Bush launched the first preemptive war to eliminate WMD.

Having reconstructed the president's main WMD arguments leading up to the start of the war in Iraq, we turn now to two tasks: First, we examine the rhetorical devices that structure his arguments; second, we compare his WMD claims to the available evidence. Both forms of criticism are important, for whereas offering counterfactual evidence enables us to prove where, when, and how the president and his supporters lied, studying the overarching rhetorical strategies driving the president's WMD arguments enable readers to flag his lying not only in this instance but in the future as well. Rhetorical criticism is therefore a necessary tool of democracy, as each citizen's capacity to fathom the complexities of our political life hinges on the abilities to listen, read, write, view, and speak critically, hence enabling her or him not only to consume political rhetoric but to produce it, thus contributing to our national dialogue. In this sense, then, rhetorical criticism and informed citizenship go hand in hand—they are among the first principles of democratic life.[17]

In *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, Richard Lanham (1991) defines *argumentum ad ignorantiam* as a logical fallacy in which one "argues that a proposition is true because it has never been proved false" (p. 77). In *A Pragmatic Theory of Fallacies*, Douglas Walton (1995) notes that "a seriously mischievous" version of this argument tactic occurs when one relies on "charges made purely on the basis of innuendo and suspicion" (p. 44). What makes *argumentum ad ignorantiam* so tricky, then, is the question of how one's evidence—or lack thereof—links thesis and conclusion. For example, because there is no definitive proof of Iraqi WMD, may one conclude that they cannot possibly exist? Alternatively, because there is no definitive proof of their non-existence, does

this sanction one's concluding that they must exist? In both cases, the rhetorical/argumentative problem concerns the relationship between evidence and conclusion. Simply foregrounding the tenuousness or contingency of one's argument therefore enables any speaker to circumvent the charge of creating mischief by arguing falsely for a conclusion based on the absence of evidence. President Bush, however, is a speaker who uses few qualifiers; instead, he pronounces, he proclaims, he preaches with certainty, even when he has little or no evidence to support his claims. The president therefore offers a case study of how *argumentum ad ignorantiam* enables one to move from having no evidence to proclaiming certainty.

In fact, as the president's WMD rhetoric has garnered more scrutiny, one response of his appointees has been to downplay the importance of evidence in the president's arguments. In a remarkable revelation of hubris, when confronted with the increasingly apparent gap between the president's rhetoric regarding Iraq's supposed WMD and the available facts, one "senior administration official"—Scott McClellan, the new White House press secretary—declared that "The President of the United States in not a fact checker."[18] The claim was clearly intended to deflect blame for any erroneous WMD charges from the president, placing guilt instead on his speech writers and intelligence agencies. But the president is apparently not alone in not checking his facts, for as we demonstrate below, many of the president's appointees were equally categorical in their rhetoric, thus demonstrating that the use of *argumentum ad ignorantiam* was not merely the result of the president's sloppy speaking but the product of an entire administration's forethought. For example, in the following list of quotations we have highlighted those phrases that refuse any possibility of doubt regarding Iraq's WMD:

- Speaking before the National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Nashville, Tennessee, on August 26, 2002, Vice President Cheney (transcript from www.whitehouse.gov) claimed that "*we now know* that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. . . . Simply stated, *there is no doubt* that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction" (pp. 3-4).

- During his press briefing of January 9, 2003, when questioned about the evidence supporting the president's claims regarding Iraq's WMD, Press Secretary Ari Fleischer (transcript from www.whitehouse.gov) claimed that "*we know for a fact* that there are weapons there. . . . *We know* they have weapons of mass destruction of a chemical nature" (pp. 2-3).

- Following the initiation of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, at the White House press briefing of March 21, 2003, Fleischer (transcript from www. whitehouse.gov) said, "*There is no question* that we have evidence and information that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction" (p. 5).

- The next day, speaking at the daily press briefing at the U.S. Central Command in Doha, Qatar, Brigadier General Vince Brooks (March 22, 2003, transcript from www.usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror) claimed that "*there is no doubt* that the regime of Saddam Hussein possesses weapons of mass destruction" (p. 2).

- At that same press briefing, General Tommy Franks (March 22, 2003, transcript from www.centcom.mil/CENTCOMnews/Transcripts) repeated Brooks's claim, arguing that "*there is no doubt* that the regime of Saddam Hussein possesses weapons of mass destruction." When pressed on the nature of U.S. intelligence supporting this claim, Franks refused to offer details,

instead saying that his forces were moving to control "weapons of mass destruction, which *for certain, sure* exist within Iraq" (p. 8).

- The following day, March 23, 2003, Kenneth Adelman, a member of the Pentagon Advisory Board, told *The Washington Post*, "*I have no doubt* we're going to find big stores of weapons of mass destruction" (quoted in Allen & Milbank, 2003, p. A27).

- Following the war, despite no new evidence supporting any of the claims listed above, Secretary Powell said on NBC's *Meet the Press*, on May 4, 2003, (transcript from www.state.gov/secretary), "*I'm absolutely sure* that there are weapons of mass destruction there and the evidence will be forthcoming" (p. 2).

We now know . . . there is no doubt; we know for a fact . . . we know; there is no question; there is no doubt; there is no doubt; for certain, [for] sure; I have no doubt; I'm absolutely sure—these are but 11 phrases among hundreds of examples of Bush administration officials, appointees, or supporters speaking with certainty regarding Iraq's WMD. But in not one instance is any hard evidence offered. These examples make it clear, then, that relying on *argumentum ad ignorantiam* is the driving rhetorical strategy not only of President Bush but of his entire administration.

In addition to *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, the president's WMD rhetoric relies heavily on prolepsis, hyperbole, and the logical fallacy of "position-to-know." For example, recall how in his Cincinnati speech, the president slipped from the claim that Hussein was "seeking nuclear weapons" to the unqualified claim that he possessed "atomic weapons." Likewise, in his 2003 State of the Union Address, notice how in his long catalog of charges against Hussein, the president moved from arguing that Hussein possessed materials "sufficient to produce" WMD to the conclusion that he had produced such weapons, thus gaining the ability "to kill several million people." Here and throughout his WMD rhetoric we see President Bush turning conditional claims (Hussein is seeking, might have, or might be able to produce WMD) into unqualified certainties complete with grisly images of imminent massive deaths. The president, therefore, relies heavily throughout his WMD rhetoric on prolepsis, the rhetorical act of shifting time frames within the same argument (see Lanham, 1991, pp. 120-121). Indeed, moving regularly from future conditional claims, in which an act might happen given the right circumstances, to present certainties, in which an act is described as imminent, the president uses prolepsis to collapse speculative claims into descriptive claims, turning what might be into what is. For example, consider the president's Cincinnati speech, where he offered dreadful speculation regarding the possible appearance of a mushroom cloud over a nameless American city. Using prolepsis to collapse distinctions between past, present, and future, the president's terrifying image of a future nuclear death drew upon cold war terrors to serve as an assumedly factual statement regarding present threats.

These uses of *argumentum ad ignorantiam* and prolepsis are supplemented by heavy doses of hyperbole. Lanham (1991) defines hyperbole as "exaggerated or extravagant terms used for emphasis and not intended to be understood lit-

erally," and thus as a form of "self-conscious exaggeration" (p. 86). President Bush offers a startling variation on this definition, for it appears from his many WMD statements that although he regularly uses exaggerated and extravagant terms, he assumes that his charges will be taken literally, as actual statements of fact. Most of the president's hyperbolic WMD charges take the time-bending form described in the paragraph above and therefore are difficult to counter with hard evidence. But some of the president's hyperbolic statements invite simple factual rejoinders. For example, although we have shown above how President Bush portrayed Iraq as a threatening military juggernaut, the U.S. General Accounting Office (2002) reported that whereas Iraq spent almost $19 billion per year on military expenditures between 1980 and 1990, by 1995 it was spending only $1.5 billion (pp. 14-15). According to a report published by the American Academy of Arts and Science (S. Miller, 2002). Iraq's military budget of $1.4 billion in 2001 placed it behind Saudi Arabia ($24.7 billion), Israel ($10.6 billion), Turkey ($7.4 billion), Kuwait ($5.1 billion), and Iran ($4.8 billion) (p. 43). These figures demonstrate that Iraq's military has been in a state of precipitous decline since 1995 and has thus been at a significant military disadvantage compared to many of its neighbors for the past 8 years. Nonetheless, in an example of *literalist hyperbole*, where extravagant exaggerations are used not for ironic literary purposes but as a substitute for evidence, the president has repeatedly portrayed Hussein's feeble army as a regional and even global threat capable of killing millions of innocents.

Although the Iraqi WMD supposedly capable of delivering Armageddon to our doorsteps have yet to be found, the president has hinted repeatedly (both before and after the war) that secret U.S. intelligence confirms that Hussein possessed such weapons. The American public has thus been asked to believe that there is evidence but that the president cannot make it public for security purposes. This line of argumentative fallacy, known as "position-to-know reasoning," relies on a speaker calling upon his or her expertise or authority to sanction a claim that would otherwise not be believable. For example, in his testimony before the UN on February 5, 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell, while ostensibly presenting to the world the best intelligence the U.S. possessed, cautioned his audience that "I cannot tell you everything that we know" (p. 2). Likewise, in his foreword to the British JIC's (2002) dossier on Iraq's WMD, Prime Minister Tony Blair stated that "we cannot publish everything we know" (p. 3). When challenged in Parliament on May 30, 2003 regarding his repeated Bush-like arguments regarding WMD, Blair responded that he had information that could "not yet [be] public," but that he would "assemble that evidence and present it properly" (Hinsliff, Walsh, & Beaumont, 2003, p. 2; and see Hodge, 2003a, p. A17; Left, 2003; Russell & McSmith, 2003, p. 1). In President Bush and Secretary Powell's cases, using position-to-know amounts to abusing the authority of their office to demand compliance with an argument that lacks evidence; in Prime Minister Blair's case, position-to-know serves as a delaying tactic promising that in-hand evidence is too sensitive and

can only be released at a later date. For Bush, Powell, and Blair, then, the fallacy of position-to-know enables them to marshal the massive prestige and power of their access to classified information to turn possibilities into certainties, a lack of information into purported evidence, dubious assertions into assumed facts.[19]

This use of the position-to-know fallacy reached its apogee in the 2003 State of the Union Address, in which President Bush cited the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)—a group deeply opposed to the president's war on Iraq—as supplying evidence supporting his claims about Iraqi WMD. President Bush did not name the report (referenced vaguely as from the 1990s), so we have no way of knowing to which one of the IAEA's hundreds of reports he was referring. But we do know that many of the IAEA's reports from that period were concerned with Iraqi WMD capabilities *prior to the first Gulf War*, which many observers agree destroyed many of the WMD facilities in question. As *The Washington Post* (Gellman & Pincus, 2003) recently reported, President Bush thus "cast as present evidence the contents of a report from 1996, updated in 1998 and 1999. In those accounts, the IAEA described the history of an Iraqi nuclear weapons program that arms inspectors systematically destroyed" (p. 5). Moreover, those WMD-producing facilities that survived the first Gulf War came under intense scrutiny between 1991 and 1998 by the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), which, according to a 2003 Issue Brief for Congress (Katzman, 2003) "destroyed all chemical weapons material uncovered—38,500 munitions, 480,000 liters of chemical agents, 1.8 million liters of precursor chemicals, and 426 pieces of production equipment items" (p. 5). Despite the president's rhetrickery, then, the IAEA documents are clear: the combination of Gulf War I bombardments and the postwar inspections regime left Iraq with no WMD.[20]

UNSCOM concluded in 1995, however, that Iraq likely possessed additional post-Gulf War I stockpiles of up to 4 tons of VX (a nerve gas). This unaccounted-for VX is the most credible WMD charge we have found, but given both the rapid decay of nerve agents and the difficulty of weaponizing them, this claim points not to a direct and imminent threat but to old, no longer dangerous information. Moreover, Seymour Hersh (2003b, p. 87) has concluded from his analysis of CIA transcripts of interviews with Jafar Dhia Jafar, who worked on Iraq's nuclear weapons program in the 1980s and had access to the highest levels of Iraqi information, that the discrepancy between Iraq's, UNSCOM's, and the U.S.'s estimates of "missing" WMD can be explained in this way: "The Iraqi government had simply lied to the United Nations about the number of chemical weapons used against Iran during the brutal Iran-Iraq war." If true, this would amount to a deadly irony: In attempting to hide its war atrocities from the 1980s, Iraq gave President Bush just enough of the appearance of WMD impropriety to argue for a war to destroy WMD that had already been used. Aside from the argument-destroying power of Hersh's suggestion, it is important to note that the UNSCOM report in question here pointed to "up

to four tons" of missing VX, not to the massive quantity of 500 tons claimed in President Bush's 2003 State of the Union Address (Appendix D, p. 6). Apparently, the president believed that he could rely on the power of the position-to-know argument not only to play fast and loose with the relevant dates and findings of these IAEA and UNSCOM reports but to exaggerate their findings to almost comic book proportions.[21]

We return below to more recent IAEA reports on the status of Iraqi WMD, but close this section by noting how the president's use of impossible-to-track-down information illustrates his abusing the authority of his office, its historically venerable position-to-know status, to awe listeners into taking old and therefore irrelevant evidence as fresh and imminently pressing evidence. In fact, in a blistering letter sent to CIA Director Tenet on September 27, 2003, Congressman Porter Goss (Rep.-FL) and Congresswoman Jane Harman (Dem.-CA), the ranking members of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, questioned the administration's use of the position-to-know fallacy. Referring to the administration's repeated claims that solid information about Iraq's alleged WMD could not be divulged because of security reasons, Goss and Harman wrote that "We have not found any information in the assessments that are still classified that was any more definitive" than those cited publicly before the war. In short, Goss and Harman argue that the position-to-know fallacy was abused by the Bush administration to create the appearance of secret evidence that did not exist (Priest, 2003b, p. A1; and see Priest, 2003a, p. A13).

In each of the instances noted here, the president's, secretary of state's, administration officials', and prime minster's slippage from *may be* to *must be*, greased at each step by prolepsis, their authority of position-to-know, and literalist versions of hyperbole, amount to classic examples of *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, to the rhetorical trick of manufacturing certainty out of uncertainty. Having established the rhetorical devices structuring the Bush administration's WMD rhetoric, we turn now to the question of how it stands under the scrutiny of counterfactual criticism.

Step 3: Secretary of State Colin Powell's UN Testimony and the Available Counterevidence

As demonstrated above, the president's claims regarding Iraqi WMD take the form of assertions based not so much on hard evidence as on a suggestive lack of evidence. It is therefore difficult to argue with the president's claims, for without his providing details there is little data to study, little evidence to examine. To apply the force of counterfactual criticism to the president's WMD rhetoric means, then, that one must look to other examples in which the speaker attempts to persuade not only by means of prolepsis, hyperbole, position-to-know, and *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, but by marshalling evidence. Considering that it was by far the most extensive effort on behalf of the Bush

administration to present an evidence-based argument for war, we turn to Secretary of State Colin Powell's testimony before the United Nations on February 5, 2003. The testimony was given before the United States had declared that it would wage a unilateral war, back when the UN was still being courted as an international stamp of approval for U.S. plans in Iraq, hence making Powell's testimony an important moment both for winning UN support by sharing evidence for war and, just as important, for demonstrating to a wary world audience the mechanics of transparent, reasoned political debate supposedly championed by the United States.

To his credit, Secretary Powell offered a speech that in many places was passionately delivered and powerfully persuasive. It was hard to hear that performance and not agree that war on Iraq would make the world a safer place—hence, the shameful rush by many reporters to depict the speech as a devastating, case-closing performance of truth telling.[24] But hearing a frightening presentation and studying its transcript are two different tasks; indeed, examining the transcript of Secretary Powell's speech points to a series of claims that merit closer attention. One aspect of the speech that stands out is Powell's awareness that his administration is perceived as evidence-challenged. For example, in classic demonstrations of protesting too much, the secretary emphasizes that his claims regarding WMD are factual. Early in his testimony Powell says, "My colleagues, every statement that I make today is backed up by sources, solid sources. These are not assertions. What we are giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence" (p. 4). Later in his testimony Powell again promises his audience that "these are not assertions. These are facts corroborated by many sources" (p. 7). Such insistence on the soundness of his evidence indicates Powell's unpleasant realization that by February 2003, his president's loose talk had created the perception that U.S. policy regarding Iraq was based on fiction, not fact. Thus, proceeding in the face of widespread doubt regarding the veracity of U.S. claims, Powell outlined seven main charges: (1) that the UN's weapons inspections teams had been compromised by spies; (2) that even in the face of UN inspections, Iraq was producing chemical and biological WMD; (3) that Iraq was making significant progress toward producing a nuclear bomb; (4) that Iraq was developing UAVs to deliver chemical, biological, and nuclear WMD; (5) that Iraq had deep connections with al Qaeda; (6) that Hussein's regime was a humanitarian disaster; and (7) that the combination of points 1 through 6 prove the U.S.'s charge that Iraq poses an immediate threat to regional and even global security, thus sanctioning a preemptive military attack.

Before turning to our critique of Secretary Powell's arguments regarding WMD, it is important to acknowledge the truth of his sixth point. Indeed, one would have to be obtuse not to cheer the fall of Hussein's rotten, murderous regime, where we know that dissidents were tortured, innocents were imprisoned, tens of thousands were executed, and large segments of the population were terrorized. In fact, the record of humanitarian abuse in Iraq is so damning

that it leads us to a troubling conclusion: The only reason the Bush administration did not argue more forcefully for intervention on the basis of humanitarian reasons was because it was wary of establishing a precedent for military actions in the name of human rights. For if ridding the world of humanitarian disasters was the business of the United States in Iraq, then why would it not apply as well to the horrors underway in Burundi, or Liberia, or Colombia, or China, or the territories occupied by Israel? Instead, seeking a more proscribed set of reasons for waging war, the administration portrayed Iraqi WMD as an imminent threat to civilization. But as we shall see below, eschewing the humanitarian argument in favor of WMD claims led the administration into a troubling thicket of questions regarding the reliability of its evidence.[24]

Secretary Powell's (2003) first charge, that UN weapons inspections teams had been neutralized by Iraqi spies, was supported by Powell analyzing taped phone conversations between Iraqi scientists and satellite images of the Taji facility. In one of the moments of his presentation that gathered much media attention—with some pundits breathlessly recalling a similar use of aerial photographs by Adlai Stevenson during the Cuban missile crisis—Powell mustered two photographs of a facility in Taji. In the first image Powell identified what he called "a signature item" of WMD production, pointing to a "decontamination vehicle," charging that such a vehicle indicated the presence of chemical and/or biological weapons production. In the second image the vehicle is gone. "The sequence of events," Powell concludes, "raises the worrisome suspicion that Iraq had been tipped off to the forthcoming inspections" (pp. 5-6). This charge was then expanded the following day in a scathing editorial by William Safire (2003a), in which he argued that the UN inspections process had been "penetrated by Iraqi wiretaps and bugs," thus fatally compromising the search for WMD. As a closing flourish, Safire concluded by claiming that "the Zarqawi poison works in northern Iraq" held both chemical weapons and al Qaeda members; in full warhawk fury, and clearly supporting the course of action implied in Secretary Powell's testimony, Safire asked incredulously, "Why haven't we obliterated it?"[24]

Powell's and Safire's entwined comments require two rejoinders. First, Safire was wrong to name the supposed camp "the Zarqawi poison works," for Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was the operative supposedly linked to this site, not the name of the site itself. Furthermore, Zarqawi's alleged ties to al Qaeda, which Powell dwelled upon in his testimony (pp. 16-18), were known at the time to be tenuous at best. In fact, *The Observer* (Vulliamy, Bright, & Pelham, 2003) reported on February 2, 2003, 3 days before Powell's testimony, that Zarqawi "has never been mentioned in the list of senior al Qaeda men in bin Laden's entourage in Afghanistan" (p. 16). Following Powell's claims before the UN, *The Wall Street Journal* (I. Johnson, Crawford, & Fields, 2003, p. A6), *The Washington Post* (Pincus, 2003a, p. A21), and *The New York Times* (Van Natta & Johnston, 2003, p. A1), among others, noted that although Zarqawi was indeed a dangerous fanatic with ties to anti-Semitic groups and a long record of

terrorism, there was no evidence linking him to either al Qaeda or Hussein's regime. Like so much of the administration's case for war, then, the claim that Zarqawi somehow cemented a war-worthy link between al Qaeda and Hussein was circumstantial at best.[25]

Second, Powell's analysis of the photos appears to have been based on deception regarding both the status of the vehicle in question and the assumed cause of its movement. For 9 days after Powell's testimony before the UN, Dr. Hans Blix (2003), executive chairman of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC—established after the demise of UNSCOM), briefed the UN Security Council on the status of his inspections teams' progress. During that briefing Blix said

> The presentation of intelligence information by the U.S. Secretary of State suggested that Iraq had prepared for inspections by cleaning up the sites and removing evidence of proscribed weapons programs. I would like to comment . . . that the two satellite images of the site were taken several weeks apart. The report of movement of munitions at the site could just as easily have been a routine activity as a movement of proscribed munitions in anticipation of imminent inspections. (p. 6)

Powell thus took what was most likely the routine movement of vehicles at the site in question over "several weeks" as unquestionable evidence—*these are not assertions. What we are giving you are facts*—of infiltration of the weapons inspection program. Furthermore, a retired CIA officer trained in photographic analysis has suggested that the vehicle in question appears not to be a "decontamination vehicle" but *a fire truck*. In short, because the administration had no hard evidence of functioning WMD programs in Iraq, it prodded Powell to mislead the UN by misreading the photographs.[26]

Secretary Powell's (2003) third main point, that Iraq was making significant progress toward producing a nuclear bomb, hinged in large part on evidence regarding "high-specification aluminum tubes," which, if modified in certain ways, could be used in "centrifuges for enriching uranium." To his credit, Powell noted that "there is controversy about what these tubes are for," but he followed this qualified statement with the firm claim that "Most U.S. experts think they are intended to serve as rotors in centrifuges to enrich uranium." According to Secretary Powell, then, the tubes prove that Hussein "is determined to acquire nuclear weapons" (p. 13). We now know that Powell made this same claim in his September 26, 2002 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Hersh, 2003c); this was the crucial meeting, preceded 2 days earlier by similar testimony by CIA director Tenet, at which Powell persuaded the committee to support the president's war powers act. From as early as September 2002, then, Powell was using the alleged weapons-grade tubes as a major reason for waging war against Iraq. But 9 days following Powell's UN speech, on February 14, 2003, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the IAEA, testified before the UN Security Council on the status of the agency's

investigations in Iraq. In his closing remarks, ElBaradei (2003) stated that "The IAEA concluded, by December 1998, that it had neutralized Iraq's past nuclear program and that, therefore, there were no unresolved disarmament issues left at that time" (p. 4). Since the IAEA resumed its inspections in Iraq on November 27, 2002—following the November 8, 2002 UN Resolution 1441—ElBaradei reported that through the IAEA's 177 inspections at 125 sites, "Iraq has continued to provide immediate access to all locations" (p. 1), and that "we have to date found *no evidence of ongoing prohibited nuclear or nuclear-related activities in Iraq*" (p. 4, italics added).[27]

Furthermore, in a remarkable postwar revelation, an unnamed "senior administration official" (McClellan) disclosed in a press conference at the White House on July 18, 2003 (www.usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/archive/ 2003/ Jul/20-327380.html) that the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) never believed Iraq was pursuing an "integrated and comprehensive approach to acquire nuclear weapons." In discussing the presence of dissent within the classified *National Intelligence Estimate* (*NIE*) of October 2002, particularly regarding claims that Iraq was successfully reconstituting its nuclear weapons program, McClellan revealed that the INR had argued that "the available evidence [was] inadequate to support such a judgment." McClellan also revealed that the *NIE* contains a passage, referring to the supposedly telltale aluminum tubes, in which the D.O.E. "assesses that the tubes probably are not part of the [nuclear] program" (pp. 4, 5). This is a particularly important revelation, for as David Albright (2003) of the Institute for Science and International Security notes, "the D.O.E. has virtually the only expertise on gas centrifuges and nuclear weapons programs in the U.S. government" (p. 2). In fact, *The Washington Post* (Gellman & Pincus, 2003) revealed in August 2003 that when the D.O.E.'s leading experts from the Oak Ridge National Laboratory examined the evidence in late 2001, they "unanimously regarded this possibility [of using the tubes to make weapons grade uranium] as implausible." One of those experts, Houston G. Wood, told the *Post*'s Barton Gellman and Walter Pincus that "it would have been extremely difficult to make these tubes into centrifuges. It stretches the imagination to come up with a way. I do not know any real centrifuge experts that feel differently."[28] Hence, despite overwhelmingly positive coverage in the mass media, much of Secretary Powell's February 2003 testimony regarding Iraq's WMD programs was refuted within 1 week by the IAEA and, more damning, was based on information discounted as early as October 2002 by the State Department's INR and as early as 2001 by the D.O.E.'s nuclear experts.[29]

In short, many of President Bush's and Secretary Powell's arguments for going to war were based on exaggerations, outright lies, or dubious interpretations of contested evidence. But possessing little evidence does not deter the Bush administration from making false assertions, for the logic of *argumentum ad ignorantiam* enables one to base conclusions not on evidence but on the absence of evidence. To be fair to Powell and Bush, we must observe that the

absence of evidence regarding alleged Iraqi WMD does not automatically prove that they are lying, for Hussein may indeed have had weapons that Blix and ElBaradei's inspections teams simply had not yet found before the war (and that U.S. troops still have not found after the war). Nonetheless, to be rhetorically accurate and ethically fair, Powell and Bush should have couched their charges as allegations, as hunches, as probabilities, as suspicions yet to be confirmed. But instead, in each of the instances examined above, Bush and Powell took questionable evidence and spun it into incontrovertible evidence, making a case that was open for debate into a case that was supposedly shut and closed. For all intents and purposes, then, this is lying, attempting to manufacture evidence to support one's policy, operating what can only be called an operation of deception.

Step 4: The African Uranium Claim Debunked and the Fallout From Intelligence Turf Wars

As we have noted above, the administration's rhetorical choices regarding waging war on Iraq were complicated by political infighting among the White House, CIA, D.O.E., INR, and other key government intelligence agencies. In fact, documents that began to surface in the spring of 2003 point to a bitter struggle within competing government agencies regarding the meaning of the available information about Iraq's supposed WMD capacities in general and its pursuit of African uranium in particular. Tracking the intelligence turf wars that lay behind the president's WMD rhetoric enables us to study how institutional imperatives regarding power and prestige in Washington drove the administration's claims about Iraq. More important, by studying the elaborate cover-ups surrounding both the administration's arguments for war and these intelligence turf battles, we demonstrate how President Bush's operation of deception has subverted the checks and balances that guarantee the legitimacy of the democratic process. The irony here is bitter, for we show that President Bush has argued for a war ostensibly to protect democracy by besmirching democracy.

Before addressing the institutional turf wars regarding supposed Iraqi WMD, however, let us first examine the controversial claim that drew attention to their existence. The contested line comes from the 2003 State of the Union address, where President Bush declared that "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa" (appendix, D, p. 6). That statement may be considered legally sound, for as we demonstrated above, the British JIC had released a dossier in September 2002 with this claim. Thus, when pressed on the question, the Bush administration resorted to legalistic sophistry, with Condeleezza Rice chiming that the statement "was indeed accurate" (quoted in Risen, 2003, p. A7; also see Nagourney, 2003). By hiding behind the accurate claim that the British had made such a statement, Rice sidestepped the more pressing point that the

content of that claim was known at the time to be false. In fact, it was widely known as early as the spring of 2002—10 months prior to the 2003 State of the Union Address—that the claims about Iraq seeking African uranium were based on documents that were forgeries. The public became aware of the forgeries in the week following the president's 2003 State of the Union Address when, in a testimony delivered to the UN, ElBaradei reported that "based on thorough analysis, the IAEA has concluded, . . . that these documents . . . are not authentic" (quoted in Sallot, 2003). But it should not have taken ElBaradei and the IAEA to reach this conclusion, for the two documents contained four obvious errors: (a) the first letter referred to a 1965 Niger constitution that had been superceded by a constitution ratified in 1999; (b) on the first letter, the signature of President Tandja Mamadou was clearly botched; (c) the letterhead used for the second document was from the previous military regime, which had been replaced by a new government (with new letterhead) in 1999; and (d) the signature on the second letter, dated 1999, was for Allele Habibou, a minister of foreign affairs who had left the post in 1989. Moreover, it is widely known that the entire yearly output of Nigerian "yellow cake," the form of uranium in question here, is contracted to French, Japanese, and Spanish corporations—so siphoning off massive amounts of material for illegal shipment to Iraq would have required the complicity of major U.S. allies. Accepting these two documents as evidence of Iraq's nuclear weapons ambitions would thus have required either shamefully sloppy spy work or, perhaps worse, turning a blind eye to their status as forgeries because they satisfied the president's desperate need to produce reasons for war. In fact, a former CIA official told Seymour Hersh (2003b) that "everybody knew at every step of the way that they were false—until they got to the Pentagon, where they were believed" (p. 84). Rice's retort that the line from the president's address was factually accurate was therefore mere quibbling, for a president who cites false information without marking it as such engages in unethical deception—this is lying.[30]

Defenders of the president have claimed that it was not known at the time that the Iraq/Niger claim was false, but this too is a lie. In fact, prior to the president endorsing the bogus British claim in his January 2003 State of the Union Address, Vice President Dick Cheney asked the CIA to dispatch Joseph Wilson, a 23-year career diplomat, to Africa to research the charges that Iraq was purchasing enriched uranium in Africa. In March 2002, Wilson reported to the CIA and State Department that the documents prompting such fears were forgeries. *The New York Times*'s Nicholas Kristof (2003b, p. A33) reported on June 13, 2003 that he had interviewed CIA officials, confirming that "lower CIA officials did tell both the vice president's office and National Security Council staff members" that the charges were false. *The Washington Post*'s Dana Priest (2003d, p. A22) confirmed 1 week later that Wilson had conveyed his dismissal of the false claims to the National Security Council on March 9, 2002, 7 months before the president's "mushroom cloud" Cincinnati speech and 10 months before the president's January 2003 State of the Union Address.[31]

Despite Kristof's and Priest's strong reporting, the White House continued to deny that it had been warned about the erroneous uranium charges. These denials prompted Wilson to expose the White House's lies in an editorial published in *The New York Times* on Sunday, July 6, 2003. Titled "What I Didn't Find in Africa," Wilson explained that he had flown to Niamey, the capital of Niger, in late February 2002. His first contact in Niamey was with United States Ambassador Babro Owens-Kirkpatrick, who was somewhat puzzled by Wilson's arrival, for the ambassador told Wilson that "she felt she had already debunked them [the claims about Iraq purchasing Niger uranium] in her reports to Washington." This means that even before sending Wilson to Niger, Washington's warhawks had already disregarded reports debunking the claim. Wilson conducted his research nonetheless, and "It did not take long to conclude that it was highly doubtful that any such transaction had ever taken place," for "there's simply too much oversight [by the IAEA] over too small an industry for a sale to have transpired" (sec. 4, p. 9). Wilson returned to the United States, where on March 9 he filed a detailed report with the CIA and the State Department's African Affairs Bureau. He was therefore stunned to hear the president use information that he knew was false in the 2003 State of the Union Address. Appalled by his nation being dragged into war on the strength of lies, Wilson wrote his editorial in an attempt to set the record straight. Supporting his written editorial of July 6th with other media appearances, Wilson argued on NBC's *Meet the Press* that the information underlying the president's repeated assertions about Iraq purchasing African uranium was "erroneous, and that they knew about it well ahead of both the publication of the British white paper and the president's State of the Union Address."[32] Wilson's testimony thus provided the smoking gun proving three points: first, the Bush administration knew its claims about Iraq purchasing African uranium were incorrect; second, it knew so well in advance of the president's key speeches utilizing the false claim; and third, the White House's denial of this knowledge amounts to a second layer of lying.

The Bush administration's response to these revelations was doubly dishonorable—demonstrating what Eric Alterman (2003a) has called "the Nixonian depths" of its "moral depravity"—for not only did it deny the facts as provided by Wilson, Kristof, Priest, and others, but it attacked Wilson's family by "outing" his wife, Valerie Plame, as a CIA agent. Indeed, roughly 1 week following Wilson's truth-telling editorial, anonymous White House officials told as many as six prominent reporters that Plame was an undercover CIA agent specializing in WMD. Of the six reporters who received the leak, only Robert Novak (2003), the syndicated conservative columnist, printed a story with the information. Leaking Bush administration officials and an irresponsible journalist thus teamed up to jeopardize Plame's career and to send a warning to other potential whistleblowers that the White House would punish those who brought its lies to public attention. As numerous observers have noted, revealing the name of a covert agent is a federal crime, punishable with a $50,000 fine

and/or up to 10 years in prison. Responding to the urgings of Senator Charles Schumer (Dem.-NY), Congresswoman Alcee Hastings (Dem.-FL), and CIA Director Tenet, and clearly recognizing that it had to respond to the scandal, the Justice Department announced at the close of September 2003 that it would investigate this crime. It will be some time before this issue is brought to conclusion, but for our purposes it demonstrates a chilling fact: that President Bush's operation of deception will deny the facts when it is confronted with them and will do everything in its power, including breaking the law and endangering the security of its own agents, to punish those who help produce evidence debunking its lies.[33]

In addition to Wilson's memos of March 2002, the White House also disregarded a second set of reports warning that its claims about African uranium were false. In fact, in preparation for President Bush's October 7, 2002 Cincinnati speech—still 4 months prior to the January 2003 State of the Union Address—the White House contacted the CIA seeking intelligence to support the president's claims regarding Iraq's search for nuclear weapons. Apparently aware that the president might use the bogus charges regarding Niger, and clearly afraid that his using such information would tarnish its own professional integrity, the CIA told the White House of its doubts about the Iraq/Africa uranium charges. *The Washington Post* (Milbank & Pincus, 2002, p. A1) verified that the CIA sent two cautionary memos, one on October 5 to President Bush's Deputy National Security Adviser, Stephen Hadley, and another on October 6 to Hadley and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. To make sure the memos were not lost in the shuffle, CIA Director Tenet called Hadley as well. For the president to rely on the British claim thus points either to rank incompetence at the office of the national security adviser—*Hadley lost a memo and forgot a phone call? Rice missed a memo?*—or, again, to the fact that he chose to disregard the CIA's analysis because it did not support his agenda. Congressman Henry Waxman (Dem., CA) summarizes this embarrassment as pointing either to "knowing deception or unfathomable incompetence."[34]

In a damning confession, an anonymous White House official admitted on July 18, 2003 that "the decision to mention uranium came from White House speech writers, not from senior White House officials" (quoted in Stevenson, 2003b, p. A6)—meaning that fact was trumped by fiction, that the concerns of career CIA and State Department intelligence specialists were overridden by an eager speech writer working to appease a war-hungry president. This revelation was forced onto the public largely because of comments made following a closed hearing of the Senate Intelligence Committee on July 16. At this hearing, the participants debated the origin of the false claim; following the hearing, Senator Richard Durbin (Dem.-IL; quoted in Risen & Sanger, 2003) spoke bitterly, lamenting that "the president has within his ranks on staff some person who was willing to spin and hype and exaggerate and cut corners" (p. A1). But the lie was not the work of one fact-denying speech writer, for following the Senate hearings of the 16th, it was widely reported that the White House and

the CIA had in fact engaged in intense pre-State of the Union "negotiations" during which the White House sought to circumvent the CIA's warnings by fiddling with the language—but not the content—of the false charge about African uranium (G. Miller, 2002, p. A10; Milbank & Priest, 2003, p. A1). To make matters worse, in the July 18 press briefing following the Senate hearings of the 16th, McClellan lied about the timeline of events, claiming despite all the evidence that the White House had not been contacted about the contested claims before the speeches in question. Instead, McClellan claimed that "the first time many people here in the White House were aware of the forged documents" was "when you [the reporters to whom he was speaking] read it publicly" in the summer of 2003. And so denial was wielded to cover up original lies, creating an increasingly dense labyrinth of deception.[35]

In a telling moment that foreshadows our discussion below regarding how President Bush's rhetorical production was entwined in institutional turf wars, one of his responses to this escalating crisis of legitimacy was to blame the CIA. In a performance of what many pundits smirkingly referred to as "falling on his sword," CIA Director Tenet was forced on July 11, 2003 to take the blame for the president citing the false uranium claim in his State of the Union Address. But Tenet did not fall quietly, for in his intricate statement accepting blame for the president's lying he reminded listeners that "in September and October 2002 before Senate Committees, senior intelligence officials . . . told members of Congress that we differed with the British dossier on the reliability of the uranium reporting." Two paragraphs later, Tenet confirmed that the classified October 2002 *National Intelligence Estimate* included a sentence written by the INR noting that "the claims of Iraqi pursuit of natural uranium in Africa are, in I.N.R.'s assessment, highly dubious." Thus, in a high-stakes performance of irony, Tenet took responsibility for the faulty claim in his opening paragraph only to spend the following two pages detailing how the presence of the claim in the president's speech could only be seen as the result of the White House disregarding congressional hearings, its own secret briefings, and the memos and phone calls described above.[36]

Tenet's ironic (non)admission of guilt apparently did not sit well with the White House, for it took but 12 days for the White House to shift the blame again, this time naming Stephen Hadley as the culprit behind the false claims about African uranium. Speaking on July 23, 12 days after Tenet's performance on the 11th, Hadley, described in one article as possessing "a reputation for fanatical attention to detail," confessed that he had misplaced the October 2002 memos and had found them only in late July 2003 (Reynolds, 2003, p. A6; Sanger & Miller, 2003, p. A11). Although Hadley's fall taking was free of Tenet's irony, it was difficult to imagine the fanatically detailed deputy national security advisor committing such an act of organizational ineptitude without a little nudge from his superiors. Indeed, despite his straight face, Hadley's dubious confession could not help but feel like a comic rejoinder to Tenet's ironic confession. But Hadley's confession did not need to be persuasive, for in yet

another example of how the legislative branch is complicit with the White House's operation of deception, on July 16, 2003, the Senate rejected by a party-line vote of 51-45 Jon Corzine's (Dem.-NJ) proposal to convene an independent 12-member commission to study the scandal (Hulse, 2003, p. A10). Instead of this proposed independent commission (like the ones used to hunt President Clinton), the Republican-controlled Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has taken up the issue, seeking to lay the blame for these intelligence scandals on faulty CIA information instead of on Bush administration lying (Jehl, 2003b, p. A8; 2003d, p. A12; Priest, 2003c, p. A1). And so, at least for now, the president's rhetorical trickery, Tenet's ironic fall taking, Hadley's unbelievable confession, and the intelligence community's turf wars will be turned into a partisan charade shielding President Bush from independent scrutiny.

But we need not wait for a Senate committee to fathom the depth of the bureaucratic turf wars that lay behind this controversy regarding President Bush's using evidence widely known to be false in his State of the Union Address. For as early as December 16, 2002, 6 weeks prior to the president's contested speech, Robert Dreyfuss (2002, p. 1) reported in *The American Prospect* that "the Pentagon is bringing relentless pressure to bear on the agency [CIA] to produce intelligence reports more supportive of war with Iraq." The Pentagon engaged in such arm twisting because, according to Dreyfuss, "Inside the foreign-policy, defense, and intelligence agencies, nearly the whole rank and file, along with many senior officials, are opposed to invading Iraq." Apparently unable to intimidate the CIA into providing information more to its liking, the Pentagon created its own intelligence unit, the Office of Special Plans (O.S.P.), to analyze materials regarding Iraq. Chaired by Adam Shulsky, a prominent neoconservative hawk, the O.S.P. reported directly to Undersecretary of Defense Feith, who in turn brought the O.S.P.'s briefs to Rumsfeld, thus circumventing the usual intelligence-gathering-and-analyzing framework. Bypassing the usual vetting procedures enabled a war-hungry White House to turn dubious and fragmentary intelligence into the "evidence" necessary for arguing for war. In an interview with Seymour Hersh (2003b), the former National Security Council expert on Iraq, Kenneth Pollack, thus described the O.S.P. as an attempt to "dismantle the existing filtering process that for fifty years had been preventing the policymakers from getting bad information" (p. 77). The O.S.P. thus selectively chose information that supported the administration's war agenda and fed it directly to the White House regardless of doubts and warnings from the traditional intelligence community. Hersh reports that intelligence professionals refer to this dangerous process as "stovepiping." The metaphor is apt, for it suggests not only the rapid elevation of materials from the kitchen of intelligence gathering to the higher regions of policy making but also the fact that what comes out of the stovepipe is smoke—not hard data and carefully processed analyses but smoke, propaganda, informational pollution.

Reflecting widespread dismay over news of the O.S.P.'s formation, *The Observer* (Hinsliff, Bright, Beaumont, & Vulliamy, 2003) referred to it as "a shadow, parallel intelligence network staffed not by espionage professionals but by favored political appointees" (p. 2). These appointees apparently flooded the CIA and State Department with "intelligence" gathered from exiled Iraqis, especially those associated with Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, thus suggesting that Shulsky's O.S.P. was not getting hard data so much as rumors and wish lists from Chalabi's would-be post-Saddam rulers of the new Iraq. Even while it was "stovepiped" to the White House without careful scrutiny by intelligence professionals, the validity of the information provided by Chalabi-linked exiles was widely doubted. In fact, according to a postwar article in *The New York Times* (Jehl, 2003a) the Defense Intelligence Agency (D.I.A.) concluded that "most of the information provided by Iraqi defectors who were made available by the Iraqi National Congress was of little or no value" (pp. A1, A8).[37]

The D.I.A.'s damning conclusions were not made public until September 2003, 6 months after the war on Iraq began, yet reports indicate that the conflict between O.S.P.'s intelligence and that gathered by CIA and other experts came to a head in the days leading up to Secretary of State Powell's February 5, 2003 testimony before the UN. Powell and a team of intelligence officials gathered at the CIA on February 1 to begin piecing together the evidence. A dismayed Powell is reported at one point to have tossed a sheaf of papers into the air, exclaiming "I'm not reading this, this is bullshit" (quoted in Auster, Mazzett, & Pound, 2003; and see Goldenberg & Norton-Taylor, 2003, p. 39). Powell knew that much of the intelligence he had been given was bogus because a September 2002 D.I.A. report had previously concluded that "there is no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons." So although the CIA couched its reports in terms of possibilities, although the D.I.A. offered "no reliable information," and although the I.N.R. and D.O.E. offered strong warnings, one can imagine the exile-fed O.S.P. arguing for certainty, thus leaving Powell squeezed between cautious old-school intelligence officials and O.S.P.'s gung-ho warhawks. The fact that this intelligence turf war led to botched information comes as no surprise, for as Odom (2003) reports in *Fixing Intelligence*, "competitive analysis has seldom produced better analysis, but it has frequently inspired intense parochialism. As a rule, it creates more heat than light" (p. 39).

These heat-but-not-light-producing intelligence turf wars were so apparent and so important in terms of figuring out who was driving U.S. foreign policy that in the first week of June 2003, Douglas Feith, under secretary of defense, called a press conference to try to dismiss charges that the O.S.P. had politicized questionable intelligence to fit President Bush's preformed imperatives. Despite Feith's efforts, by July 2003 *The New York Times* (Risen & Sanger, 2003; Schmitt, 2003a) was referring to "the feud between the CIA and White House." At the same time, Seymour Hersh (2003a) reported in *The New Yorker*

that the O.S.P. had taken over the intelligence functions once played by the CIA, D.I.A., FBI, and I.N.R., and that the O.S.P. was relying for much of its intelligence on less-than-credible Chalabi allies. The Steering Group of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (Beske, McGrath, Christison, & McGovern, 2003) was so dismayed by the growing cascade of information pointing to the O.S.P cooking intelligence that on May 2, 2003, it sent a bristling letter of complaint to the president. The letter charged that

> while there have been occasions in the past when intelligence has been deliberately warped for political purposes, never before has such warping been used in such a systematic way to mislead our elected representatives into voting to authorize launching a war.

Although the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity's letter seethes with rage at the compromising of their profession for the president's war mongering, the fact is that intelligence has been systematically warped on prior occasions to fit political needs. Whereas prudent foreign policy uses intelligence to inform strategy, numerous administrations have reversed this relationship and fabricated evidence to conform to policy. For example, *The Pentagon Papers* proved that over the course of many presidencies, the executive branch systematically ignored intelligence and then systematically produced false intelligence to support its disastrous policies in Vietnam. Hannah Arendt's 1969 essay about *The Pentagon Papers*, titled "Lying in Politics," serves as a cautionary tale of the ramifications of such long-term, systemic lying. Arendt argues that

> if the mysteries of government have so befogged the minds of the actors themselves that they no longer know or remember the truth behind their concealments and their lies, the whole operation of deception . . . will run aground or become counterproductive. (p. 31)

The push to manufacture evidence, then, to rely on *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, prolepsis, hyperbole, and position-to-know to lie about what one knows or does not know, becomes a self-fulfilling and ultimately devastating feedback loop in which one loses the ability to recognize reality as anything other than one's one production, one's own lie.

The damage this systematic lying does to democracy is immeasurable. As Paul Krugman (2003) lamented in an ominous editorial titled "Things to Come," in the days leading up to waging war on Iraq

> we got assertions about a nuclear program that turned out to be based on flawed or faked evidence; we got assertions about a link to Al Qaeda that people inside the intelligence services regard as nonsense. Yet those serial embarrassments went almost unreported by our domestic news media. . . . So now the administration knows that it can make unsubstantiated claims. (p. A31)

Thus echoing Arendt, Krugman asserts that a lying administration, aided by a largely compliant mass media, can foist upon an uninformed public any number of wild assertions, producing consensus not through informed dialogue but orchestrated patriotic ignorance (see Kellner, 2003; Kull, 2003; Rampton & Stauber, 2003).

Given our critique of President Bush's operation of deception regarding alleged Iraqi WMD, it comes as no surprise to learn that as of mid-December 2003, the U.S. forces occupying Iraq have found no WMD. Led by David Kay, the onetime UN weapons inspector, the weapons-hunting Iraq Survey Group spent the summer scouring Iraq, finding not one WMD (Jehl, 2003c; Risen & Miller, 2003; Sanger & Risen, 2003). For Thomas Powers (2003), Kay's findings prove that "the administration's justification for war was not merely flawed or imperfect—it was wrong in almost every detail, and completely wrong at the heart. There was no imminent danger—indeed, there was no *distant* danger" (p. 7). If this first test case of the president's new policy of pursuing benevolent empire through unilateral, preemptive war serves as an example, then we may safely conclude that the American public may look forward to continued barrages of disinformation, propaganda, and lies masquerading as facts. As Arendt, Krugman, and Powers suggest, in such a scenario democracy is reduced to little more than an operation of deception; as we have shown here, such deceptions are murderous.

Epilogue: Speech Kills; or the Productions and Deceptions of Violence

Since 9/11, the Bush administration has been engaged in an operation of deception that has had deadly consequences; indeed, we have illustrated here how by using *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, prolepsis, hyperbole, and position-to-know, the president has proven once again that speech kills. We are fully aware, however, that reconstructing the president's murderous lies is just one step in the larger project of unraveling the political economy of state-sanctioned violence. For example, consider the fact that over the course of its work in Iraq, from May 1991 through October 1997, the IAEA's "Action Team" of weapons inspectors had a budget of $3 million per year. Projected across this 6½ year period, this means that the world community spent $19.5 million for weapons inspections. But over the 5 years including 1998-2002, the United States alone spent $78 million in "assistance to the [Iraqi] opposition," meaning that for every $1 spent trying to rid Iraq of WMD, the United States spent $4 trying to topple Hussein by funneling conventional weapons to a wide variety of opposition groups. Furthermore, the figure of $78 million represents only public expenditures, not CIA and other covert Pentagon expenditures, so we have no idea how much money the United States actually spent trying to destabilize Iraq by arming clandestine groups. In short, ever since the close of the Gulf War, the United States has spoken publicly about supporting

weapons control while in fact contributing to the mass proliferation of violence in Iraq (Dillon, 2002, p. 43; Katzman, 2002, p. 15).

Furthermore, as Chalmers Johnson (2000, p. 88ff.) argues in *Blowback*, any threat Hussein posed to the world was largely the result of reckless U.S. foreign policy, which in the name of combating fundamentalism in Iran armed Hussein throughout the 1980s with a remarkable arsenal of weapons. In this same vein, Peter Dale Scott (2003) argues in *Drugs, Oil, and War* that "covert operations, when they generate or reinforce autonomous political power, almost always outlast the specific purpose for which they were designed. Instead they enlarge and become part of the hostile forces the United States has to address" (p. 29). Consider, for example, the havoc wreaked both in Nicaragua and the United States by the Contras, the trail of murder and drugs left by paramilitary death squads in Colombia, the history of violent extremism spawned by anti-Castro fanatics, the prehistoric butchery committed by the Taliban, and, of course, the military ambitions of Hussein himself—each of these nightmares was fueled at one time, in some cases in explicit violation of U.S. law, by covert U.S. funding, training, and arming. For Johnson and Scott, then, one of the main sources of violence in the world is the United States itself, which, by trying to influence political situations via covert operations, creates underground networks of heavily armed, highly trained, and utterly lawless mercenaries whose violence inevitably "blows back" as a threat to U.S. security.[38]

Creating mass hysteria regarding WMD deflects attention from these more pressing causes of violence. For example, Richard Butler (2000) opens his venomous and paranoid memoir, *The Greatest Threat: Iraq, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and The Crisis of Global Security*, with the whopping claim that "the greatest threat to life on earth is weapons of mass destruction" (p. xv). Despite the United States's unquestioned control of Iraqi airspace and the fact that post-Gulf War Iraq never possessed a credible WMD delivery system, Butler terrifies readers with the hyperbolic threat that Hussein is on the verge of producing chemical rockets so powerful that just one could kill "*up to 1 million people*" (p. 8). Butler was head of UNSCOM from 1997-1999; reading his bitter screed leaves no doubt that UNSCOM was destined to failure, as Butler began his work in Baghdad assuming that Hussein was comparable to Hitler and that he was so dangerous that "a veiled threat of physical violence was always signaled, if only subliminally" (p. xv). Because Butler's cranky book reads like the heralding of a vendetta, a literal call to war in the name of ridding the world of WMD, it stands along with President Bush's many lies as a strong example of how producing a hysterical discourse of WMD diverts attention from more immediate and more deadly forms of violence.[39]

Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that the entire debate about WMD, including both the administration's lies about them and our critique of the "operation of deception," deflects attention from the most-pressing causes and weapons of violence. For example, in the first Gulf War coalition forces flew 110,000 air sorties, dropping anywhere from 99,000 to 140,000 tons of explo-

sives, thus unleashing upon Iraq an amount of explosives described by Dilip Hiro (2002) as "equivalent to five to seven of the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima" (p. 39). Asking at what point the saturation bombing (with conventional weapons) of an impoverished nation crosses over into an act of "mass destruction" demonstrates that overblown fears of WMD serve to naturalize and justify the U.S.'s use of awesomely devastating conventional weapons. Some critics have pushed this line of thinking even further by charging that the UN's post-Gulf War sanctions against Iraq—which contributed on some estimates to the death of *half a million* Iraqis—amount to a WMD more deadly than anything Hussein could ever dream of producing. For example, in a blistering article in *Foreign Affairs*, John and Karl Mueller (1999) argue that "the harm caused by these weapons [chemical, biological, and nuclear WMD] pales in comparison to the havoc wreaked by a much more popular tool: economic sanctions." The Muellers thus appropriate the notion of WMD to rename the UN's post-Gulf War restrictions on trade with Iraq as "Sanctions of Mass Destruction." In a similar vein, James Fine (1992) refers in the *Middle East Report* to "The Iraq Sanctions Catastrophe." Bush administration spokespersons have repeatedly blamed the sanctions catastrophe on Hussein, charging that he used available funds and resources for his enrichment and armament while his people starved, yet the Muellers, Fine, and a host of other scholars and critics have concluded that the sanctions indeed caused unnecessary hardships and hundreds of thousands of deaths, thus problematizing the notion of what is or is not a WMD ("Iraq sanctions," 2002; Reiff, 2003).

Although some readers may quibble with our thinking critically about what constitutes a weapon of mass destruction, we would like to push this line of argument even further to argue that the true WMD are dirty water, hunger, and disease. For example, the World Health Organization (2002) reports that in 2002 there were 170 million underweight children globally and that "over three million of them die each year as a result" (p. 8). Another 1.7 million deaths each year "are attributed to unsafe water, sanitation, and hygiene, mainly through infectious diarrhea" (p. 9). Richard Jolly, chairman of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, estimates that "bringing water and sanitation to all would cost $10 billion a year" ("Price of safe water," 2000, p. A10). Compared to the hundreds of billions of dollars the United States has spent leveling Iraq in the name of making the world safe from alleged Iraqi WMD—with the occupation alone costing $5.46 billion each month—and considering that the U.S. military budget is almost $400 billion per year, it is maddening to wonder how our government could choose not to spend $10 billion a year to save 1.7 million lives. But no; instead of saving lives from the ravages of real WMD, our government wages war against fictional WMD.[40]

Given the widespread sense that the United States is the world's wealthiest nation, complete with the world's best doctors and scientists and engineers, allowing the destructive forces noted above to continue their death march while waging a costly war in the name of eliminating Iraq's fictional WMD can-

not help but appear to much of the world as unconscionable cruelty. It comes as no surprise, then, to learn that interviews and polls conducted around the world on the 2-year anniversary of 9/11 show increasing hostility toward the United States. As *The New York Times* reported on September 11, 2003, favorable views of the United States have plummeted in Brazil from 56% in 2000 to 34% now; similar drops were reported in France (from 62% to 43%), Germany (from 78% to 45%), Indonesia (from 75% to 15%), Morocco (from 77% to 27%), and Turkey (from 52% to 15%; Bernstein, 2003). As *The Times* concluded,

> In the two years since Sept. 11, 2001, the view of the United States as a victim of terrorism that deserved the world's sympathy and support has given way to a widespread vision of America as an imperial power that has defied world opinion through unjustified and unilateral use of military force. (pp. A1, A18)

Two weeks later, the president's United States Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World reached a similar conclusion, arguing that its assessment of postwar global sentiment suggested that "hostility toward America has reached shocking levels" (Weisman, 2003, pp. A1, A8). President Bush's operation of deception regarding WMD thus has not only cost innocent lives, subverted the constitutional process of checks and balances, wasted our tax dollars, committed U.S. troops to a bloody quagmire, and left Iraq a devastated and lawless wasteland but also squandered the world's post-9/11 goodwill, leaving the United States feared now more than ever—and hence more likely than ever to be the target of terrorist vengeance.[42]

Appendix
A Note on Presidential Sources

All quotations from President George W. Bush's speeches are from full-text versions downloaded from the White House Web page, available at www.whitehouse.gov; page numbers refer to our printouts and may vary according to different computer set-ups. The president's speeches are referenced in the essay to capital letters (A, B, C, etc.), which are listed below in reverse chronological order, moving from the most recent (3/17/2003) backwards to his first major post-9/11 statement (9/14/2001).

A = "President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point," West Point, New York, June 1, 2003

B = "President Bush Announces Combat Operations in Iraq Have Ended," aboard the U.S.S. *Abraham Lincoln*, off the coast of California, May 1, 2003

C = "President Says Saddam Hussein Must Leave Iraq Within 48 Hours," Washington, D.C., March 17, 2003

D = "President Delivers State of the Union Address," Washington, D.C., January 28, 2003

E = "President Bush Taking Action to Strengthen America's Economy," Economic Club of Chicago, January 7, 2003

F = "President Bush Signs Homeland Security Act," Washington, D.C., November 25, 2002.

G = "President Bush Outlines Iraqi Threat," Cincinnati Museum Center, October 7, 2002

H = "President's Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly," New York, September 12, 2002

I = "President's Remark to the Nation," Ellis Island, New York City, September 11, 2002

J = "President Bush Thanks Germany for Support Against Terror," The Bundestag, Berlin, May 23, 2002

K = "President Outlines U.S. Plan to Help World's Poor," Monterrey, Mexico, March 22, 2002

L = "President Proposes $5 Billion Plan to Help Developing Nations," Washington, D.C., March 14, 2002

M = "President Delivers State of the Union Address," Washington, D.C., January 29, 2002

N = "President's Remarks at National Day of Prayer and Remembrance," Washington, D.C., September 14, 2001

Notes

(Note that page numbers are given where possible, but that many of the documents cited here were found on the Web, where page numbers are often not used; in those cases where page numbers are not offered we have provided links to the Web pages where the documents may be found.)

1. For attacks against U.S. troops in postwar Iraq, see any credible newspaper from the summer and fall of 2003—especially telling examples are Rhode (2003) and Schmitt (2003b). For the most recent figures of coalition casualties, see Iraq Coalition Casualty Count (http://lunaville.org/warcasualties/ Summary.aspx). On Dana's murder, see Schell (2003) and see the collected information from Reporter's Committee for Freedom of the Press (www.rcfp.org) and from Occupation Watch (www.occupationwatch.org). For reporting on and estimates about Iraqi deaths and injuries, see Ford (2003), Iraq Body Count (www.iraqbodycount.net), Jeffery (2003), King (2003), and the especially grueling Medact (2003) report, casualty and death figures from p. 4 (Medact is the U.K. affiliate of Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War). For a review of media disinformation on this subject, see FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) (2003b).

2. On the UN bombing, see Filkins and Oppel (2003), Shanker (2003), and McDonnell and Wilkerson (2003a). On the Najaf bombing, MacFarquhar and Oppel (2003); Filkins (2003); McDonnell and Wilkerson (2003b). On the Jordanian Hospital battle, see Berenson (2003a). On the suicide bombings of October 27, see Filkins and Berenson (2003), and Rubin and Lamb (2003). On the helicopter downing, see Berenson (2003b), Labbe and Chandrasekaran (2003), Ricks (2003), and Rubin (2003). On the Khan Bani Saad bombings, see Fisher and Filkins (2003), Hendren (2003), Williams (2003). Whereas Christian Parenti (2003) reported an average of 13 attacks per day in early autumn, 33 attacks per day were reported by the close of October by Susan Sachs (2003). For two riveting accounts of the disaster of postwar Iraq, see Davis (2003) and Packer (2003).

3. For alternative responses to 9/11, see Denzin and Lincoln (2003) and Greenberg (2003).

4. Among the many critiques of this post-9/11 turn to empire, see Kellner (2003), Falk (2003), Lapham (2002), and Nye (2002).

5. For examples of these theological, historical, philosophical, and economic claims, see President Bush's speeches E, J, K, and L from the list provided in the appendix.

6. Although written in schematic, nonnarrative form, Sam Gardiner (2003) offers a suggestive compendium of the "pattern of lies" cited here. Gardiner is a retired United States Air Force Colonel; he can be reached at SamGard@aol.com.

7. Wayne Booth's notion of "rhetrickery," meant to distinguish between the noble arts of rhetoric and the political spinning practiced by liars like President Bush, comes from his (2003) lecture at a conference organized by Rosa Eberly for Penn State University. For a pre-9/11 attempt to make sense of President Bush's rhetoric, see Mark Crispin Miller (2001); for a compendium of Bush-isms, see the archives at www.bushwatch.com and www.thetruthaboutgeorge.com.

8. Among the many exposés of both the Bush administration and its conservative allies' penchant for lying, see Conason (2003), Corn (2003a), Franken (2003), and Scheer and Scheer (2003).

9. The CIA's web page is an invaluable source of information which includes, no kidding, a link "for kids." For an overview of the pertinent UN resolutions, see Cortwright (2002).

10. The identical photograph is on page 23 of the British dossier and page 23 of the CIA's report—we have no way of determining who is borrowing from whom in this case. All of Prime Minster Blair's speeches are available at www.pm.gov.uk.

11. This second British dossier, dated January 2003 and titled *Iraq—Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation*, bears no trace of authorship; it may be found by searching under "concealment" at www.number10.gov.uk. For updates on British responses to the scandals surrounding the production of both dossiers see Frankel (2003) and Hodge (2003c).

12. We are quoting here from the updated version of April 2003, but prior fact sheets made these same arguments—readers may access these documents at www. ProliferationNews.org.

13. Also see Cordesman's comments as part of The Committee on Foreign Relations' July 31 and August 1, 2002, *Hearings to Examine Threats, Responses, and Regional Considerations Surrounding Iraq*, available online at www.access. gpo.gov/congress/senate.

14. Thanks for this lead to David Corn (2003b). For a blistering critique of the intelligence community, see Bamford (2002).

15. Considering the dubious evidence upon which these claims were based, media coverage of the Cincinnati speech amounts to little more than cheerleading; see DeYoung (2003) and Sanger (2003).

16. House Joint Resolution 114, as posted on the White House Web page, www.whitehouse.gov, and dated October 2, 2002; the president signed the bill into law on October 16, 2002; see the president's comments on that occasion under "Statement by the President," also at the White House Web page. For coverage of the debates sur-

rounding the bill, see Epstein (2002), Grice (2002), LaFranchi (2002), and VandeHei and Eilperin (2002).

17. For extended versions of this thesis, see Cmiel (1990) and Hartnett (2002); for a condensed version, see Nilsen (1958).

18. The "senior administration official," Scott McClellan, is the featured protagonist in the remarkably long and testy White House press briefing of July 18, 2003; the reporters asking questions are also unnamed in the transcript used here; quotation from page 24—see the transcript at www.usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/archive/2003/Jul/20-327380.html.

19. On position-to-know fallacies, see Walton (1995), and note that Powell (2003, p. 9) uses the phrase *position-to-know* to describe the anonymous Iraqi exiles from whom he draws his evidence. For essays arguing that Blair did not lie but rather was the victim of organizational miscommunication between agencies, see Clarke (2003) and Soar (2003).

20. And see Black (2002) and Dillon (2002); and see the powerful commentaries by weapons experts in Robert Greenwald's 2003 documentary, *Uncovered: The Whole Truth About the Iraq War.*

21. Regarding the longevity of VX and the impossibility of Iraq using it in long-range rockets, see Prados (2003).

22. For a numbing overview of how the press granted Powell's speech a free pass, see Alterman (2003).

23. The evidence regarding Hussein's brutality is overwhelming; for a report summarizing this evidence, see The White House (2002).

24. See Safire (2003b) for a reprised attempt to link al Qaeda and Hussein. The titles of these essays alone demonstrate that Safire, following the Bush administration's lead, systematically speaks of conditional circumstances and possible leads as if proven true.

25. On Zarqawi, Powell's and others' attempts to turn him into the smoking gun linking Iraq and al Qaeda and the counterevidence, see Vulliamy, Bright, and Pelham (2003), I. Johnson, Crawford, and Fields (2003), Pincus (2003a), and Van Natta and Johnston (2003). For an excellent summary of these refutations of Powell's and other's claims regarding the alleged Zarqawi/al Qaeda/Iraq link, see Cortwright, Millar, Lopez, and Gerber (2003).

26. The fire truck claim is one among many critiques of Powell's testimony offered by senior intelligence officials in Greenwald (2003).

27. For a comprehensive refutation of the administration's lies regarding Iraq's nuclear weapons program see Traprock Peace (2003).

28. Gellman and Pincus (2003, p. 9 of our printout); for a blistering refutation of the aluminum tubes argument see Rothstein (2002); on the negotiating processes involved in producing National Intelligence Estimates, see Odom (2003, pp. 80-81).

29. Despite the overwhelming sense that Powell's speech received little to no critical commentary (see Note 22 above), some reporters did excellent work. For example, in a brave illustration of the press fulfilling its function of debunking propaganda, *The New York Times* ("Verbatim, Weighing the Evidence," 2003, p. A6) ran an article on Febru-

ary 15 detailing Powell's lying; to visually enhance the point, the *Times* printed a sidebar in two columns, with the left side featuring quotations from Powell's testimony and the right side offering refutations of Powell's claims from Blix and Elbaradei. For other critical reviews of Powell's UN testimony, see Drogin (2003), Farley (2003), Campbell (2003), Steele, (2003), and Warrick (2003).

30. Details of the forgeries from Priest and DeYoung (2003); Hersh (2003c); see Hersh (2003b) for a remarkable interview in which he suggests that the forgeries were actually made by disgruntled CIA agents who hoped the crude documents would reveal the shabby nature of the intelligence work driving the White House's push for war; see Davidson's (2003) interview of Hersh.

31. On "the broader pattern of dishonesty and delusion that helped get us into the Iraq mess," see Kristof (2003a, p. A25).

32. Wilson's *Meet the Press* quotation was replayed on NPR's "Weekend All Things Considered," 8 p.m. edition (July 6, 2003); and see Buncombe (2003); Wilson has subsequently been awarded The Fertel Foundation and Nation Institute's Ron Ridenhour Prize for Truth Telling (see *The Nation*, October 13, 2003, p. 21).

33. On the ensuing scandal, see Cole (2003), Kaplan (2003), and Sengputa (2003). On the political gaming surrounding the Justice Department's investigation, see Allen and Priest (2003), Lichtblau and Stevenson (2003), and Stevenson and Lichtblau (2003).

34. Henry Waxman's letter to the president, March 17, 2003, page 2, available by following the links at www.house.gov; note that the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has demanded that the White House send it copies of the memos discussed here to aid its investigation but that the committee has announced that no findings will be published until 2004 at the earliest (see Pincus, 2003b).

35. Senior administration official quoted from transcript of July 18, 2003 White House press briefing cited above; for a timeline of the deception, see Hodge and Van Natta (2003); for an overview, see the FAIR media advisory (2003a).

36. While he misses the irony of the moment, see Stevenson (2003a).

37. Jehl (2003a) notes that milking Chalabi-linked defectors for bogus intelligence cost the government "more than $1 million in taxpayers' money."

38. For case studies of this thesis, see Scott (1993) and Scott and Marshall (1991).

39. For an equally insipid version of this genre of hysterical WMD discourse (that reads, it must be said, as an exciting spy novel), see Hamza (2000); for a concise deconstruction of such WMD hysteria, see Cote (2003); for a sober analysis, see Ritter (1999).

40. Thanks to Joshua Barbour for these leads. U.S. military budget figures from 2002 from "Last of the Big Time Spenders," Center for Defense Information (www.cdi.org); war costs from www.costofwar.com, where they note that the figure of $5.46 billion includes their calculation of interest on these expenditures at 4% over 10 years; for the minutia of military spending, see *The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004* (H.R. 1588, signed by the president on November 24, 2003), available from the Congressional Budget Office (www.cbo.gov/showdoc.cfm?index= 4864&sequence=0).

41. Given these damaging findings, it should come as no surprise that the public's confidence in President Bush continues to slide as well, as detailed in Purdum and Elder (2003).

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