

DRINKING THE KOOL-AID

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Throughout my long service life in the Department of Defense, first as an army officer and then as a member of the Defense Intelligence Senior Executive Service, there was a phrase in common usage: “I will fall on my sword over that.” It meant that the speaker had reached a point of internal commitment with regard to something that his superiors wanted him to do and that he intended to refuse even though this would be career suicide. The speaker preferred career death to the loss of personal honor.

This phrase is no longer widely in use. What has taken its place is far more sinister in its meaning and implications. “I drank the Kool-Aid” is what is now said. Those old enough to remember the Jonestown tragedy know this phrase all too well. Jim Jones, a self-styled “messiah” from the United States, lured hundreds of innocent and believing followers to Guyana, where he built a village, isolated from the world, in which his Utopian view of the universe would be played out. He controlled all news, regulated all discourse and expression of opinion, and shaped behavior to his taste. After a time, his paranoia grew unmanageable and he “foresaw” that “evil” forces were coming to threaten his “paradise.” He decided that these forces were unstoppable and that death would be

preferable to living under their control. He called together his followers in the town square and explained the situation to them. There were a few survivors, who all said afterward that within the context of the “group-think” prevailing in the village, it sounded quite reasonable. Jim Jones then invited all present to drink from vats of Kool-Aid containing lethal doses of poison. Nearly all did so, without physical coercion. Parents gave their children the poison and then drank it themselves. Finally Jones drank. Many hundreds died with him.

What does drinking the Kool-Aid mean today? It signifies that the person in question has given up personal integrity and has succumbed to the prevailing group-think that typifies policymaking today. This person has become “part of the problem, not part of the solution.”

What was the “problem”? The sincerely held beliefs of a small group of people who think they are the “bearers” of a uniquely correct view of the world, sought to dominate the foreign policy of the United States in the Bush 43 administration, and succeeded in doing so through a practice of excluding all who disagreed with them. Those they could not drive from government they bullied and undermined until they, too, had drunk from the vat.

What was the result? The war in Iraq.

It is not anything like over yet, and the body count is still mounting. As of March 2004, there were 554 American soldiers dead, several thousand wounded, and more than 15,000 Iraqis dead (the Pentagon is not publicizing the number). The recent PBS special on *Frontline* concerning Iraq mentioned that senior military officers had said of General Franks, "He had drunk the Kool-Aid." Many intelligence officers have told the author that they too drank the Kool-Aid and as a result consider themselves to be among the "walking dead," waiting only for retirement and praying for an early release that will allow them to go away and try to forget their dishonor and the damage they have done to the intelligence services and therefore to the republic.

What we have now is a highly corrupted system of intelligence and policymaking, one twisted to serve specific group goals, ends and beliefs held to the point of religious faith. Is this different from the situation in previous administrations? Yes. The intelligence community (the information collection and analysis functions, not "James Bond" covert action, which should properly be in other parts of the government) is assigned the task of describing reality. The policy staffs and politicals in the government have the task of creating a new reality, more to their taste. Nevertheless, it is "understood" by the government professionals, as opposed to the zealots, that a certain restraint must be observed by the policy crowd in dealing with the intelligence people. Without objective facts, decisions are based on subjective drivel. Wars result from such drivel. We are in the midst of one at present.

The signs of impending disaster were clear from the beginning of this administra-

tion. Insiders knew it all along. Statements made by the Bush administration often seem to convey the message that Iraq only became a focus of attention after the terrorist attacks on 9/11. The evidence points in another direction.

Sometime in the spring of 2000, Stephen Hadley, now Condoleezza Rice's deputy at the National Security Council (NSC), briefed a group of prominent Republican party policymakers on the national-security and foreign-policy agenda of a future George W. Bush administration. Hadley was one of a group of senior campaign policy advisers to then-Texas Governor Bush known collectively as "the Vulcans." The group, in addition to Hadley, included Rice, Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle and had been assembled by George Shultz and Dick Cheney beginning in late 1998, when Bush first launched his presidential bid.

Hadley's briefing shocked a number of the participants, according to Clifford Kiracofe, a professor at the Virginia Military Institute, who spoke to several of them shortly after the meeting. Hadley announced that the "number-one foreign-policy agenda" of a Bush administration would be Iraq and the unfinished business of removing Saddam Hussein from power. Hadley also made it clear that the Israel-Palestine conflict, which had dominated the Middle East agenda of the Clinton administration, would be placed in the deep freeze.

Dr. Kiracofe's account of the pre-election obsession of the Vulcans with the ouster of Saddam Hussein is corroborated by former U.S. Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill's memory of the first meetings of the Bush National Security Council, which he attended in late January and early February of 2001. Ron Suskind's book

The Price of Loyalty, based on O'Neill's memory and notes, tells us of an NSC meeting, ten days into the Bush administration, at which both the Israel-Palestine and Iraq situations were discussed.

Referring to President Clinton's efforts to reach a comprehensive peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, President Bush declared, "Clinton overreached, and it all fell apart. That's why we're in trouble. If the two sides don't want peace, there's no way we can force them. I don't see much we can do over there at this point. I think it's time to pull out of the situation."

Next, Condoleeza Rice raised the issue of Iraq and the danger posed by Saddam's arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. A good deal of the hour-long meeting was taken up with a briefing by CIA Director George Tenet on a series of aerial photographs of sites inside Iraq that "might" be producing WMD. Tenet admitted that there was no firm intelligence on what was going on inside those sites, but at the close of the meeting, President Bush tasked Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Hugh Shelton to begin preparing options for the use of U.S. ground forces in the northern and southern no-fly zones in Iraq to support an insurgency to bring down the Saddam regime. As author Ron Suskind summed it up: "Meeting adjourned. Ten days in, and it was about Iraq. Rumsfeld had said little, Cheney nothing at all, though both men clearly had long entertained the idea of overthrowing Saddam." If this was a decision meeting, it was strange. It ended in a presidential order to prepare contingency plans for war in Iraq.

Surely, this was not the first time these people had considered this problem. One interesting thing about those at the meeting

is that no one present or in the background had any substantive knowledge of the Middle East. It is one thing to have traveled to the area as a senior government official. It is another to have lived there and worked with the people of the region for long periods of time. People with that kind of experience in the Muslim world are strangely absent from Team Bush. In the game plan for the Arab and Islamic world, most of the government's veteran Middle East experts were largely shut out. The Pentagon civilian bureaucracy of the Bush administration, dominated by an inner circle of think-tankers, lawyers and former Senate staffers, virtually hung out a sign, "Arabic Speakers Need Not Apply." They effectively purged the process of Americans who might have inadvertently developed sympathies for the people of the region.

Instead of including such veterans in the planning process, the Bush team opted for amateurs brought in from outside the Executive Branch who tended to share the views of many of President Bush's earliest foreign-policy advisors and mentors. Because of this hiring bias, the American people got a Middle East planning process dominated by "insider" discourse among longtime colleagues and old friends who ate, drank, talked, worked and planned only with each other. Most of these people already shared attitudes and concepts of how the Middle East should be handled. Their continued association only reinforced their common beliefs. This created an environment in which any shared belief could become sacrosanct and unchallengeable. A situation like this is, in essence, a war waiting for an excuse to happen. If there is no "imminent threat," one can be invented, not as a matter of deliberate

deception, but rather as an artifact of group self-delusion. In normal circumstances, there is a flow of new talent into the government that melds with the old timers in a process both dynamic and creative. This does not seem to have happened in the Bush 43 administration. Instead, the newcomers behaved as though they had seized control of the government in a silent coup. They tended to behave in such a way that civil servants were made to feel that somehow they were the real enemy, barely tolerated and under suspicion. There seemed to be a general feeling among the newcomers that professional intelligence people somehow just did not “get it.” To add to the discomfort, the new Bush team began to do some odd things.

INFORMATION COLLECTION

Early in the Bush 43 administration, actions began that clearly reflected a predisposition to place regime change in Iraq at the top of the foreign-policy agenda. Sometime in January 2001, the Iraqi National Congress (INC), the opposition group headed by Ahmed Chalabi, began receiving U.S. State Department funds for an effort called the “Information-Collection Program.” Under the Clinton administration, some money had been given to Iraqi exiles for what might be called agit-prop activities against Saddam’s government, but the INC (Chalabi) had not been taken very seriously. They had a bad reputation for spending money freely with very little to show for it. The CIA had concluded that Chalabi and his INC colleagues were not to be trusted with taxpayers’ money. Nevertheless, Chalabi had longstanding ties to a group of well-established anti-Saddam American activists who were installed by the Bush administra-

tion as leading figures of the politically appointed civilian bureaucracy in the Pentagon and in the Office of the Vice President.

Those ties paid off. The Information-Collection Program, launched in the early months of the Bush administration, was aimed at providing funds to the INC for recruiting defectors from Saddam’s military and secret police, and making them available to American intelligence. But what the program really did was to provide a steady stream of raw information useful in challenging the collective wisdom of the intelligence community where the “War with Iraq” enthusiasts disagreed with the intelligence agencies. If the president and Congress were to be sold the need for war, information had to be available with which to argue against what was seen as the lack of imagination and timidity of regular intelligence analysts. To facilitate the flow of such “information” to the president, a dedicated apparatus centered in the Office of the Vice President created its own intelligence office, buried in the recesses of the Pentagon, to “stovepipe” raw data to the White House, to make the case for war on the basis of the testimony of self-interested émigrés and exiles.

At the time of the first Gulf War in 1991, I was the defense intelligence officer for the Middle East in the Defense Intelligence Agency. This meant that I was in charge of all DIA substantive business for the region. In discussions at the time of the victorious end of that campaign and the subsequent Shia and Kurdish revolts in Iraq, it became abundantly clear that the same people who later made up the war party in the Bush 43 administration were not completely reconciled to the failure of U.S. forces to overthrow the Saddam

regime. In spite of the lack of U.N. sanction for such an operation and the probable long-term costs of the inevitable American occupation of Iraq, the group later known as the neocons seemed deeply embittered by the lack of decisive action to remove the Iraqi dictator. Soon after the dust settled on Operation Desert Storm, the first Bush administration helped launch the Iraqi National Congress (INC). The INC was initially an umbrella of anti-Saddam groups largely composed of Kurdish and Shia organizations. In the beginning, the CIA provided seed money as a result of presidential direction, and a private consulting firm, the Rendon Group, provided the initial public-relations support. To this day, one of the Rendon advisors to the INC, Francis Brooke, serves as the INC's chief Washington lobbyist.

Chalabi's American connections played a dominant role in the INC's evolution over the next dozen years. At the University of Chicago, Chalabi had been a student of Albert Wohlstetter, a hard-line Utopian nuclear-war planner who had been the dissertation adviser to another University of Chicago Ph.D., Paul Wolfowitz. Wohlstetter had also been a mentor to Richard Perle. In the summer of 1969, Wohlstetter arranged for both Wolfowitz and Perle to work for the short-lived Committee to Maintain a Prudent Defense Policy, a Washington-based group co-founded by two icons of American Cold War policy, Dean Acheson and Paul Nitze. Wolfowitz and Perle remained close collaborators from that time forward.

Chalabi, an Iraqi Shia Arab, had fled Iraq in 1958, just after the overthrow of the royal Hashemite government. His father and grandfather had held cabinet posts in the British-installed Hashemite regime.

Before coming to the United States to obtain a doctorate, Chalabi lived in Jordan, Lebanon and Britain. He returned to Beirut after obtaining his doctorate, but in 1977, he moved to Jordan and established a new company, the Petra Bank, which grew into the second largest commercial bank in the country. Twelve years later, the Jordanian government took over the bank and charged Chalabi, who fled the country, with embezzling \$70 million. In 1992, Chalabi was tried and convicted in absentia and sentenced to 22 years at hard labor. One of the persistent stories concerning this scandal is that Chalabi's Petra Bank was involved in arms sales to Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, and that Saddam Hussein discovered this and pressured King Hussein of Jordan to crack down on Chalabi.

Shortly after his hasty departure from Jordan, Chalabi, with the backing of his neocon allies in Washington, most notably, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle and Professor Bernard Lewis of Princeton, helped launch the INC. Chalabi had first been introduced to Perle and Wolfowitz in 1985 by their mutual mentor, Albert Wohlstetter. Bernard Lewis met Chalabi in 1990 and soon thereafter asked his own allies inside the Bush 41 administration, including Wolfowitz's Pentagon aide Zalmay Khalilzad, to help boost the Iraqi exile. Another future Bush 43 Iraq War player also met Chalabi about that time. General Wayne Downing was first introduced to Chalabi in 1991, when Downing commanded the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

In November 1993, Chalabi presented the newly inaugurated Clinton administration with a scheme for the overthrow of

the Saddam Hussein regime. Dubbed “End Game,” the plan envisioned a limited revolt by an insurgent force of INC-led Kurds and Shiites in the oil regions around Basra in the south and Mosul and Kirkuk in the north. The “End Game” scenario: at the first sign of revolt against Saddam, there would be a full-scale insurrection by military commanders, who would overthrow the Saddam clique and install a Washington- and Tel Aviv-friendly, INC-dominated regime in Baghdad. The plan was based on a belief that Iraq was ripe for revolt and that there were no units in the armed forces that would fight to preserve Saddam’s government. Since the same units had fought to keep Saddam in power during the Kurdish and Shia revolts of a few years before, it is difficult to see why the sponsors of End Game would have thought that. A limited effort to implement End Game ended in disaster in 1995, when the Iraqis did fight to defeat the rebels and the Iraqi Army killed over 100 INC combatants. From that point on, both the CIA and DIA considered Chalabi “persona non grata.” The CIA also dropped all financial backing for Chalabi, as the INC, once an umbrella group of various opposition forces, degenerated into little more than a cult of personality, gathered together in London, where Chalabi and his small group of remaining INC loyalists retreated.

In spite of this, neoconservatives inside the United States, largely in exile during the Clinton administration, succeeded in influencing the Congress enough to obtain passage of the “Iraq Liberation Act of 1998,” largely to revive Chalabi’s End Game scheme. Now retired, Gen. Downing, along with retired CIA officer Duane “Dewey” Clarridge of Iran-contra fame,

became military “consultants” to Chalabi’s INC and then drafted their own updated version of the Chalabi plan, now dubbed “the Downing Plan.” It was different in name only. The Downing-Clarridge plan insisted that a “crack force” of no more than 5,000 INC troops, backed by a group of former U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers (Green Berets), could bring down the Iraq Army. “The idea from the beginning was to encourage defections of Iraqi units,” Clarridge insisted to *The Washington Post*. “You need to create a nucleus, something for people to defect to. If they could take Basra, it would be all over.” It is difficult to understand how a retired four-star army general could believe this to be true.

In subsequent congressional testimony, then-Central Command head General Anthony Zinni (USMC) denounced the Downing scheme in no uncertain terms, warning that it would lead to a “Bay of Goats,” adding that, by his most recent counts, there were 91 Iraqi opposition groups. None of them had “the viability to overthrow Saddam.” Elsewhere he mocked Chalabi and the INC as “some silk-suited, Rolex-wearing guys in London.” Despite CIA and uniformed military repudiation of End Game, the Downing Plan and other variations on the same theme, the neoconservative group continued to crank out advocacy for Chalabi’s proposed revolution.

On February 19, 1998, a group of neocons calling themselves the Committee for Peace and Security in the Gulf issued an “Open Letter to the President” (this was before the passage of the Iraq Liberation Act) calling for the implementation of yet another revised plan for the overthrow of Saddam. The letter was remarkable in

that it adopted some of the very formulations that would later be used by Vice President Cheney and other current administration officials to justify the preventive war in Iraq that commenced on March 20, 2003. The letter stated,

Despite his defeat in the Gulf War, continuing sanctions, and the determined effort of U.N. inspectors to root out and destroy his weapons of mass destruction, Saddam Hussein has been able to develop biological and chemical munitions This poses a danger to our friends, our allies, and to our nation.

Equally striking were the recommendations in the letter. Chapter and verse, the document called for the implementation of the Downing Plan with a few added wrinkles. After demanding that the Clinton administration recognize a “provisional government of Iraq based on the principles and leaders of the Iraqi National Congress (INC),” the letter called for the creation of INC-controlled “liberated zones” in the north and south of the country; the lifting of sanctions in those areas and the release of billions of dollars of frozen Iraqi government funds to the INC; the launching of a “systematic air campaign” against the Republican Guard divisions and the military-industrial infrastructure of Iraq; and the repositioning of U.S. ground-force equipment “so that, as a last resort, we have the capacity to protect and assist the anti-Saddam forces in the northern and southern parts of Iraq.”

The letter was co-authored by former Congressman Stephen Solarz (D-NY) and Richard Perle. The signers included some people merely sympathetic to the cause of Iraqi freedom and a pantheon of Beltway

neocons, many of whom would form the core of the Bush administration’s national security apparatus: Elliot Abrams, Richard Armitage, John Bolton, Stephen Bryen, Douglas Feith, Frank Gaffney, Fred Ikle, Robert Kagan, Zalmay Khalilzad, William Kristol, Michael Ledeen, Bernard Lewis, Peter Rodman, Donald Rumsfeld, Gary Schmitt, Max Singer, Casper Weinberger, Paul Wolfowitz, David Wurmser and Dov Zakheim. Some of these gentlemen may have had cause to reconsider their generosity in signing this document. This was in February 1998. A month after the release of the letter, Paul Wolfowitz and Gen. Wayne Downing briefed a group of U.S. senators on the INC war scheme. The senators at the meeting may also have cause to regret their subsequent sponsorship of the Iraq Liberation Act. This law clearly set the stage for renewed fighting in the Middle East in 2003.

THE BUSH-CHENEY “CLEAN BREAK”

A core group of neoconservatives, including Vulcans Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle, came into the Bush administration fully committed to the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in Baghdad as the number-one foreign-policy priority for the United States, but they found it necessary to spend much of the first nine months in bureaucratic combat with the State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the CIA, all of whom remained unconvinced that Saddam posed any serious threat to American strategic interests. At the first NSC meeting of the new administration, Colin Powell argued that the existing sanctions regime against Iraq was ineffective, and he promoted the idea of a change to “smart sanctions.”

These would zero in on vital military technologies that might enable Saddam to rebuild his military machine, which had been devastated by Desert Storm, a decade of sanctions, no-fly-zone bombing sorties, six years of U.N. inspections, and the 1998 Operation Desert Fox 70-hour bombing campaign.

Arguments like this were hard to deal with for those completely convinced of the necessity of a new government in Baghdad. But Colin Powell cast a mighty shadow on the American political scene, and his military credentials were formidable. If there had not been a cataclysmic event that tipped the balance, it is possible that the war party would never have won the struggle to have their point of view accepted as policy. It was the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, that provided the neocons with the opportunity to turn dreams into reality. In a war-cabinet meeting at the presidential retreat at Camp David four days after the 9/11 attacks, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz made an appeal for an immediate American military invasion of Iraq in retaliation for the terrorist attacks. Wolfowitz argued that attacking Afghanistan would be uncertain. He worried about 100,000 American troops getting bogged down in mountain fighting in Afghanistan indefinitely. In contrast, he said, Iraq was a brittle, oppressive regime that might break easily. He said that Iraq was “do-able.” He estimated that there was a 10-50 percent chance Saddam was involved in the September 11 terrorist attacks (this, of course, is a judgment that he was not involved). The United States “would have to go after Saddam at some time if the war on terrorism was to be taken seriously.” Wolfowitz’s pitch for war against Iraq,

rather than against the Afghan strongholds of Osama Bin Laden’s al-Qaeda, was rejected at the Camp David session, and two days later, on September 17, President Bush signed a two-and-a-half page directive marked “Top Secret,” which spelled out the plan to go to war against Afghanistan. The document also ordered the Pentagon to begin preparing military options for an invasion of Iraq.

Instantly, the neocon apparatus inside the Pentagon and in the office of Vice President Dick Cheney seized upon the opportunity represented by the authorization. On September 19, 2001, the Defense Policy Board (DPB) convened a closed-door meeting to discuss Iraq. Vulcan Richard Perle chaired the DPB. In the past, the board had been recruited from defense experts from both parties and with a broad range of views. In contrast, Perle’s DPB had become a neocon sanctuary, including such leading advocates of war on Saddam as former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-GA), former CIA Director James R. Woolsey (a Democrat, but nevertheless a longstanding member of the neocon group), former arms control adviser Ken Adelman, former Undersecretary of Defense Fred C. Ikle, and former Vice President Dan Quayle. Wolfowitz and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld attended the September 19 session. The speakers at the event, who aggressively advocated U.S. military action to overthrow Saddam Hussein, were Ahmed Chalabi and Princeton professor Bernard Lewis.

One consequence of the DPB meeting was that former CIA Director Woolsey was secretly dispatched by Wolfowitz to London to seek out evidence that Saddam Hussein was behind the 9/11 attacks and

the earlier 1993 attack on the World Trade Center. Part of Woolsey's mission involved making contact with INC officials to get their help in further substantiating the link between hijacker Mohammed Atta and Iraqi intelligence. This theory was the brainchild of Laurie Mylroie, a scholar completely "in tune" with neocon thinking. According to news accounts at the time, Woolsey's actions drew the attention of police officials in Wales, who contacted the U.S. embassy to confirm that Woolsey was on "official U.S. government business," as he claimed. It was only then that Secretary of State Colin Powell and CIA Director Tenet found out about Woolsey's mission.

By October 2001, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith had established a two-man intelligence cell inside his office with the job of combing the intelligence community's classified files to establish a pattern of evidence linking Saddam Hussein to al-Qaeda and the 9/11 attacks. The permanent, statutory agencies of the national intelligence community could not support such beliefs on the basis of what they saw in their own files. Therefore, some other means was sought to obtain the conclusion that the Iraqi government had been involved in 9/11. The team's mission was to cull the massive holdings of the intelligence database and to uncover intelligence reports accumulated on the subject of Iraq-al-Qaeda links. The issue of whether or not the intelligence agencies considered these reports to be true was thought immaterial. Not surprisingly, some of the sweetest cherries picked in the data searches came from informants provided by the INC's "Information Collection Program." The team in Feith's office was later more formally constituted

as the "Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group."

This kind of single-minded intensity in pursuing his goals was nothing new for Feith. In July 1996, he had been a principal author of a study prepared for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. This paper advocated abrogation of the Oslo accords and the launch of a new regional balance-of-power scheme based on American-Israeli military dominance with a subsidiary military role for Turkey and Jordan. The study was produced by the "Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies" (IASPS), a Jerusalem-based Likud-party-linked think tank, and was called "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm." In it, Feith and company wrote, "Israel can shape its strategic environment, in cooperation with Turkey and Jordan, by weakening, containing and even rolling back Syria. This effort can focus on removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq – an important Israeli strategic objective in its own right – as a means of foiling Syria's regional ambitions." The study-group leader was Richard Perle. Other members of the team included Charles Fairbanks Jr., a longtime friend of Paul Wolfowitz since their student days together at the University of Chicago; and David Wurmser, an American Enterprise Institute Middle East fellow, and his wife, Meyrav Wurmser, who headed the Washington, DC office of the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI). Her boss in that group was a retired Israeli intelligence officer, Yigal Carmon. On July 8, 1996, Richard Perle presented the "Clean Break" document to Netanyahu, who was visiting Washington. Two days later, the Israeli prime minister unveiled the document as his own regional

foreign-policy design in a speech before a joint session of the U.S. Congress.

The initial team selected by Feith to conduct the cherry picking data search in the Pentagon, consisted of “Clean Break” co-author David Wurmser and Michael Maloof. Maloof was a career Pentagon bureaucrat who had joined forces with Perle during the Reagan years, when Perle was a Pentagon official. At that time Maloof was a deputy to Stephen Bryen. The existence of the Wurmser-Maloof unit was kept a secret within the Pentagon for more than a year. Only on October 24, 2002, did Defense Secretary Rumsfeld formally announce that he had commissioned what *The Washington Post* called “a small team of defense officials outside regular intelligence channels to focus on unearthing details about Iraqi ties with al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks.” The unveiling of the “Policy Counterterrorism Evaluations Group,” as Pentagon officials dubbed it, coincided with a move by Rumsfeld to directly take over the financing and management of the INC’s “Information Collection Project” from the State Department, which had developed serious reservations about maintaining an “off the reservation” intelligence operation.

Rumsfeld defensively told the Pentagon press corps on October 24, 2002, “Any suggestion that it’s an intelligence-gathering activity or an intelligence unit of some sort, I think would be a misunderstanding of it.” But former CIA case officer and AEI fellow Reuel Marc Gerecht, a relatively late recruit to the neocon cause, could barely conceal his enthusiasm in discussing the group: “The Pentagon is setting up the capability to assess information on Iraq in areas that in the past might have been the realm of the agency (CIA). They don’t

think the product they receive from the agency is always what it should be.” Gerecht was then consulting with the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group. In September 2001, the State Department inspector general issued a scathing audit of the INC, charging that the group had failed to account for how it was spending its U.S. government cash. “The Information Collection Project” was singled out as one of the particular problem cases. According to the audit, there was no accounting for how informants were paid or what benefit had been derived from their work. As a result of the audit, the State Department placed severe restrictions on the INC, suspended some payouts, and insisted that an outside auditor co-sign for all funds drawn by the group.

It was not until June 2002 that the State Department loosened the restrictions on the INC’s cash flows. By then, the drive for a war against Iraq was in high gear inside the Pentagon civilian bureaucracy, and Feith and company (as opposed to the State Department) sought direct control over the INC, particularly the informant program.

NO SADDAM-AL-QAEDA TIES

The overwhelming view within the professional U.S. intelligence community was (and is) that there was no Saddam Hussein link to the 9/11 terrorists. Admiral Bob Inman, who served in both Democratic and Republican administrations as head of the Office of Naval Intelligence, Director of the National Security Agency and Deputy Director of the CIA, bluntly stated,

There was no tie between Iraq and 9/11, even though some people tried to

postulate one Iraq did support terror in Israel, but I know of no instance in which Iraq funded direct, deliberate terrorist attacks on the United States.

Vincent Cannistraro, who headed the CIA's counterterrorism office before his retirement in 1990, maintains close ties to the intelligence community to this day. He debunks the Saddam-9/11 claims:

The policymakers already had conceits they had adopted without reference to current intelligence estimates. And those conceits were: Saddam was evil, a bad man, he had evil intentions, and they were greatly influenced by neoconservative beliefs that Saddam had been involved with the sponsorship of terrorism in the United States since as early as 1993, with the first World Trade Center bombing. . . . None of this is true, of course, but these were their conceits, and they continue in large measure to be the conceits of a lot of people like Jim Woolsey.

This, he added, is not the view of the intelligence community:

No, no, no. The FBI did a pretty thorough investigation of the first World Trade Center bombing, and while it's true that their policy was to treat terrorism as a law-enforcement problem, nevertheless, they understood how the first World Trade Center bombing was supported . . . and had linkages back to Osama Bin Laden. He was of course, not indicted . . . because the FBI until recently believed that you prosecuted perpetrators, not the sponsors. In any event they knew there was no Saddam

linkage. Laurie Mylroie promoted a lot of this, and people who came in [to the Bush Administration], particularly in the Defense Department – Wolfowitz and Feith – were acolytes, promoting her book, *The Study of Revenge*, particularly in the Office of Special Plans, and the Secretary's Policy Office. In any event, they already had their preconceived notions. . . . So the intelligence, and I can speak directly to the CIA part of it, the intelligence community's assessments were never considered adequate.

THE OFFICE OF SPECIAL PLANS

Some time before the 9/11 attacks, Vice President Cheney dispatched one of his Middle East aides, William Luti, over to the Pentagon as deputy undersecretary of defense for Near East and South Asian affairs (NESA). Luti, a retired Navy captain, is a member of the neocon group, recruited by Albert Wohlstetter. They had met in the early 1990s, when Luti was part of an executive panel of advisers to the chief of naval operations.

Parenthetically, I received what seems to have been an exploratory recruiting visit from Dr. Wohlstetter and his wife, Roberta. In 1992, the Wohlstetters unexpectedly arrived at my doorstep at the Pentagon with the news that a mutual friend, now a senior personage in the Pentagon, had told them to visit me. There followed an hour and a half of conversation involving European and world history, philosophy and a discussion of the various illustrious people who were friends and associates of the Wohlstetters. Roberta Wohlstetter went so far as to show me various books that they and their friends had written. An unspoken question seemed to hang in the air. After a while

they became impatient with my responses and left, never to return. Clearly, I had failed the test. At the time, I only vaguely knew who these people were and did not really care, but since they have become so important to this story, I have inquired of various people who might have received similar visits and found that this was not uncommon. An old academic colleague of Wohlstetter has also told me that the couple had done similar things in the university setting.

In any case, Luti landed a job as a military aide to Speaker of the House Gingrich from 1996 to 1997. There, he worked with Air Force Col. William Bruner, another active-duty military officer on loan to the speaker. Still on active duty when the Bush 43 administration came into office, Luti worked in the vice president's office as part of a shadow National Security Council staff, under the direction of Cheney's chief of staff and chief policy aide, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby.

Libby was a Yale Law School protégé of Paul Wolfowitz. Beginning in the 1980s, Libby followed Wolfowitz into the Reagan and Bush 41 administrations. When he was not working for Uncle Sam or Wolfowitz, Libby was the law partner/protégé of Richard Nixon's personal attorney, Leonard Garment. Under his direction, for a period of 16 years, on and off, Libby was the attorney for fugitive swindler and Israeli Mossad agent, Marc Rich. In the first Bush administration, Libby served with Wolfowitz in the policy office of then-Defense Secretary Cheney, where he gained some notoriety as one of the principal authors, along with Wolfowitz and Zalmay Khalilzad, of the draft 1992 "Defense Planning Guidance" that advocated preventive war and the development

of a new arsenal of mini-nuclear weapons, to be used against Third World targets thought to be developing WMD arsenals.

Midway through 2001, Luti retired from the Navy and took a civilian Pentagon post as head of NESAs. Under normal circumstances, NESAs are Pentagon backwaters, responsible primarily for arranging bilateral meetings with military counterparts from a region stretching "from Bangladesh to Marakesh." Before the recent war, the NESAs staff worked daily with the defense intelligence officer for the Near East, South Asia and Counterterrorism. This was the most senior officer in DIA for that region and the person responsible for seeing that NESAs were well provided with intelligence information. During the early Luti period at NESAs, the DIO was Bruce Hardcastle. There were DIOs for each of the major regions of the world; Hardcastle happened to be the man for the Middle East. I knew Hardcastle and respected his work. He had been a middle-level analyst in DIA when I held the job of DIO for the Middle East.

Abruptly last year, the Defense Department dismantled the entire DIO system. It now seems likely that frictions that developed between Luti and Hardcastle were a significant factor in this destruction of a very worthwhile intelligence-analytic system. Historically, the DIO oversaw all of the regional analysts and assets of DIA, but reported directly to the director of the DIA, avoiding bureaucratic and managerial duties while retaining responsibility for all analysis within his or her geographical domain. The roots of the friction between Hardcastle and Luti were straightforward: Hardcastle brought with him the combined wisdom of the professional military intelligence community. The

community had serious doubts about the lethality of the threat from Saddam Hussein, the terrorism links and the status of the Iraqi WMD programs. Luti could not accept this. He knew what he wanted: to bring down Saddam Hussein.

Hardcastle could not accept the very idea of allowing a desired outcome to shape the results of analysis.

Even before the Iraq desk at NESAs was expanded into the "Office of Special Plans" in August 2002, Luti had transformed NESAs into a "de facto" arm of the vice president's office. While the normal chain of command for NESAs ran through Undersecretary for Policy Feith and up to Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz and Secretary Rumsfeld, Luti made it clear that his chain of command principally ran directly up to Scooter Libby, Cheney's chief of staff. We are lucky enough to have a description of this relationship from a participant in the business of the office itself.

Lt. Col. (ret.) Karen Kwiatkowski (USAF), who served at NESAs from June 2002 to March 2003, provides an interesting perspective. She says she was "shocked to learn that Luti was effectively working for Libby. . . . In one of the first staff meetings that I attended there," she recalled recently, "Bill Luti said, 'Well, did you get that thing over to Scooter? Scooter wants this, and somebody's got to get it over to him, and get that up to him right away.' After the meeting, I asked one of my co-workers, who'd been there longer, 'Who is this Scooter?' I was told, 'That's Scooter Libby over at the OVP (Office of the Vice President). He's the Vice President's chief of staff.' Later I came to understand that Cheney had put Luti there."

Kwiatkowski learned that OSP person-

nel were participating, along with officials from the DIA and CIA, in the debriefings of Chalabi-delivered informants. John Trigilio, a DIA officer assigned to NESAs, confirmed it to her in a heated discussion.

I argued with him (Trigilio) after the president's Cincinnati speech (in October 2002). I told him that the president had made a number of statements that were just not supported by the intelligence. He said that the president's statements are supported by intelligence, and he would finally say, 'We have sources that you don't have.' I took it to mean the sources that Chalabi was bringing in for debriefing. . . . Trigilio told me he participated in a number of debriefs, conducted in hotels downtown, or wherever, of people that Chalabi brought in. These debriefs had Trigilio from OSP, but also CIA and DIA participated. . . . If it (the information) sounded good, it would go straight to the OVP or elsewhere. I don't put it out of possibility that the information would go straight to the media because of the (media's) close relationship with some of the neoconservatives. So this information would make it straight out into the knowledge base without waiting for intelligence (analysts) to come by with their qualifications and reservations.

NESAs/OSP apparently carried the cherry-picking methods of the smaller Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group to a new level of effectiveness, according to Lt. Col. Kwiatkowski,

At the OSP, what they were doing was looking at all the intelligence they could find on WMD. That was the focal point, picking bits and pieces

that were the most inflammatory, removing any context that might have been provided in the original intelligence report, that would have caused you to have some pause in believing it or reflected doubts that the intelligence community had, so if the intelligence community had doubts, those would be left out. . . . They would take items that had occurred many years ago, and put them in the present tense, make it seem like they occurred not many years ago. . . . But they would not talk about the dates; they would say things like, 'He has continued since that time' and 'He could do it tomorrow,' which of course, wasn't true. . . . The other thing they would do would be to take unrelated events that were reported in totally unrelated ways and make connections that the intelligence community had not made. This was primarily in discussing Iraq's activities and how they might be related to al-Qaeda or other terrorist groups that might be against us, or against Israel. . . . These kinds of links would be made. They would be made casually, and they would be made in a calculated way to form an image that is definitely not the image that anyone reading the original reports would have. The summaries that we would see from Intelligence did not match the kinds of things that OSP was putting out. So that is what I call propaganda development. It goes beyond the manipulation of intelligence to propaganda development.

A number of people have made the observation that Lt. Col. Kwiatkowski did not have sufficient access to have seen what was going on with intelligence materials. The previous paragraphs would seem to disprove that idea.

Kwiatkowski also knows a lot about Luti's efforts to exclude DIO Bruce Hardcastle from the briefings to foreign military officials. Luti ordered that Hardcastle was not to be included in briefings on Iraq, its WMD, and its links to terrorism. Instead, the Iraq desk of NESAs, and later the Office of Special Plans, would produce "talking points" which, Luti insisted, were to be the only briefings provided on Iraq. Kwiatkowski says,

With the talking points, many of the propagandistic bullets that were given to use in papers for our superiors to inform them – internal propaganda – many of those same phrases and assumptions and tones, I saw in Vice President Cheney's speeches and the president's speeches. So I got the impression that those talking points were not just for us, but were the core of an overall agenda for a disciplined product, beyond the Pentagon. Over at the vice president's office and the *Weekly Standard*, the media, and the neoconservative talking heads and that kind of thing, all on the same sheet of music.

Lt. Col. Kwiatkowski identified Abram Shulsky as the principal author of the NESAs/OSP talking points on Iraq. Shulsky was one of the Pentagon's "defense intellectuals" who had been involved on the periphery of intelligence work since the late 1970s, when he first came to Washington as an aide to Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY). He also worked for Sen. Henry "Scoop" Jackson (D-WA.) Shulsky shared a common background with Paul Wolfowitz. Both men had graduated from the University of Chicago and had studied under Leo Strauss. In 1999, Shulsky, along with his fellow Chicago

alumnus and Strauss protégé Gary Schmitt, founder of the “Project for the New American Century” (PNAC), wrote an essay entitled, “Leo Strauss and the World of Intelligence,” which attacked American intelligence-community icon Sherman Kent for failing to understand that all intelligence work ultimately comes down to deception and counterdeception. For Shulsky (as expressed in his article), the goal of intelligence is to serve the needs of policymakers in making possible the attainment of policy goals. Intelligence, he wrote, “was the art of deception.” Shulsky seems to have set out to use the OSP as the means for providing the Bush administration policymakers all the ammunition they needed to get their desired results. Interestingly, neither Shulsky nor the great majority of the people employed at one time or another by all these ad hoc intelligence groups were people with any previous experience of intelligence work. They were former congressional staffers, scholars and activists of one kind or another. They were people embarked on a great adventure in pursuit of a goal, not craftsmen devoted to their art.

SUBVERTING AND SUBDUING THE PROFESSIONALS

Supporting the statements of Kwiatkowski and others about the pipeline of unevaluated information that flowed straight into the hands of Vice President Cheney and other key policymakers, there is extant a June 2002 letter from the INC’s Washington office addressed to the Senate Appropriations Committee that argues for the transfer of the “Information Collection Program” from the State Department to the Defense Intelligence Agency’s Defense HUMINT Service (a service I was

instrumental in founding). In a clumsy act of indiscretion, the letter’s author explained that there was already a direct flow of information from the INC into the hands of Bill Luti and John Hannah, the latter being Scooter Libby’s deputy in Cheney’s office.

Armed with the INC product, Vice President Cheney made a series of visits to the CIA headquarters at Langley to question agency analysts who were producing assessments that did not match the material that had been funneled to him through Luti and Hannah. The vice president also made personal visits to many members of Congress, to persuade them, in the autumn of 2002, to grant the president the authority to go to war with Iraq. One leading Democratic senator says that Cheney sat in his office and made what now appear to be greatly exaggerated claims about Saddam’s nuclear weapons program. The fear of Saddam’s possessing a nuclear bomb compelled the senator to vote in favor of granting the war powers.

Part of the “Saddam bomb plot” tale came from Khadir Hamza, an Iraqi nuclear scientist who defected in 1994 and settled in the United States through the assistance of the INC. Hamza initially went to work for the Institute for Science and International Security, a think tank headed by former U.N. weapons inspector David Albright. According to a May 12, 2003, *New Yorker* interview with Albright by Seymour Hersh, Hamza and his boss drafted a 1998 proposal for a book that would have exposed how Saddam’s quest for a nuclear bomb had “fizzled.” There were no takers. But two years later, Hamza co-authored a very different book, with Jeff Stein, vastly exaggerating Saddam’s nuclear weapons program. This, despite the fact that, in 1995, Saddam

Hussein's son-in-law, General Hussein Kamel, who was the head of Iraq's weapons agency, escaped to Jordan with a large collection of Iraqi government documents showing how little was left of Iraqi WMD programs. Kamel was interviewed by a team of U.N. weapons inspectors headed by Rolf Ekeus, chairman of the U.N. teams, and he confirmed that the inspections had, in effect, uprooted most of what was left of the Iraqi WMD program after the 1991 Gulf War.

It is telling that, in the more than two-year run-up to the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, nobody in the Bush administration sought to commission a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Saddam Hussein's WMD programs. Perhaps it is unsurprising that they did not want such an estimate. An estimate, if conducted over a period of months, would undoubtedly have revealed deep skepticism about the threat posed by Saddam's weapons program. It would have exposed major gaps in the intelligence picture, particularly since the pullout of U.N. weapons inspectors from Iraq at the end of 1998, and it would have likely undercut the rush to war. It was only as a result of intense pressure from Sen. Bob Graham (D-FL.), chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, that the intelligence community was finally tasked, in September 2002, to produce an NIE on Saddam's WMD programs. The report was to be rushed to completion in three weeks, so it could reach the desks of the relevant congressional committee members before a vote on war-powers authorization scheduled for early October, on the eve of the midterm elections. As the NIE went forward for approval, everyone knew that there were major problems with it.

The issue of the Niger yellowcake uranium precursor had been a point of controversy since late 2001, when the Italian secret service, SISMI, reported to their American, British and Israeli counterparts that they had obtained documents on Niger government letterhead indicating that Iraq had attempted to purchase 500 tons of yellowcake. The yellowcake lead had been reported to the vice president by his CIA daily-briefing officer, and Cheney had tasked the CIA to dig deeper. Obviously, if the case could be made that Saddam was aggressively seeking nuclear material, no one in Congress could justifiably oppose war. The story proved to be a hoax. In February 2002, the CIA dispatched former Ambassador Joseph Wilson to Niger to look into the report. Wilson had served in several African countries, including Niger, and had also been the U.S. chargé d'affaires in Baghdad, at the time of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. He knew all the players. After several days of meetings in Niger, he returned to Washington and was debriefed by the CIA. The yellowcake story simply did not check out. Case closed.

Contrary to Wilson's expectations, variations on the matter continued to creep into policy speeches by top administration officials. Although CIA Director Tenet personally intervened to remove references to the discredited African uranium story from President Bush's early October 2002 speech in Cincinnati, Ohio, promoting the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, bogus yellowcake information appeared in a December 19, 2002, State Department "fact sheet" on Saddam's failure to disclose his secret WMD programs. As we all know, President Bush's January 2003 State of the Union speech contained the

now infamous 16 words citing British intelligence claims about Saddam’s seeking uranium in Africa.

For Greg Thielmann, who retired in September 2002 from his post as director of the Strategic, Proliferation and Military Affairs Office at the State Department’s Intelligence Bureau, the issue of the aluminum tubes was an even more egregious case of policymakers’ contamination of the intelligence process than the Wilson yellowcake affair. His position is,

What was done with the aluminum tubes was far worse than what was done with the uranium from Africa. Because the intelligence community had debated over a period of months, and involved key scientists and engineers in the National Laboratories – and foreigners as well – in a long and detailed discussion. The way I would have characterized it, if you had asked me in July 2002, when I turned over the leadership of my office, there was a growing consensus in the intelligence community that this kind of aluminum was not suitable for the nuclear weapons program. So I was really quite shocked to see – I was just retired – the National Intelligence Estimate say that the majority of agencies came to the opposite interpretation, that it was going into the nuclear weapons program.

Even with this “majority” view, Thielmann points out that anyone at the White House or the National Security Council who was genuinely seeking the truth would have seen through the subterfuge and drawn the proper conclusion:

If they had read the NIE in October, it is transparent that there were different

views in the intelligence community. They could have read, for example, that the Department of Energy and the State Department INR believed that the aluminum tubes were not going into the nuclear weapons program and instead were going into conventional artillery rockets. And, if one assumes a modicum of intelligence understanding at the NSC, they should know that the agency that is most able to judge on this would be the Department of Energy. They control all the laboratories that actually over the years have enriched uranium and built centrifuges.

Thielmann also had an important observation about the Office of Special Plans and the other intelligence boutiques that Cheney and Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz had established inside the Pentagon’s policy shop:

It was a stealth organization. They didn’t play in the intelligence community proceedings that our office participated in. When the intelligence community met as a community, there was no OSP represented in these sessions. Because, if they had done that, they would have had to subject their views to peer review. Why do that when you can send stuff right in to the vice president?

THE NIE CONTAMINATION

Two other major INC-foisted fabrications made their way into the NIE and from there into policy speeches by top Bush administration officials, including the president, the vice president and the secretaries of Defense and State. The first involved claims that Iraq had mobile biological-weapons labs that could produce deadly agents. The declassified version of the October 2002 NIE stated, “Baghdad

has mobile facilities for producing bacterial and toxin BW agents; these facilities can evade detection and are highly survivable. Within three to six months, these units probably could produce an amount of agent equal to the total that Iraq produced in the years prior to the Gulf war.” The same claim was a dramatic highlight of Colin Powell’s February 5, 2003, presentation before the Security Council.

But, a subsequent review of the intelligence files – long after the NIE had been produced – revealed that the sole source for the mobile-lab story was an Iraqi military defector, a major, who had been produced by the INC via the “Information Collection Program.” The CIA and DIA had both given warnings about the defector, after concluding that he was a fabricator. But, as CIA Director Tenet would later admit in a February 2004 speech at Georgetown University, those warnings fell on deaf ears. The fabrication judgment was shown to be correct after the U.S. invasion, when two of the mobile labs were captured. They were, as other Iraqi sources had claimed, mobile facilities for producing hydrogen for weather balloons.

A somewhat different fiasco occurred on the issue of the equally inflammatory claim that Iraq had unmanned airborne vehicles (UAVs), outfitted to deliver biological and chemical weapons. Allegations about the UAVs surfaced in early September 2002, prompting both CIA Director Tenet and Vice President Cheney to visit House and Senate leaders on the day Congress reconvened after the Labor Day recess to present their new “smoking gun” argument for war. The UAV story appeared in President Bush’s October 7, 2002, speech in Cincinnati. It was also

featured in Colin Powell’s Security Council presentation four months later. Powell warned the Council then that “Iraq could use these small UAVs, which have a wingspan of only a few meters, to deliver biological agents to its neighbors or, if transported, to other countries, including the United States.”

Yet the declassified version of the October 2002 NIE, while reporting that “Baghdad’s UAVs could threaten Iraq’s neighbors, U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf and, if brought close to or into the United States, the U.S. homeland,” also noted that “the Director, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, US Air Force, does not agree that Iraq is developing UAVs primarily intended to be delivery platforms for chemical and biological warfare (CBW) agents. The small size of Iraq’s new UAV strongly suggests a primary role of reconnaissance, although CBW delivery is an inherent capability.” Indeed, the specifications of the Iraqi UAVs, known to U.S. Air Force Intelligence, proved that they were ill-suited for CBW dissemination. According to several news accounts, even the formulation that “CBW delivery is an inherent capability” was foisted upon the Air Force during the negotiating sessions over the final wording of the NIE.

The subversion of the intelligence process was death by a thousand cuts, a cumulative process of badgering in which the pipeline of disinformation from the INC, through OSP, to the desk of the vice president played a decisive role.

Vincent Cannistraro puts it this way:

Over a long period of time, there was a subtle process of pressure and intimidation until people started giving them what was wanted When the Senate Intelligence Committee

interviewed, under oath, over 100 analysts, not one of them said, ‘I changed my assessment because of pressure.’ . . . The environment was conditioned in such a way that the analyst subtly leaned toward the conceits of the policymakers. . . . The intelligence community was vulnerable to the aggressiveness of neoconservative policymakers, particularly at the Pentagon and at the VP’s office. As one analyst said to me, ‘You can’t fight something with nothing, and those people had something. Whether it was right or wrong, fraudulent or specious, it almost didn’t make any difference, because the policymakers believed it already, and if you didn’t have hard countervailing evidence to persuade them, then you were at a loss.’

Lt. Col. Dale Davis (USMC, ret.) concurs that the intelligence process was badly subverted by a “political operation.” Davis, through March 2004, headed International Programs at the Virginia Military Institute. A fluent Arabic speaker, he has served throughout the Arab world. Davis initially said that he did not think that the intelligence analysts were pressured, “per se”:

They created an organization that would give them the answers they wanted. Or at least piece together a very compelling case by rummaging through all the various intelligence reports and picking out the best, the most juicy, but quite often the most flimsy pieces of information. . . . By creating the OSP, Cheney was able to say, ‘Hey, look at what we’re getting out of OSP. How come you guys aren’t doing as well? What is your response to what this alternative

analysis that we’re receiving from the Pentagon says?’ That’s how you do it. You pressure people indirectly.

THE COUNTDOWN

Why on earth didn’t [Saddam] let the inspectors in and avoid the war?

– Sen. Pat Roberts, Chairman, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, quoted by Paul Krugman in a *New York Times*, column February 6, 2004

Sen. Pat Roberts of Kansas is the Republican chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, which is today investigating the misuse of intelligence prior to the Iraq war, the failures of intelligence, the Iraqi National Congress, and the Office of Special Plans. The answer to his question is simple: Saddam did let the inspectors in, at a level of cooperation that was unprecedented. The question that Senator Roberts should really be asking is, Why didn’t it matter?

It should have been a dire warning to the U.S. Congress when the man who had been convicted of lying to Congress during the Iran-contra affair – Elliot Abrams – was put in charge of the Middle East section of the NSC staff. One underestimated talent of the neocon group in the run-up to this war was its ability to manipulate Congress. They were masters of the game, having made the team in Washington in the 1970s on the staffs of two of the most powerful senators in recent decades, New York’s Patrick Moynihan and Washington’s Henry “Scoop” Jackson. The old boy’s club – Abe Shulsky at OSP, Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith, Middle East Desk Officer at the NSC Elliot Abrams, Defense Policy Board Chairman Richard Perle –

had not only worked together in their early government years in these two Senate offices, but they had stayed together as a network through the ensuing decades, floating around a small number of businesses and think tanks, including the American Enterprise Institute and the openly neoimperialist Project for a New American Century. The neocons were openly contemptuous of Congress, as they were of the U.N. Security Council. And a number of tricks and manipulations of the congressional process have now been exposed. But was the trickery planned? Was it a well-orchestrated obfuscation, an accident or coincidence? What is the evidence?

First, there was the consistent refusal to provide witnesses and information to the U.S. Senate, especially regarding the projected costs of the war and the lack of opportunities to question key players such as General Jay Garner, who was appointed by the Defense Department to be the first head of the U.S. provisional authority in Iraq. There was also the subtle hiding of the objections of the Department of Energy and the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) in the NIE of October 2002. One congressional source explained that the classified NIE was made available in its entirety to only a select few members of Congress. There were verbal briefings and an elaborate process to access the document in a secure location. But it was never clear that the 27-page unclassified version that was available to every office was missing any crucial information.

There were also false statements to Congress about providing the U.N. inspectors all the intelligence that might have helped them locate the Iraqi WMD and

programs. Sen. Carl Levin of Michigan has accused the administration, and especially CIA Director Tenet, of withholding information because "the truth" – that the United States had withheld the locations of 21 high- and middle-priority sites – might have slowed down the drive for war. The truth might have convinced Congress to take action to delay military action until the inspections were completed.

The March 7, 2003, appearance by the chairmen of UNMOVIC (Hans Blix) and the IAEA (Mohamed ElBaradei) before the U.N. Security Council was a disaster for the neoconservatives. The Iraqis and Saddam Hussein had "accelerated" cooperation with the United Nations, said Dr. Blix. Blix told the Council that Iraq had made a major concession: they had agreed to allow the destruction of the Al Samoud ballistic missiles. "We are not watching the breaking of toothpicks," Blix said. "Lethal weapons are being destroyed. . . . The destruction undertaken constitutes a substantial measure of disarmament – indeed, the first since the middle of the 1990s."

The Al Samoud, a massive missile seven meters long weighing two tons with its warhead, was being destroyed, without the slightest obstruction or even complaint from the Iraqis. Major Corrine Heraud, a French woman who served as the chief weapons inspector for UNMOVIC in this operation and who had also served from 1996 with UNSCOM, says that the level of cooperation from the Iraqis was unprecedented, something that she never would have expected and did not encounter during the 1996-98 inspections. Each missile cost more than \$1 million, estimates Maj. Heraud, who also cautions that this would be equivalent to a much higher

amount in Western dollars, considering the difficulty that Iraq encountered in buying materials and parts, due to the U.N. sanctions. Yet, to President Bush, the destruction of the Al Samoud, a missile often mistaken in photographs for the better-known SCUD missile, was meaningless. The missile destruction, said Bush, was a “campaign of deception.” For the U.N. inspectors, Bush’s words were a shock. “We didn’t know what to make of this,” an UNMOVIC official said.

“Blix came down hard on the Iraqis, and we actually were in the process of destroying all these Al Samoud missiles,” says Greg Thielman, the former head of the WMD section of INR. “As soon as the Iraqis agreed to do that, I sighed a big sigh of relief. I thought, the U.N. inspectors are working; we’ve stared Saddam down; we’ve forced him to do what he desperately didn’t want to do, in that area of activity that was of most concern to us.” Thielman believes that the Al Samoud incident shows that the administration was so intent on war that this compliance with the inspections “made no difference.”

But it was after the next presentation, by IAEA chairman Mohammed ElBaradei, that “all hell broke loose” in Washington. ElBaradei, in his statement, sank the U.S. intelligence community’s prestigious NIE, President Bush’s State of the Union address, and Colin Powell’s February 5 address to the U.N. Security Council with one blow. ElBaradei was calm in what he had to say: “Based on thorough analysis, the IAEA has concluded, with the concurrence of outside experts, that these documents, which form the basis for reports of recent uranium transactions between Iraq and Niger are, in fact, not authentic.” The Niger yellowcake documents were forger-

ies. Then, ElBaradei told the press that an IAEA staff member had, in fact, used the common search engine Google to determine, within hours, that the Niger documents, which had been passed on to the U.S. embassy in Rome through an anonymous source, were fakes! Members of Congress then began to grumble. In light of the contradictions, a bill was introduced demanding that the administration disclose the intelligence reports that were the basis for the statements made by Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld and Powell about the Iraqi WMD threat. It was still locked in committee when the war began.

The destruction of the Al Samoud missiles continued. It was not only missiles, reports UNMOVIC chief weapons inspector Corrine Heroud, it was engines, launchers, training missiles and missiles still in production that were destroyed. Heroud, called “the terminator” in her native France for her expertise in destroying missiles, described the delicate process of disarming the missiles, then crushing them over and over till they “were a pancake” that was then encased in concrete and buried.

How did the White House respond to these instances of effective work by the United Nations in Iraq? In the final weeks of the countdown to war, the administration’s actions resembled nothing so much as some of the madder scenes from *Alice in Wonderland*. The fact that the documents the administration had used to “prove” that Iraq was working on nuclear weapons were forged only led to greater insistence that Iraq was a danger. The absence of discovery of WMD by the U.N. inspectors was only further evidence that the Iraqis were the greatest deceivers in history and that they had succeeded in

concealing their location. The destruction of the Al Samoud missiles was just more evidence of a “grand deception.”

George Tenet has now told us, on February 5, 2004, exactly one year after he and Colin Powell drank the Kool-Aid at the U.N. Security Council, that there was no imminent danger. The administration spin-doctors immediately responded to this statement by saying that nobody from the administration ever claimed there was an “imminent danger.”

On March 7, 2003, Mohammed ElBaradei spoke to the U.N. Security Council in an open session watched by tens of millions of Americans and countless congressional and government offices. He said,

In conclusion, I am able to report today that, in the area of nuclear weapons – the most lethal weapons of mass destruction – inspections in Iraq are moving forward. One, there is no indication of resumed nuclear activities in those buildings that were identified through the use of satellite imagery as being reconstructed or newly erected since 1998, nor any indication of nuclear-related activities at any inspected sites. Second, there is no indication that Iraq has attempted to import uranium since 1990. Third, there is no indication that Iraq has attempted to import aluminum tubes for use in centrifuge enrichment. Moreover, even had Iraq pursued such a plan, it would have encountered practical difficulties in manufacturing centrifuges out of the aluminum tubes in question. Fourth, ... there is no indication to date that Iraq imported magnets for use in a centrifuge enrichment programme.

After three months of intrusive

inspections, we have to date found no evidence or plausible indication of the revival of a nuclear weapons programme in Iraq. . . . I should note that, in the past three weeks, possibly as a result of ever-increasing pressure by the international community, Iraq has been forthcoming in its co-operation, particularly with regard to the conduct of private interviews and in making available evidence that contributes to the resolution of matters of IAEA concern.

On March 16, 2003, the neocons struck back with the heavy artillery. Vice President Dick Cheney appeared on *Meet the Press*. When pressured by Tim Russert about Iraq’s nuclear danger, Cheney retorted,

We know he has been absolutely devoted to trying to acquire nuclear weapons. *And we believe he has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons* (emphasis mine). I think Mr. ElBaradei frankly is wrong. And I think if you look at the track record of the International Atomic Energy Agency on this kind of issue, especially where Iraq’s concerned, they have consistently underestimated or missed what it was Saddam Hussein was doing. I don’t have any reason to believe they’re any more valid this time than they’ve been in the past.

On March 17, 2003, President George W. Bush went on national television to tell Saddam and his sons, “They have 48 hours to get out of town.” No new evidence or reason was given. It was the ultimate imperial moment.

On March 19, 2003, the bombs began to fall.