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## The American Intelligence Community and the Invasion of Iraq

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# **The American Intelligence Community and the Invasion of Iraq**

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
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To Fred, Malia, Natasha, David, Arthur, Leah, and little Jubal,

I would not be here without your support and a strong push in the right direction.



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It has truly been an honor to work with someone who has become such a hero of mine.

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**Introduction:**

The 21st century came with the promise of further interconnectivity on a global scale and along with it a new kind of acceptance and cooperation. It seemed to many as a time of hope. However, the sunny world view of many American's would be permanently changed on September 11, 2001 when members of the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda hijacked four commercial airliners and used them as weapons of horrifying destruction. One of those Americans who had been thrust into a brave new world was newly elected President George W. Bush. The event would convince President Bush, and many other Americans, that the United States must take an active role in preventing further atrocities. The calls for retribution in the United States were pervasive.

However, despite the fact that the 9/11 attacks were perpetrated by Al-Qaeda (a non-state organization) supported by the Taliban-run government in Afghanistan, the President and many prominent members of the Bush administration came to believe that Saddam Hussein had enabled the attacks that had been committed by Al-Qaeda and was developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to use against the United States and its allies. The ousting of Saddam Hussein would become a key objective of the Bush administration.

To make the case for a military invasion of Iraq, President Bush and members of his administration, including Secretary of State Colin Powell (whose speech to the United Nations Security Council on February 5th, 2003 is now infamous), relied heavily on information provided by the American intelligence community (IC). The purpose of

this paper is to answer a question: Just how influential was information provided by the IC in making and justifying the decision to go to war with Iraq in 2003?

To be able to answer this question one must first understand the context of the invasion and the role of the American IC. This includes a number of issues: the role of the American IC in informing and advising the president, how the IC collected and analyzed intelligence regarding Iraq during the lead up to the invasion, how intelligence is communicated, the position of the IC post-9/11, the views of key administration members regarding Saddam Hussein and a potential invasion, and some of the recent history of American-Iraqi relations.

The true role of the IC in the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 is not something that can be easily defined. Many authors, academics, journalists, and statesmen have wrestled with this issue. For this research paper, four books have been selected. Each paints its own picture of the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq and how the IC operated during the decision-making process and during the period of preparation for the invasion. In order to represent different ideas as well as interpretations regarding the IC and the lead-up to the Iraq War, the authors were chosen for the different times their books were written as well as the origin of their knowledge.

The memoir of the Director of the CIA, during the 2000-2003 period, George Tenet's *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*, is a first-hand account of what happened by someone who was deeply involved.

*Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* by Thomas Ricks, onetime *Washington Post* Pentagon correspondent, reflects his role as an active journalist

during the three years between President Bush's election and the start of the war. Ricks uses his own research and interviews to provide a detailed picture of preparation for the war as well as what happened after the invasion took place.

Robert Draper's *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq* was released in 2020 and therefore has the advantage of having access to more information as well as more space with which to analyze what led to the invasion of Iraq. Draper is a seasoned journalist with a reputation for strong research.

Professor Robert Jervis in 2010 published his analysis of two of the greatest United States intelligence failures in his book *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Jervis was an accomplished professor of international politics at Columbia University where he worked until his death in 2021. Jervis was known as an expert in his field and had worked as a consultant for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

In addition to these books, Lyman Kirkpatrick's *The Real CIA* was chosen to define the role of the IC, especially the CIA, as well as how it is supposed to function. The paper uses these five texts, as well as a collection of speeches and articles, to try and create a nuanced narrative of what happened during the lead up to the war with Iraq, the IC's role in it, and whether the IC functioned as it was intended to in the context of the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq.

## **I. The role the intelligence community played in informing the president's decision to invade Iraq in 2003.**

On 9/11 2001, the George W. Bush administration and America would be irreparably changed. For the first time since Pearl Harbor, the United States had been attacked by a foreign entity on American soil. The seemingly impenetrable fortress had its walls demolished and America and Americans seemed vulnerable.

During his campaign, Governor George W. Bush had shown little interest in military action abroad. In fact, Bush had condemned the previous Clinton administration for allegedly irresponsibly deploying American armed forces overseas.

Yet after 9/11, President Bush and the key members of his administration began to sing a different tune. Bush declared a “War on Terror” on September 20th, 2001<sup>1</sup> which became a direct threat to not only terrorist groups all over the world but also to states that supported them. The “War on Terror” offered individuals like Paul Wolfowitz, who would become the Deputy Secretary of Defense and who had been advocating for the deposing of Saddam Hussein, a golden opportunity.

For Wolfowitz, it seemed unlikely that the 9/11 attacks could have been perpetrated by Al-Qaeda alone. Countries all around the world expressed sympathy and support for the United States, but Saddam Hussein’s reaction at the time stuck out like a sore thumb. Saddam’s statement can be summed up as the United States reaping, on

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<sup>1</sup> George W. Bush, “ADDRESS TO THE JOINT SESSION OF THE 107TH CONGRESS”, (speech, Washington D.C., September 20th, 2001), White House Archives, [https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected\\_Speeches\\_George\\_W\\_Bush.pdf](https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Speeches_George_W_Bush.pdf)

9/11, what it had sowed. This only strengthened Wolfowitz's belief that "Saddam, in the network of global terrorism, was 'the head of the snake (18)."<sup>2</sup>

Wolfowitz believed that an attack on Afghanistan (which had hosted the 9/11 attackers) would lead to meager results, while attacking Iraq had many more potentially key targets. He also argued that deposing Saddam would send a much louder message to adversaries around the world. In the months immediately following 9/11 Wolfowitz and his supporters would not get their way. But it would only be a matter of time.

For the members of the IC, especially the Central Intelligence Agency, the 9/11 attacks represented arguably one of their greatest failures, one later matched by the lead-up to the Iraq war itself. America had been attacked on its own soil and the IC had not been able to foresee the attack in sufficient detail to stop it. As a result of this failure many Americans, including members of the Bush administration, lost faith in the ability of the IC to keep America safe.

This lack of confidence would not only put the IC in a challenging position during the lead-up to the Iraq War, but would also allow for the Iraq War Hawks of the Bush Administration to come up with their own alternative solutions and evidence.<sup>3</sup> Ricks writes, "By seeming to catch the intelligence community asleep, the 9/11 attacks had created a new opportunity for those arguing that professional intelligence analysts were underestimating the threat presented by Iraq, and especially the likelihood of its

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<sup>2</sup>Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 18.

<sup>3</sup>Ricks, Thomas E. 2006. *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press.

possessing chemical or biological weapons or its willingness to share them with anti-American terrorists (32).”<sup>4</sup>

This distrust of the IC led to an increased reliance on “bad intelligence,” especially that collected and analyzed by members of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s staff. However, the IC was not innocent when it came to the collection and dissemination of “bad intelligence,” as demonstrated by the language used in the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) released in October of 2002.

The NIE was created to be a comprehensive survey of all of the IC’s information on Iraq and its weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The NIE had been approved by all members of the IC during the deliberations of the National Foreign Intelligence Board, which included members of the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the National Security Agency, the Department of Energy, and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. However, George Tenet (who was the Director of the CIA at the time) writes in his book that the NIE’s “narrow time frame, combined with often highly technical material, pushed standard procedures to the breaking point (324).”<sup>5</sup> The NIE was, in fact, extremely rushed and the CIA was given only about two weeks to complete the estimate before it had to be submitted to the Bush administration and then given to Congress. Bob Walpole who was a senior member of the CIA was appointed to take point on the NIE.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>5</sup>Tenet, George, and Bill Harlow. 2007. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the Cia*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 324.

<sup>6</sup>Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 208.

The importance of the NIE cannot be understated when it comes to the sequence of events that led up to the invasion of Iraq. It influenced Secretary of State Colin Powell's pivotal speech to the United Nations in February of 2003 and the Congressional approval of Bush's war powers. It swayed many key actors, in the United States and abroad, away from uncertainty and toward war.

George Tenet explains in his memoir that, "An NIE had never been relied upon as a basis for going to war, and, in my view, the decision to invade Iraq was not solely predicated on this one."<sup>7</sup> Much of Powell's speech in February of 2003 was based on the information that was provided and strongly backed up by the NIE. George Tenet and his team assisted Powell in writing his speech. Powell wanted to be completely sure that the speech was honest and up to his own standard of truthfulness.

Despite having removed much of the false information that had been suggested by the White House<sup>8</sup>, the larger issue would turn out to be the integrity of the NIE on which Powell's speech was based. In the years that followed the invasion, Ricks explains, "The official, bipartisan conclusion of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's review of the prewar handling of intelligence was, 'Much of the information provided or cleared by the Central Intelligence Agency for inclusion in Secretary Powell's speech was overstated, misleading, or incorrect (90).'"<sup>9</sup> The speech became a stain on Colin Powell's record and was the biggest regret of his career.

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<sup>7</sup>Tenet, George, and Bill Harlow. 2007. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the Cia*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 337.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 372.

<sup>9</sup>Ricks, Thomas E. 2006. *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 90.

With or without the support of the United Nations or the intelligence to back up the claims that Saddam Hussein was developing WMDs, in violation of international sanctions, certain members of the Bush Administration were adamant about invading Iraq. Wolfowitz had been campaigning for deposing Saddam Hussein and creating a “free Iraq” long before 9/11 and now had the support of Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and other important members of the administration.

On August 26th, 2002 Cheney gave a speech at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention and said, "Intelligence is an uncertain business, even in the best of circumstances."<sup>10</sup> The example Cheney used to demonstrate his claim was the fact that the IC had been wrong during the lead-up to the 1991 Gulf War about how close Saddam Hussein had been to a nuclear weapon. Despite the inaccuracy of the example used by Cheney, it was enough for him to excuse discarding the IC's intelligence on WMDs in Iraq at the time.<sup>11</sup> Cheney went on to say that, "Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction; there is no doubt that he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us."<sup>12</sup>

There is no doubt that the IC contributed to creating the conditions that allowed for the invasion of Iraq to occur in the way it did. However, that does not mean that the

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<sup>10</sup>Dick Cheney, "Vice President Speaks at VFW 103rd National Convention", (speech, Tennessee, Nashville, August 26th, 2002), White House Archives, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/08/20020826.html>

<sup>11</sup>Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 179.

<sup>12</sup>Dick Cheney, "Vice President Speaks at VFW 103rd National Convention", (speech, Tennessee, Nashville, August 26th, 2002), White House Archives, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/08/20020826.html>



IC was culpable for the decision to invade Iraq or that the intelligence provided by the IC was the reason for the 2003 invasion.

The decision to invade Iraq was President Bush's alone. In the end, when all was said and done, Bush was the only person in the United States who could make the call to go to war (although the support of Congress is also necessary). When it came down to it, many Americans and the Bush administration elected to represent them were hungry for retribution after 9/11, and there was widespread national support for going to war with Iraq. In fact, according to a *Pew Research Center* poll in January of 2003, 68 percent of Americans interviewed believed that America should go to war with the Baathist Regime.<sup>13</sup>

The blame for the decision to go to war cannot, therefore, be placed solely on the shoulders of the IC. Without question, the IC made many mistakes during the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq. This paper attempts, among other things, to define those shortcomings and assess their effects.

However, this examination will conclude that, even if the IC had not been a victim to its own selective but rampant imagination, the United States still would have gone to war with Iraq. The combination of strong public support, trigger happy government officials, and an alternative intelligence collection (to that of the IC) would likely have been a strong enough combination to lead to war even if the IC had been more accurate in its assessments; even if it had concluded that the Iraq of Saddam Hussein had no WMD arsenal.

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<sup>13</sup>“Public Struggles with Possible War in Iraq.” *Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy*, Pew Research Center, 30 May 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2003/01/30/public-struggles-with-possible-war-in-iraq/>.

## II. What is the intelligence community and what is its purpose?

Prior to World War II, the United States did not have a formal IC. However, as war seemed more and more inevitable, William Donovan argued for and was granted permission by President Franklin Roosevelt to create and head an organization called the Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI). Donovan believed that to ensure the safety of the United States, at that time and in the future, the country would need to have capabilities for irregular warfare.<sup>14</sup> This would include everything that could be considered intelligence including espionage and counterespionage, supporting guerrilla warfare, and propaganda.

During the war, the COI became two different organizations, the OWI (Office of Warfare Information) which was overt, and the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) which was covert. The OSS would not outlast the war by much and was disbanded by the Bureau of the Budget in September 1945. Part of the OSS's research and analysis capabilities would be transferred to the Department of State.

However, America would not have to wait very long for a new intelligence organization to be developed. President Truman would announce the creation of the Central Intelligence Group in 1946. The former Executive Director of the CIA, Lyman Kirkpatrick, stated in his book *The Real CIA* that "The concept [for the organization] was based upon General Donovan's vision of a central intelligence organization responsible for the coordination of the total United States effort and for producing national

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<sup>14</sup>Kirkpatrick, Lyman B. 1968. *The Real CIA* Macmillan, 15.

intelligence-the information required by the President and his principal advisers (74)."<sup>15</sup>

This same concept would be the basis of the CIA which would be created a year later as part of the National Security Act.

In Section 102 (d) of United States Code (61 Stat. 495, 50 U.S.C. 401 or P. L. 253-80th Congress [1947]) the mission of the CIA is explicitly stated. The CIA exists "For the purpose of coordinating the intelligence activities of the several Government departments and agencies in the interest of national security, it shall be the duty of the Agency, under the direction of the National Security Council...(77)."<sup>16</sup> The CIA exists to inform and assist the President and the top policymakers of the United States of America through the gathering, analyzing, and communication of intelligence. It is important to note that the CIA is not a law enforcement agency and it has no power to subpoena or to conduct internal security functions.

To understand the importance of George Tenet's role in the decision-making process of invading Iraq, one must first understand the expectations and responsibilities of the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. The importance of the role of the Director cannot be overstated. The Director is responsible for the oversight and coordination of the entire intelligence community and has complete control over the termination of employees. Kirkpatrick writes that,

...the director of Central Intelligence is supposed to be the one man in Washington to whom the President of the United States can look for the intelligence viewpoint. The director does not report to anybody else. The law says that he reports to the President through the National Security Council-and therefore he does not have any departmental ties or allegiances, or perhaps even more important, any budget to defend except

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<sup>15</sup>Kirkpatrick, Lyman B. 1968. *The Real CIA* Macmillan, 74.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 77.

that of the CIA, which is exclusively a service organization supplying intelligence required by the other departments. (254)<sup>17</sup>

The Director is also tasked with presenting an objective and detached view to the best of his or her ability. Fortunately, because the CIA does not have any “departmental ties or allegiances” as well as only having financial responsibilities to the CIA itself, the Director of the CIA is in a specific position where an attempt at objectivity can be possible. However, because the Director’s main task is to supply information to the executive branch, there can be a bias towards the needs of the president. This is a point that is argued by Robert Draper in his book, *To Start A War: How the Bush Administration Took America Into Iraq*, and will be explored later in this paper.

Among the most important deliverables produced by the IC for policy makers are National Intelligence Estimates. The Director of the CIA, along with the other 16 members of the IC, are consulted by the National Intelligence Council in order to produce these estimates. The Belfer Center says that, “National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) are the IC's most authoritative written judgments on national security issues.”<sup>18</sup> NIEs are used to predict potential outcomes of future events and the likelihood of those events occurring so that policy makers can make informed decisions and prepare for the future. These estimates cover any pressing threat from global warming to the threat of Iraqi WMD production.

George Tenet writes in his book that “NIEs are intended to provide senior policy makers with the consensus of the American intelligence community on a given subject

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 254.

<sup>18</sup>Eric Rosenbach Aki J. Peritz | July 2009, et al. “National Intelligence Estimates.” *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/national-intelligence-estimates>.

and to portray honestly dissenting and alternative views. Typically, NIEs require several months of preparation and jawboning by CIA, DIA, NSA, INR, DOE, NGA, and other agencies.”<sup>19</sup>

Although agencies and their methodologies evolved between the years 1947 and 2003, the main purpose of the CIA stayed the same. As General Donovan very clearly understood, not all information will be readily available. At times unavailable information is precisely the information that could save countless lives and preserve the security of the United States and its allies. As countries around the world have developed their intelligence gathering capabilities it has become crucial the United States stays ahead of the curve.

**III. How and why did Iraq, between 1990 and 2003, become an important target for the IC’s collection and analysis activities? Based on the stated roles and missions of the IC, how should it have performed in terms of collection and analysis in the Iraqi context?**

In August 1990, the IC was taken by surprise when the Iraqi army marched into Kuwait. When Saddam invaded Kuwait he closed the doors to any negotiations with the United States. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait sparked Operation Desert Storm which involved American and allied forces using military force to oust Iraq from Kuwait, after

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<sup>19</sup>Tenet, George, and Bill Harlow. 2007. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the Cia*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 321.

which the United States began a campaign of empowering Shiite and Kurdish rebels to seek to oust Saddam and the Baathist regime.

Many in the elder Bush's administration believe that Saddam Hussein could not stay in power after the Gulf War. Therefore the administration, including Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, would end up leaving the rebels to fight without American military support. The rebel forces failed to depose Hussein, leaving many Iraqis with a feeling of distrust for the United States; distrust that would greatly affect the possibility of Iraqi rebel groups assisting the American armed forces during the invasion of Iraq close to a decade later.<sup>20</sup>

After Iraq's defeat in 1991, the United States and allied forces followed up the conflict by sending in a UNSCOM (United Nations Special Commission) to investigate the Baathist regime's use and procurement of WMD. The reason for the investigation was to ensure that Saddam was in accordance with United Nations policies and sanctions regarding WMDs.

The Baathist regime claimed that its nuclear program was only meant for peaceful uses. However, as explained in Ricks' book, "inspectors with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) discovered two facilities that were not on the list provided (65)."<sup>21</sup> Despite Iraqi claims, the inspector came across a large collection of documents describing the true nature of the facilities in a "supposed petrochemical building" in

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<sup>20</sup>Ricks, Thomas E. 2006. *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq.* New York: Penguin Press, 6.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 65.

Baghdad. According to Ricks the document said that “One was a uranium enrichment plant, the other a nuclear weapons development facility (65).”<sup>22</sup>

The initial Iraqi response to the newfound documentation was denial but after two months Iraq acknowledged the truth. Up to 1995 the Iraqis lied three times about their weapons inventory and had to make three separate inventories after being caught in those lies.<sup>23</sup>

After the defection of Hussein Kamel Hassan al-Majid (Saddam's son-in-law), the Iraqis finally revealed the extent of their chemical weapons capabilities. Ricks writes that, “The irony, as UNSCOM deputy chief inspector Charles Duelfer would come to realize only years later, was that ‘Saddam's compliance had been going up, while at the same time our confidence and willingness to give him the benefit of the doubt was going down (67).”<sup>24</sup>

Saddam’s record of lying and avoiding detection, as well as the successes of American operations in Iraq, doomed any possibility of improved relations with the United States and the United Nations. At the same time, Saddam strengthened his grip within Iraq. Ricks states that “...Iraqis inside the country in contact with U.S. intelligence grew far warrier. The Senate Intelligence Committee, in a 2004 autopsy of the intelligence failures made in handling Iraq, would report that after the raids the U.S. intelligence community ‘did not have a single HUMINT (human intelligence) source collecting against Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs (22).”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>25</sup>Ricks, Thomas E. 2006. “*Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq.*” New York: Penguin Press, 22.

An overall lack of HUMINT would come back to haunt the IC in the lead up to the 2003 Invasion. Republicans were by no means the only ones interested in ousting Saddam Hussein. After President H.W. Bush was beaten by Bill Clinton in the 1992 presidential elections, Clinton continued American opposition to Saddam and the Baathist regime. In 1998 the Clinton administration supported the passage of the Iraqi Liberation Act (ILA) unanimously in the Senate and by a wide majority of the House of Representatives. George Tenet describes the goal of the ILA specifically to be regime change in Iraq.<sup>26</sup> The passing of the ILA made the liberation of Iraq as well as the promotion of democracy in Iraq American policy.

There were also some similarities between intelligence estimates made by the Clinton administration and the second Bush administration. Jervis writes that "...the gap between the two sets of estimates is less than that which separated their conclusions from what we now believe to have been true"<sup>27</sup>. This means that at least some of what was considered to be common knowledge within the IC about Iraq and WMDs was not solely based on new information acquired during the Bush administration. Saddam was seen as a threat by the United States government since, at least, the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the 1991 Gulf War.

### **III. The Circumstances inside the Intelligence Community:**

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<sup>26</sup>Tenet, George, and Bill Harlow. 2007. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the Cia*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 98.

<sup>27</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 135.



After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, CIA teams had interrogated numerous Al-Qaeda detainees and recovered documents as well as computer drives in safe houses throughout Afghanistan. According to George Tenet, the CIA was “shocked” to discover that Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda had been making progress when it came to the development of advanced WMDs (specifically chemical and biological weapons).<sup>28</sup>

According to Tenet, Al-Qaeda was actively pursuing nuclear options and, he explains, “For Dick Cheney, the follow-up question was obvious: What rogue actor was likely to furnish such weapons to a fellow hater of America (94)?”<sup>29</sup> The information recovered by the CIA would only further enforce the beliefs of the Iraq hawks in the administration that Saddam Hussein was in collusion with Al-Qaeda.

On Monday the 17th of September 2001, President George W. Bush simultaneously fulfilled the hopes of Wolfowitz, and his fellow hawks, and began to shift the focus of the Defense Department and the IC. President Bush called for a meeting of the National Security Council and the major focus of the conversations at the time was still Afghanistan. In his book Draper writes that “...This time, however, the president issued an additional directive: even as the CIA and the Pentagon endeavored to lay siege to Al-Qaeda, Bush ordered that the Defense Department consider a plan that might include occupying Iraqi oil fields (22).”<sup>30</sup>

As Bush became more enamored of the idea of invading Iraq, a heavier burden fell upon the shoulders of the IC. The problem was that the IC did not have the

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<sup>28</sup>Tenet, George, and Bill Harlow. 2007. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the Cia*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 94.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 94

<sup>30</sup>Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 22.

intelligence-gathering capacities needed at the time to carry this burden. The CIA had no agents within Iraq's regime and had not had any since UN inspectors had left Iraq three years prior.<sup>31</sup> Saddam at the time would not let inspectors inside the country.

In the early 2000s, the United States IC found itself fighting an uphill battle against public mistrust, both in the political arena and in the homes of everyday Americans. The IC had failed to predict and prevent a terrible attack on American soil. To make matters worse the head of the IC and Director of the CIA, George Tenet, found himself serving a presidential administration of the opposite political party.

The circumstances of the early 2000s left the IC with vulnerabilities that, although they existed before, had not been as obvious for at least a few decades. The IC at this time became acutely vulnerable to politicization, the ability to perceive threats to an almost paranoid extent at times, and a narrow view of the possible at other times.

After the 9/11 attacks, there could be no room for failure and the IC had to demonstrate that it was prepared and willing to contribute to the defense of the United States and its interests. This would only be reinforced by the new president's increased interest in intelligence and his expectation that the CIA would keep him constantly informed. In fact, President Bush insisted that he be briefed by Tenet six days a week.<sup>32</sup>

The IC would come to suffer an affliction called "motivated bias"<sup>33</sup>. The IC did not want to undermine or interfere with policymakers' attempts to regain America's sense of security. Although there is no evidence of the IC modifying papers to conform to the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>32</sup> Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 136

<sup>33</sup> Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 133.

needs of policymakers, there was an unspoken desire to please both policymakers and the American people according to Jervis<sup>34</sup>. Jervis writes that political pressure “...created an atmosphere that was not conducive to critical analysis, encouraged excessive certainty, and eroded subtleties and nuances. Analysts and intelligence managers knew that any suggestion that Saddam's capabilities were limited would immediately draw fire from their superiors.”<sup>35</sup> This made it extremely difficult to even want to go against the conventional wisdom. Reliance on conventional wisdom was reinforced by the fact that many of the beliefs about Saddam's nuclear program had also been informed by intelligence estimates during the Clinton Administration<sup>36</sup>.

Analysts and officers were also given tasks incorporating the assumption that Saddam indeed had WMDs, leading in some cases to significant confirmation bias. On top of a general understanding within the IC that the plausibility of Saddam having WMDs was extremely high, this almost ensured that information “confirming” the assumption would be “found.”

Jervis writes that, “In early 2002, CIA agents around the world were told to seek information about Iraq's WMD programs. This made sense, but inadvertently was dangerous because asking people to be on the lookout for something increases the chance that they will find it whether it is there or not.”<sup>37</sup> It is human nature to gravitate toward information that confirms one's assumptions or beliefs and at the same time

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 133

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 135

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 135

<sup>37</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 150.

either ignores or discounts information to the contrary. It is very possible that in some instances members of the IC fell victim to this fallacy.

Jervis quotes Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld when he said "Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence"<sup>38</sup>. This is a statement that at times throughout history has rung true. Yet to assume that in all cases just because evidence has not been found doesn't mean that there is no evidence can be dangerous, as it was in the case of the Iraq War. In some cases an absence of evidence can mean that something does not exist. This is what Jervis calls "negative information"<sup>39</sup> and is likely something that was not given much credence by CIA officers who were briefing their sources or intelligence analysts sifting through data. Not considering "negative evidence" very possibly led to a lack of sources that, rather than cried WMD, support the position that Saddam did not possess WMDs or discount the existence of mobile weapons labs.

One example of a lack of consideration for "negative information" occurred in the conversation about whether Saddam had links to and had potentially collaborated with Al-Qaeda. After the Taliban, a key partner of Al-Qaeda, assumed control of Afghanistan, Saddam never established an embassy in Kabul.<sup>40</sup> Saddam had no history of signaling or attempting to support Al-Qaeda or allies of Al-Qaeda. Despite these facts, many in the IC and the Bush administration continued to pursue and try to prove the argument that Saddam had, even if he had not assisted the 9/11 attacks directly, at least supported Al-Qaeda in expanding its capabilities.

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 151

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 151.

Although there was no conclusive evidence showing that Saddam had reconstituted his WMD program, there was plenty of inconclusive evidence. This evidence, combined with what the IC had thought it already knew during the Clinton Administration, did not make the strong case that the officials of the Bush Administration were hoping for.

The IC and the Bush Administration needed a “smoking gun”, and so they looked to a German informant and engineer who had defected from Iraq by the name of Rafid Ahmed Alwan al-Janabi, a person given the codename “Curveball”. Curveball on his own may not have been convincing but, on top of a large amount of inconclusive (but suggestive) information, Curveball gave credence to a positive conclusion, something like a nail in the coffin.<sup>41</sup> Curveball was the nail that the IC was so desperately looking for to confirm what was commonly perceived to be happening in Iraq within the IC.

Hesitancy to go against conventional wisdom may in part explain why the CIA never reassessed its estimates after the findings of the UNMOVIC (United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission). By the time UNMOVIC had begun its investigation, it became clear that the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom were committed to war with Iraq.

In the lead up to Powell's speech to the United Nations, Jervis writes that, “When an agent questioned the use of information in the speech from a key source named Curveball, his boss replied: ‘[L]et's keep in mind that this war's going to happen

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<sup>41</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 137.

regardless of what Curveball said or didn't say, and that the Powers That Be probably aren't very interested in whether Curveball knows what he's talking about."<sup>42</sup>

By the end of 2002, the war in Iraq seemed inevitable to many in and outside the IC. It was also understood that going against the common understanding of Iraq within the IC was not only an uphill battle, but was generally pointless given that the prospective war was so popular politically and amongst the American people.

This same cynicism prevailed even during the writing of the now infamous 2002 National Intelligence Estimate that made the case to Congress to go to war and was extremely influential in Secretary of State Powell's speech to the United Nations. The writers of the NIE seem to have come to the same conclusion that many in the IC had come to already. They decided that, given that the war was almost guaranteed to happen, it was better to assume that Saddam had chemical weapons than to suffer the consequences of assuming he didn't and then seeing them used against American troops.<sup>43</sup>

It also did not help the situation that the CIA was given very little time to put together the NIE. This resulted in the projection of unfounded confidence as well as hasty conclusions.

Without the necessary time to fully analyze new information, the IC in many cases ended up communicating a much stronger position than factually warranted. Jervis explains that another "...reason for the excess certainty was that analysts

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<sup>42</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 136.

<sup>43</sup>Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 208.

overestimated the number of independent sources reporting to them, and they failed to consider the significance of negative reports and the absence of evidence”<sup>44</sup>. In reality, the number of sources that the analysts were drawing from was far less plentiful than they had assumed. If they had known this it would have been much harder to be confident in their assessments. It is also very possible that analysts were inclined to please policymakers by expressing a greater amount of confidence in NIE findings supportive of policymakers' stated positions instead of introducing skepticism or uncertainty, such as the common use of “on one hand” and, “on the other hand”.<sup>45</sup>

This does not mean, however, that there were not respectable and differing opinions within the IC on the details of the NIE. One example concerned the disputed use for aluminum tubes that were procured by the Iraq Government.

The question addressed by the IC in the NIE was whether or not the quality of the tubes could support nuclear enrichment. Much of the IC came to the conclusion that the tubes were indeed intended to be used for the enrichment of Uranium. The Department of Energy (DOE), however, came to a different conclusion which would be cited as the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR)'s reason for claiming that the tubes were not of a quality that could be used for the enrichment of Uranium. INR stated, as quoted in Ricks's book, that "the most comparable U.S. system is a tactical rocket--the U.S. Mark-66 air-launched 70 mm rocket-- that uses the same, high-grade

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<sup>44</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 127.

<sup>45</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 127.

(7075-T6) aluminum, and that has specifications with similar tolerances.”<sup>46</sup> Despite their dissents concerning the use of the aluminum tubes, the INR and the DOE both believed that Saddam Hussein was in fact pursuing WMDs.

The NIE states that, “The Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research (INR) believes that Saddam continues to want nuclear weapons and that available evidence indicates that Baghdad is pursuing at least a limited effort to maintain and acquire nuclear weapons-related capabilities.”<sup>47</sup> However, the INR does not go so far as to say that Iraq was taking a “comprehensive”<sup>48</sup> approach to acquire WMDs.

The DOE did agree with the claim that Saddam was attempting to reconstitute his pursuit of nuclear capabilities. It is assumed by Jervis in his book that the DOE believed that Saddam was using other means to develop WMDs. The issue was that the NIE never explored what these alternative means were if the DOE had any hypothesis at all.<sup>49</sup> It seems that the most important thing to the writers of the NIE was that the DOE agreed with the general conclusion, which was what most policymakers were concerned with.

Some of the assumptions made in the NIE were the result of technical or administrative failures. For instance, the assumption that Iraq was seeking uranium from

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<sup>46</sup>Ricks, Thomas E. 2006. “*Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*.” New York: Penguin Press, 90.

<sup>47</sup>*Key Judgments: Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction*, <https://irp.fas.org/cia/product/iraq-wmd.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 143.



Africa also happened to be considered by the INR as a “highly dubious”<sup>50</sup> claim. Jenkins explains, as quoted by Jervis, that “[his] discussions indicate that its analysts may have believed that Saddam was seeking uranium from Africa, a conclusion that was tenable because a technical failure led to their not receiving the cable from CIA that discredited these claims.”<sup>51</sup> This gross oversight could likely have been avoided if the NIE had been given more time to be written and if the analysts had put a larger effort into reviewing the intelligence they were referencing.

A compounding factor that increased the National Intelligence Council’s confidence was their supposed trump card. The writers of the NIE were told that a high-level source, believed to be Iraq’s Foreign Minister Naji Sabri, had given the IC information that confirmed many of their assertions. The only problem was the source was so sensitive that the information was unavailable to lower-level analysts. Tenet went so far as to say, “Now did this information make any difference in my thinking? You bet it did”<sup>52</sup> according to Jervis. The confidence of the top brass likely was likely to influence the opinions of the rest of the IC. The NIE was another example of an intelligence analysis process that was rushed and did not have time to be reassessed. Many in the IC believed that an NIE was not needed because of the steady flow of information.

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<sup>50</sup>*Key Judgments: Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction*, <https://irp.fas.org/cia/product/iraq-wmd.html>.

<sup>51</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 143.

<sup>52</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 127.

For George Tenet, the Director of the CIA and the head of the IC, war seemed to be inevitable and he was determined to support the policymakers by providing them, especially the president, with the necessary supportive intelligence. In his memoirs, Tenet admits that the decision to go to war seemed as if it had been made without representatives of the IC in the room.<sup>53</sup> The IC, including Tenet, were left feeling that they needed to catch up to policymakers.

Tenet eventually decided to fill the president's daily briefings with WMD scenarios when war seemed impending. He seemed insistent on showing the president everything he could.<sup>54</sup>

Tenet put a huge emphasis on pleasing the President to ensure the IC remained at the table. To achieve this goal, he had to demonstrate that the IC was willing to consider all WMD-related possibilities, even if some of them seemed ridiculous. Tenet and others at the CIA, based on the IC's underestimation of Iraq's WMDs during the Gulf War, feared that the administration was right that there was more going on than the IC knew. This too increased his willingness to consider all WMD possibilities, except of course their absence. The first time the Iraqi program was interrupted during the Gulf War, Iraq was only months away from a WMD.<sup>55</sup>

Another major disadvantage faced by the IC was an overall lack of HUMINT (Human Intelligence) in Iraq. HUMINT, which is intelligence gathered from human

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<sup>53</sup>Tenet, George, and Bill Harlow. 2007. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the Cia*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 308.

<sup>54</sup>Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 259.

<sup>55</sup>Tenet, George, and Bill Harlow. 2007. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the Cia*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 325.

sources by case officers and operatives, largely through the running of agents, has been a key aspect of CIA intelligence collection since the beginning of the Cold War. Intelligence gathered by CIA stations and the stations of allied countries was instrumental in averting nuclear war and eventually defeating the Soviets. However, during the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, the United States and its allies had almost no agents on the ground in Iraq.

Until very recently, it was not certain how many agents the Americans had in Iraq during the lead-up to the war. It was known that the British had five human sources. However, none of these sources claimed first-hand knowledge of the Iraqi's supposed WMD programs.<sup>56</sup> As it turned out, the CIA had two sources of information operating in Iraq, and one of those agents could only be contacted once every six months when the agent was out of the country.

The second source was arguably even less reliable, because the intelligence he gathered was communicated through coded writing in Yemen and was often outdated by the time it arrived.<sup>57</sup> According to Jenkins, as quoted by Jervis, "Compounding the problem, the IC did not realize how much depended on so few individuals, especially where biological weapons were concerned."<sup>58</sup>

As previously stated, this factor would come back to haunt analysts while writing the NIE and throughout the lead-up to the war. Before the ousting of UN inspectors from

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<sup>56</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 140.

<sup>57</sup>Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 49.

<sup>58</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 140.

Iraq in 1998 the IC had used the inspectors as the main source of intelligence gathering. The UN inspectors proved to have been more reliable than the sources that the UK and the US had in Iraq during the lead-up to the war. Although these British and American sources provided lots of intelligence, much of it ended up being wrong.

The lack of opportunities for HUMINT led to the extreme reliance on the few sources to which the IC had access to. In any other situation, these sources may have been considered to be dubious at best. One of the main examples of this was the source that was codenamed Curveball. Although there is some controversy regarding Curveball the general consensus strongly questions the credibility and reliability of the source which even at the time should have cast doubt on the intelligence he delivered. Jenkins writes, again quoted in Jervis's book, "Had he not appeared on the scene, the IC almost certainly would have assessed that while the regime was pursuing the ability to make BW, little could be said about the scope of the program or the existence of stockpiles."<sup>59</sup> Without Curveball it is very possible that the position of the IC would have been somewhat closer to the reality of the WMD situation in Iraq.

#### **IV. The Broader Political Environment:**

With or without evidence of Iraqi WMD, the United States and its key British ally were hungry for vengeance after the terrible events of 9/11. The 9/11 terrorist attacks had demonstrated to America and the world that no one was safe from the threats posed by irregular warfare and non-state actors. However, this did not mean that the

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 153.

Americans and the world were not looking for something or someone more tangible to blame. America and its Western allies were not prepared to fight exclusively non-state insurgents, so they decided to look towards adversarial states as a way of settling the score and ensuring the security of the West. After the invasion of Afghanistan, the Bush Administration began to set its sights on an old adversary, Saddam Hussein.

For George W. Bush, Saddam Hussein posed not only an existential threat against America and its values but also a very personal threat. During a trip in 1993 made by the senior Bush to Kuwait, a handful of terrorists were apprehended and arrested by Kuwaiti authorities. The arrested terrorists claimed to have been recruited by Iraqi Intelligence to attack Bush's motorcade using a bomb planted on the motorcade's route. If that had failed, one of the terrorists had been told to detonate a suicide belt.<sup>60</sup> Although the assassination attempt was foiled, President Bush would never forget the threat Saddam had posed to his father.

On top of his personal history with the Baathist dictator, many in Bush's Administration, including Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Rumsfeld, believed that Saddam was connected to global terrorists including Al-Qaeda. Wolfowitz even went so far as to propose that Saddam had been involved with the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Wolfowitz said that "It seemed unlikely that Al-Qaeda could have pulled off such a deviously orchestrated scheme all by themselves. Saddam, in the network of global terrorism, was 'the head of the snake.'<sup>61</sup> Even before the invasion of Afghanistan, many in Bush's Administration were already planning and proposing military action against Iraq and

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<sup>60</sup>Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 26.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 18.

believed that by attacking Iraq they would be sending a message to the rest of the world of what happens when one confronts the United States.

These individuals viewed Saddam as a loose end that needed to be cut. They believed that, like Al-Qaeda, Saddam Hussein and the Iraq WMD program posed both an existential and immediate threat to the security of the United States.<sup>62</sup> Although other states were considered in the decision-making process of how to expand the “War on Terror,” Iraq seemed like the best option to many in the Bush administration, including the president. Draper even argues that Iran and North Korea were only really mentioned as options following the suggestion of Condoleezza Rice.<sup>63</sup> Bush wanted to signal that he had not yet made a definite decision to go forward with Iraq although the likelihood of invading either of the other two options were extremely slim and not strongly considered.

Former President Bush has gone on record saying that even if there had been conclusive evidence that there were no WMDs in Iraq before the Invasion he still would have supported the war.<sup>64</sup> Bush truly believed that Saddam Hussein posed, if not a direct threat, then certainly a future threat to the United States. During the first year of Bush’s Presidency, the calls for war with Iraq within his administration only increased. Even before the decision to go to war was officially made, many of the conversations in

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<sup>62</sup>Tenet, George, and Bill Harlow. 2007. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the Cia*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 305.

<sup>63</sup>Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 48.

<sup>64</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 125.

the Bush Administration were much more concerned with the logistics of warfare than with debating the merits of going to war with Iraq at all.<sup>65</sup>

The political mood of the Bush White House concerning Iraq was inspired and informed by key members of the president's inner circle. In fact, a few key members were widely known as Iraq Hawks including Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle. Both Perle and Wolfowitz had been campaigning for the ousting of Saddam Hussein long before 9/11. However, 9/11 offered Perle, Wolfowitz, and their allies a new opportunity to make their aspirations a reality.

These Iraq Hawks truly believed that Hussein was not only a threat to the Iraqi people but also the United States. Wolfowitz told the Jerusalem Post according to Ricks, "The idea that we could live with another 20 years of stagnation in the Middle East that breeds this radicalism and breeds terrorism is, I think, just unacceptable- especially after September 11th."<sup>66</sup> The sentiment that was espoused in his interview with the Jerusalem Post was one that was shared by many Americans on both sides of the spectrum. The United States government came to believe that Islamist terrorism could not be ignored, and had to be confronted head-on. The Iraq Hawks specifically saw Iraq and the deposing of Saddam Hussein as a way to cut off the head of the snake when it came to threats against the United States. Although a connection between Saddam and Al-Qaeda would prove to be false, the Iraq Hawks became no less determined to rid the world of Saddam Hussein.

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 308.

<sup>66</sup>Ricks, Thomas E. 2006. "*Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*." New York: Penguin Press, 30.

However, besides having one key ally, the United Kingdom, the United States was largely on its own when it came to calls for war, especially after UN Inspections uncovered no evidence to support the claim that Saddam Hussein was developing WMDs. Even the people of Iraq who had been forced to live under Saddam's foot since the 1970s would end up largely not supporting the war effort which likely had some effect on the overall lack of HUMINT that was available to the United States and the United Kingdom. Many in Iraq had lost faith in the United States after the Gulf War. Following the end of the Gulf War, the senior Bush administration encouraged the people of Iraq to rise up and oust Saddam. Iraqi Shiites in the south and Iraqi Kurds in the north had been doing just that and resisting Hussein.<sup>67</sup>

Unfortunately, Saddam had not been left completely weakened by the Gulf War, as many in the Bush administration assumed, and used his recently returned forces from Kuwait to destroy both rebel groups. The American reaction may best be described by Ricks in his book when he writes that after "Having incited a rebellion against Saddam Hussein, the U.S. government stood by while the rebels were slaughtered."<sup>68</sup> Unsurprisingly the Iraqi people would not forget what had happened in 1991 and their view of the United States was one filled with distrust.

Following the 9/11 attacks, Wolfowitz and others in the Bush administration were convinced that a non-state organization was incapable of orchestrating and perpetrating an attack on the scale of 9/11 on their own. Wolfowitz may not have been alone in connecting the imaginary dots between Saddam and Al-Qaeda but he was definitely a

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 6.



champion of the theory. His theory was only strengthened by his lack of trust in the information that was being provided by the Intelligence Community.<sup>69</sup>

A lack of trust in the IC was something that was not uncommon within certain members of the Bush Administration. Key members of the administration, including the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz, believed that if the IC missed the signs before 9/11 it was very possible that there were other key security threats that the IC had missed as well. Draper writes that “If [Rumsfeld’s] deputies could demonstrate that the intelligence community was yet again miscalculating a threat--that Rumsfeld's people knew better than Tenet's--they had license to do so.”<sup>70</sup> Theoretically, these kinds of attempts to correct errors made by the IC in order to better assure the security of the United States could be considered “all well and good”. However, the information that Rumsfeld’s teams were using to show the failures of the IC was most if not all of the time incorrect. In fact, much of said information had been overlooked by the IC for a reason and had been deemed to be at best unsupported.

One example of this was Rumsfeld and his allies' continued belief that Iraq was supporting Al-Qaeda despite the fact that Al-Qaeda was fundamentally opposed to secularist governments like that of the Baathist Regime.<sup>71</sup> This fact was understood and stressed by the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, but was largely ignored by many in Bush’s inner circle. After 9/11 Wolfowitz had authorized a subordinate, Douglas Feith, to create an intelligence “Team B”<sup>72</sup> with the supposed

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>70</sup>Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 90.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 148

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 150.

purpose of further understanding the Al-Qaeda network and its potential connection to states.

In reality, the goal of the team would turn out to be finding a through-line from bin Laden to Hussein. In his attempt to find this through-line, Feith used information that had been discarded by the IC. For instance, a presentation made by one of Feith's team to Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and himself, claimed that Iraq was harboring (instead of imprisoning) known conspirator of the 1993 World Trade Center Bombing Abdul Rahman Yasin, that Saddam had control over parts of Kurdistan where Al-Qaeda one point had training camps, and that prolific Al-Qaeda member Mohamed Atta had met Iraqi intelligence officers in Prague.<sup>73</sup> None of these claims proved to be factual.

Another key player discounted by the IC as at best biased, but fully embraced by Rumsfeld, Cheney, Wolfowitz, and other members of the administration, was Ahmed Chalabi. Chalabi was an influential anti-Baathist Iraqi politician who was more than willing to tell the Iraq Hawks what they wanted to hear. Chalabi was a charismatic figure who quickly rose through the ranks of political power in the United States despite previously being dropped as a potential alternative to Saddam by the CIA.

In the 1990s the CIA had attempted to create dissent within Iraq leadership by supporting an alternative to Saddam and at the time Chalabi seemed to fit the bill. However, it quickly became apparent that Chalabi was not someone that the CIA could rely on or control. On top of this, Chalabi had a strong connection to Iranian Shiites.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, Ricks writes that “Chalabi also was able to introduce misinformation

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 126.

directly into the system. One senior military intelligence officer recalled being awed by Chalabi's ability to inject himself into the internal deliberations of the U.S. government. 'He always got access' during 2002 and 2003. 'His views always got where he wanted them to go.'<sup>75</sup>

Two of those loyal listeners were Douglas Feith and Paul Wolfowitz. Despite concerns within the IC regarding Chalabi's trustworthiness, Feith and other top members of the Pentagon were strong allies of him and shut down efforts to prevent Chalabi's access to important information.<sup>76</sup> Chalabi, according to Ricks, "described his allies in the U.S. government as being from the office of 'the vice president' and 'the office of the secretary of defense'<sup>77</sup>. His claims were not exaggerated.

The lack of HUMINT resources in Iraq that could inform the IC created a need for alternatives to explain what was happening inside Iraq. This need was something that Chalabi did not hesitate to fulfill by providing the IC and the Bush administration his own versions of intelligence. Obviously, Chalabi had his own interests in mind.

Chalabi's long-term goal was to replace Saddam and establish a Shia-led order in Iraq.<sup>78</sup> Encouraging the United States to go to war, he believed, would allow him to eventually assume control in Iraq. The Bush administration gladly accepted Chalabi's assistance and during the lead-up to the war, Chalabi's organization (as well as

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<sup>75</sup>Ricks, Thomas E. 2006. "*Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*." New York: Penguin Press, 56.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>78</sup>Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 126.

“transitional government”) the Iraqi National Congress (INC) got onto the State Department’s bankroll.

The INC’s intelligence collection program became the United States’ main pipeline between those in need of intelligence and Iraqi defectors.<sup>79</sup> At one point, Richard Perle even stated that, “The INC has been without question the single most important source of intelligence about Saddam”<sup>80</sup> according to Ricks. If Perle’s statement was in fact true, which it very likely was, it reflected a sad state of affairs when it came to intelligence resources on Iraq. Especially given that Chalabi and his organization were biased and at times untruthful with the information they provided. From the years 2000 to 2003 the United States ended up paying the INC more than 36 million dollars.

To the IC’s credit, it largely discounted the information that was provided by Chalabi and the INC. Unfortunately, as stated above, many key members of the Bush administration including the Office of the Vice President and top civilians in the Department of Defense as well as much of the popular media believed that Chalabi was a goldmine. Given that the main source of HUMINT information at the time was provided by the INC it is no surprise that much of the intelligence acted to support the possibility of invasion and was shoddy if not completely false.<sup>81</sup> It was in the INC’s best interest to convince the Bush administration of what they already wanted to be true by

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 144.

<sup>80</sup>Ricks, Thomas E. 2006. *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 57.

<sup>81</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 140.

demonstrating that Saddam was putting every resource and effort he could into his alleged WMD program.

Despite the fact that Saddam was facing a potential invasion by the United States and the United Kingdom his actions did reflect concern. In many ways the way Saddam Hussein behaved during the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq only gave the Bush administration further reasons to believe he did in fact have WMDs. According to Jervis "Saddam sought to maintain the appearance of WMD in order to keep power at home and deter Iran"<sup>82</sup>.

In reality, the situation in Iraq was far different than that assumed by the United States officially and unofficially. Saddam had been left weak after his failed invasion of Kuwait and years of economic sanctions. Overall, the United States' strategy of containing Saddam and the Baathists was largely successful, as argued by General Anthony Zinni (commander of the U.S. Central Command during *Operation Desert Fox*). Zinni even went so far as to argue that Saddam was no longer a regional threat.<sup>83</sup> In conversations with an interrogator after the war, Saddam claimed that he did not even consider the United States to be his enemy<sup>84</sup>. However, this claim should be taken with a grain of salt considering the Saddam regime's history with the United States. To achieve his goal of deterring Iran while simultaneously bringing about an end to economic sanctions (and then restarting his WMD programs) Saddam needed to have and enact a very nuanced strategy. Jervis writes that "This led to a difficult balancing act

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>83</sup>Ricks, Thomas E. 2006. "*Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*." New York: Penguin Press, 22.

<sup>84</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 148.

between the need to disarm to achieve sanctions relief while at the same time retaining a strategic deterrent<sup>85</sup>. Saddam largely failed on both accounts.

#### **V. Lessons learned from the performance of the intelligence community in setting the stage for the 2003 invasion of Iraq.**

In the intelligence community's attempt to ensure that, after 9/11, the United States would never be taken by surprise by an adversarial threat again, the IC expanded its view of what is possible. Members of the IC as well as the Bush administration began to see threats on all sides and, in many cases, they perceived threats that were not real.

For many in the IC and the Bush administration the possibility that Saddam Hussein could, after years of conflict and adversarial relations with the United States, not be a threat seemed highly improbable. It became common knowledge within the IC that Saddam had been attempting to procure nuclear weapons and because this common knowledge was considered to be undeniable dissent was frowned upon and seemed largely pointless.

There was also a sense within the IC that whether or not Saddam did in fact have WMDs the war was inevitable. It was what the president wanted and it was what the American people wanted, so the IC was not in a position to speak truth to power. Although the reasoning for these kinds of mistakes is understandable and the intention to protect the United States and its citizens is good, the actions of the IC contributed

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 148.

directly to the rationale for the invasion of Iraq, although not necessarily directly to the decision to invade and occupy the country.

During the process the IC was paradoxically too imaginative while at the same time not imaginative enough. When it came to considering potential threats, leaders in the IC as well as the Bush administration encouraged the IC and the nation to have almost limitless imagination. However, that same kind of encouragement did not apply to out of the box or even critical thinking when it came to discounting threats as unlikely or impossible. Jervis sums up this conundrum by saying that "...in one sense the IC was too imaginative about Iraq in putting together scattered and ambiguous information and so ended up speculating without realizing it was doing so. While one can legitimately reply that this kind of outrunning the evidence was not imaginative because the picture that resulted was a familiar one, the analysts were seeing a world beyond the incoming reports."<sup>86</sup>

The conclusion that this leads to is that although it is important to have some imagination, so that the security of the United States can be ensured in all situations, it must be disciplined and focused on a search for the truth. It must also not be used as an excuse to ignore reality and what is actually communicated in reports. Imagination should be informed by reality, not a fantasy of worst case scenarios, at least when it comes to dealing with real world situations that require the timely implementation of policy.

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<sup>86</sup>Jervis, Robert. 2010. *Why Intelligence Fails : Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 129.

How language is used has a profound effect on how things are perceived and this is no less true when it comes to the IC. There were multiple pivotal instances where language was not used in a way that would lead to unbiased results or even results that would reflect the reality of the threat that Saddam actually posed to the United States. When it came to writing the “Key Judgements” of the NIE, in many cases, contributors failed to use language that would reflect uncertainty or dissent. Generally, deliverables produced by the IC and the National Security Council (including NIEs) include the intentional use of ambiguous and uncertain phrases such as “on one hand” and “on the other hand”. After all, intelligence is not a game of certainty but rather probability.

George Tenet believes that one of the major failures occurred when NIE “Key Judgments” were expressed as opinions rather than their relationship to fact.<sup>87</sup> This contributed to how policy makers perceived the situation in Iraq as well as being used as the foundational “facts” that informed Colin Powell’s speech to the United Nations.<sup>88</sup> The use of more certain language very likely occurred as a response to pressure by the Bush administration. However, the role of the IC is to try and portray a holistic and genuine picture of a situation even in the face of political pressure. It is imperative that the IC does not overstate its level of certainty even if there is outside pressure to do so.

Another example of a misuse of language involved how members in the IC both in operations and analysis were told to look for information. Rather than ask for operatives and analysts to find and process information using language reflecting objective, fact-based assessments, they were told to specifically look for evidence of

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<sup>87</sup>Tenet, George, and Bill Harlow. 2007. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the Cia*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins, 327.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 372.



WMDs. This caused a large amount of information to be the product of confirmation bias (something that was explored in greater detail starting on page 16 of this paper) and the consideration of input that should have been discounted or caveated. Moving forward the IC should attempt to use more inquisitive language when in the collection phase until it is ascertained that something being searched for truly exists.

Specificity and intentionality of language are imperative to ensuring that the job of the IC is executed effectively and as intended. Using language that represents either over confidence or a lack of confidence can mislead policy makers and produce a false perception of reality. It can also deprive policy makers of knowing other possibilities or a more holistic interpretation of a situation. This can be extremely damaging to American integrity and assist in the lead up to unjustified conflict, as it was during the decision making process on whether or not to invade Iraq, or in a worse case it can result in serious security threats.

An overall lack of information supporting claims of WMDs in Iraq did not inspire curiosity as it should have, especially given that Curveball was offering to provide the trump card the IC and the administration were looking for. The information provided by Curveball was central to the NIE, which provided the backbone to that argument for an invasion of Iraq, and subsequently Powell's infamous speech to the United Nation. This is not to say that there was not any dissent or skepticism in regards to the integrity of Curveball's information as well as how trustworthy he was as an informant.

Tenet even acknowledges in his memoir that "Some of the collectors from our Directorate of Operations didn't like the way the case "felt"- they had a gut instinct that

there was something wrong with Curve Ball, but little more to go on.”<sup>89</sup> Whether Tenet was aware of it or not, this statement is somewhat of a half truth. According to Ricks, the CIA had been warned by the Germans that Curveball was a flawed if not untrustworthy source and there was concern regarding Curveball’s centrality to the IC’s position within the ranks of the CIA.<sup>90</sup>

When something seems, or at least should seem, to be too good to be true it is very possible that it is, in fact, too good to be true. At the very least, finding a silver bullet or receiving the exact information one is looking for on a gold platter should be met with skepticism. This is especially the case if one has been warned by multiple other sources that something is wrong and the source of the supposed solution cannot be trusted.

The saying “don’t look a gift horse in the mouth” should not apply when it comes to intelligence and national security. The failure caused by trusting Curveball and basing the majority of the IC’s position on the information he provided cannot solely be attributed to “confirmation bias”. True, “confirmation bias” very likely contributed to how susceptible many in the IC were to Curveball’s seduction. Desperation could also be a contributing factor to the use of Curveball by the IC. Up until Curveball reared his ugly head, or the IC reared it for him, information that supported the claims of Iraqi WMDs was scarce at best.<sup>91</sup> Curveball gave credence to the questionable intelligence that had

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 376.

<sup>90</sup>Ricks, Thomas E. 2006. *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 91.

<sup>91</sup>See footnote 39.

been previously acquired and the IC had, at that point, not found any other source that could play the role of a qualifier for the other information.

It does not matter what reason explains why Curveball, despite concerns within the American IC as well as within the German IC, was deemed to be trustworthy and reliable. The fact remains, Curveball was detrimental to the efforts of the IC to gauge the threat posed by Iraq. In the future the IC should always be skeptical and, no matter how attractive a source may seem to be, must always stare straight into the mouth of the gift horse. In almost all cases, one source should never be relied on so heavily, especially when it comes to justification for an invasion.

Another lesson learned from the Curveball fiasco is the importance of dissent. No matter what level of the hierarchy someone may be in, if an individual has an informed opinion that is shared by others in the organization it should be considered seriously. Always defaulting to the position of the majority is dangerous and at best can result in important information being missed. At worst the majority opinion, if not challenged, can lead to catastrophic decisions.

Although the IC was created to be politically impartial, it is perhaps inevitable that, from time to time, members of the IC, especially those nominated by the President and confirmed by Congress, will be swayed by White House expectations. However, for the IC to do its job correctly it must do its best to resist exterior pressure and politicization and when members of the IC are heavily influenced it can have grave consequences. One example of this was the lead up to the invasion of Iraq and the kinds of information that was assumed to be true as well as sought after.

The director of the Central Intelligence Agency George Tenet between 2000 and 2003 had two major disadvantages when it came to working with the Bush administration: he was a Democrat and he had been appointed by President Bill Clinton. For these reasons Tenet worked hard to please and gain the confidence of the new president. Robert Draper writes that “Scrambling to accommodate [President Bush], the agency under Tenet overhauled the Presidential Daily Brief as part of an effort to give the First Customer' what he wanted.”<sup>92</sup> Draper believes that Tenet attempted to appease the new president by sharing the information that Bush wanted to hear, which very likely lined up with what Bush wanted to be true about Iraq.

Still, the job of the Director of the CIA is not to appease partisan policymakers or the President of the United States. The CIA is intentionally a detached and unaligned civilian organization in order to avoid falling into a partisan trap. The role of the Director of the CIA is to oversee the collection of information to inform decision-makers, not to manufacture information that supports their views. It is imperative that future directors do not make the mistake of succumbing to outside political pressure, no matter what the circumstances might be. If a director cannot do this then they should resign to ensure the continued integrity of the position.

In all organizations leadership is decisively important and generally dictates culture and operations. The CIA is no exception. When leadership indicated a belief in Iraqi WMDs as well as entertained the idea of connections between the Baathists and Al-Qaeda it was taken as organizational policy and common knowledge. Although,

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<sup>92</sup>Draper, Robert. 2020. *To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America into Iraq*. New York: Penguin Press, 136.

without a doubt, all feasible possibilities should be explored and all credible sources should be investigated, it is important that leadership not show bias. As was explored earlier in this paper in an analysis of Jervis's work,<sup>93</sup> leadership's projection of bias likely misleads analysts and officers. Much of the information that was focused on by the CIA at the time was intelligence that would support the beliefs that were held by the higher ups in the organization as well as some of the beliefs held by the presidential administration.

However, "confirmation bias" was not the only reason information that supported commonly held sentiments in the IC and in the Executive Branch of the government was prioritized and sought after while information that cast doubt was given much less credence. Many analysts and officers in the CIA felt that there was little point in dissent or exploring alternative explanations for two main reasons. Their superiors seemed uninterested in alternative viewpoints and critical analysis and the prevailing sentiment was that the war was inevitable (it is very likely that the latter was the reason for the former).<sup>94</sup> This again demonstrates the importance of attempts at unbiased, critical, and open analysis and using intentional and particular language in all levels of CIA as well as the other organizations within the IC.

The goal of the CIA and the IC as a whole is to inform the United States government of threats to American security and American interest both domestically and abroad. It is an organization that exists to serve the American people by informing the government of the United States of the true intentions of state and non-state actors

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<sup>93</sup>See footnotes 33 through 36.

<sup>94</sup>See footnotes 33 and 40.

as well as giving nuanced and thoroughly analyzed accounts of international geopolitics. The CIA and the rest of the IC cannot fulfill its purpose if the IC as a whole does not attempt to stave off politicalization and forgoes critical thinking for easy answers that will appeal to the interests of policy makers.

Members of the IC must do everything they can to ensure that the organizations within the IC are not producing information through a biased lens that only sees what it wants to see or previously believed to be true. Much like in the world of science, when multiple sources have disproved a hypothesis it is necessary to consider other possibilities, not to double down on the failed thesis. An open and critical approach must occur from the top down within the IC and leaders must be intentional and clear with their expectations for the missions within their organizations as well as the language they use to express their findings.

### **Conclusion:**

Although there were undoubtedly influential actors, the decision to go to war in the case of Iraq was made solely by the Commander in Chief of the United States, President George W. Bush. Since Bush did not seek a formal “Declaration of War” Congressional approval was not required. However, Congress did vote to allow Bush to make the final decision regarding military action in Iraq a year before the invasion.<sup>95</sup>

President Bush, in the years following the war, as stated earlier in the paper<sup>96</sup>, would state that even if he had not believed there were WMDs in Iraq he still would

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<sup>95</sup>Dan, Dan. “Congress Says Yes to Iraq Resolution.” *CBS News*, CBS Interactive, 16 Oct. 2002, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/congress-says-yes-to-iraq-resolution/>.

<sup>96</sup>See footnote 64.

have directed the invasion. It is important to note that hindsight is 20/20 and it is impossible to know for sure if this claim would have proven to be true if things had been different. However, when it came to Saddam Hussein, Bush had unfinished business. The members of his inner circle were more than happy to help Bush solve the issue of Saddam once and for all.

After the 9/11 attacks, Americans wanted justice and individuals like Paul Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld believed that a war in Iraq could simultaneously fulfill the needs of the American people while also supporting their own agendas. Following the invasion of Afghanistan, Bush had signaled interest in expanding the “War on Terror” to his cabinet. The contenders for membership in what would become Bush’s “Axis of Evil”<sup>97</sup> of the 21st century were Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. Many individuals in the Bush administration, especially Paul Wolfowitz, had been calling for the ousting of Saddam since Bush's father, George H.W. Bush had made the decision not to support Iraqi insurgents militarily after the Gulf War. Rumblings that called for war with Iraq had been going on for decades within parts of the American political community, and the 9/11 attacks were the perfect catalyst to set the ball in motion according to Roberts and Draper as they explain in their books. All that was needed to justify war in Iraq was an excuse.

Beliefs regarding Iraqi nuclear procurement and Baathist ties to terrorist organizations provided the perfect justification. In his book, Draper describes Saddam as unfinished business for the new president; business that had been left behind by his

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<sup>97</sup>Glass, Andrew. “President Bush Cites 'Axis of Evil,' Jan. 29, 2002.” *POLITICO*, 29 Jan. 2019, <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/01/29/bush-axis-of-evil-2002-1127725>.

father. It did not take much convincing by members of the younger Bush's administration to take advantage of a situation that would allow him to succeed where his father had failed. Nothing in history is inevitable but the precedent for a war in Iraq was not new and the calls for war did not originate with the American IC.

The role of the American IC is not to legislate or create policy. Rather it is to gather and analyze information to inform policy makers. The question of whether or not the IC successfully did the job it was intended to do is debatable and explored in great detail by most of the authors used as sources for this paper, as well as many other statesmen and scholars. However, the question of the culpability of the IC in the decision making process, at least directly, is largely undisputed. This is not to say that the information that was provided by the IC was not influential in the decision making process or the planning process for the invasion of Iraq. All four authors would largely agree that the information that was provided by the IC oiled the gears of war but did not install them.

Rather than uncover the truth of Iraqi WMDs and what was occurring within Saddam's regime during the early 2000s, much of the information provided by the IC only compounded popular speculations and beliefs that were held by many members of the Bush administration. A number of key mistakes led a National Intelligence Estimate to conclude that Saddam Hussein either had or was close to having a WMD.

If analysts and officers within the IC did not fall victim to "confirmation bias" influenced by requests made by leadership, they may have been much less likely to find "proof" that supported these same requests. The search for and discovery of WMDs



was what was expected of the IC by the Bush administration. The goal was not to first and foremost understand holistically what was happening behind closed doors in Iraq. If the CIA had been less determined, or arguably less desperate, to find information that confirmed the presence of WMDs or the procurement of WMDs in Iraq it may have not put so much importance and emphasis on the intelligence provided by one source who would prove to be unreliable: Curveball.

According to the authors cited in this paper, the IC did not leave much room for dissenting opinions or the consideration of other perspectives. For many in the IC the idea that Saddam might not have had WMDs was unbelievable or at least pointless to entertain in the face of organizational and political pressure. The imagination of the IC was not disciplined by leadership and on the contrary was encouraged to run somewhat rampant by the Director of the CIA George Tenet who was determined to avoid a catastrophic event like 9/11 from blindsiding the CIA again at any cost. The irony is that these efforts led to the CIA overlooking what was right in front of them and assuming that something that they could not see must be there.

Not all of the IC believed that there was evidence to support the claim that Saddam Hussein was procuring or had procured WMDs. The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) was the only member of the IC that discredited the claim in the NIE that aluminum centrifuges, that had been sought after by the Iraqis, could be used for the refinement of uranium. However, INR's alternative conclusion was largely ignored by the rest of the NIE as well as policy-makers and the Bush administration. Another issue with the NIE, as George Tenet attests to in his

memoir and is discussed earlier in the paper, was the language that was used in the writing of the NIE.

Rather than using the customary language of “on one hand” and “but on the other hand” as well as gauging confidence levels more conservatively, the authors of the NIE decided to forgo traditional approaches. The language that was used demonstrated much more confidence than the IC really had in Iraqi WMDs but, as Draper explains, many in the IC believed that the war was inevitable and it was better to be wrong about not having WMDs than risk being wrong about having WMDs.<sup>98</sup> Although this position is circumstantially understandable, it is the job of the IC to provide intelligence it believes is to be correct and not what is expected or is convenient. Leadership has a responsibility to ensure that the organizations they are a part of are fulfilling the functions of the IC. If they are apathetic or express biases while ignoring other possibilities it can not be expected that those who work in the organization will act any differently.

The circumstances surrounding the writing of the NIE ensured that the document would be fundamentally flawed. George Tenet was tasked to initiate the NIE only a few weeks before it was due after succumbing to pressure from the administration. The Bush Administration wanted the NIE to be the groundwork for Congress’s assessment of Iraqi WMDs. The NIE was claimed by many to be the basis of many Congress members' vote to approve war powers for the Bush Administration in regards to Iraq in October of 2002.

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<sup>98</sup>See footnote 6.

The NIE, according to Tenet, had never been used before for the justification of an invasion of another country. However, it was not the IC that was arguing for going to war. It was members of Congress and the Bush administration who used information provided by the NIE to bolster their position and argument.

Tenet himself admits that if the IC had not have been rushed or there was a greater use of critical analysis during the writing of the NIE it would have been much harder for war critics to blame the IC in hindsight.<sup>99</sup> The NIE itself was also used as the basis of Secretary of State Colin Powell's speech to the United Nations Security Council during which he argued for the presence of WMDs in Iraq. The speech would end up being disastrous for Colin Powell who was well known as a man with integrity.

The entirety of the IC's efforts to do its job during the years between 2000 and 2003 were made much more complicated when the 9/11 attacks strengthened negative views of the IC held by key members of the Bush administration and other members of government. The argument went that if the IC had missed the signs before 9/11 what else had they been missing? This sentiment definitely plagued the IC and likely contributed to much of what has already been described regarding the mistakes made by the IC. However, it was equally prevalent and utilized by members of the Bush administration who saw an opportunity to entertain perspectives that had been discounted by the IC.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney were both outspoken in their mistrust of the IC and their skepticism regarding its overall

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<sup>99</sup>See footnote 7.

competence. Cheney seemed to never forgo an opportunity to remind his fellow administration members or the American public that the IC had been wrong about WMDs in Iraq during the lead up to the Gulf War. Under Rumsfeld the creation of an intelligence “Team B” was authorized for the purpose of connecting Saddam to Al-Qaeda using in part intelligence they believe the IC had neglected and overlooked.<sup>100</sup> Much of this intelligence had been discounted by the IC because it had either been proven false or could not be verified but “Team B” led by Doug Feith had been instilled with the same mistrust of the IC as their bosses.

This was not the only instance of distrust of the IC contributing to the error of using “alternative intelligence” that proved to be false and have dangerous consequences. This combined with the CIA’s lack of HUMINT intelligence in Iraq created an opportunity for Ahmed Chalabi and his organization the Iraqi National Conference. The INC, with State Department funding, would end up being the American Government’s main source of HUMINT intelligence during the lead up to the Iraq War.<sup>101</sup>

Chalabi wanted to be the American replacement for Saddam and it is therefore unsurprising that much of the information provided by the INC was biased if not false or misleading. The bankrolling of the INC was a disastrous decision if the intention of the United States government was to actually understand what was going on in Iraq. Just because someone is the enemy of one's enemy does not mean that they are trustworthy or one's friend. Chalabi had been lobbying congress for years at this point and had already accumulated powerful friends.

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<sup>100</sup>See footnote 72.

<sup>101</sup>See footnote 80.

It seems in retrospect many members of Congress, the IC, and the Bush administration were drawn away from truth and the search for truth by political and social pressures, pressures that originated from the American public as well as from within the Bush administration and much of the Republican party. Key members of the Bush administration saw the brave new world that was triggered by the 9/11 attacks as an opportunity to deal with Saddam Hussein once and for all while also creating an easy political victory through the development of democracies in a region of the world that has had a difficult history with democracy as a form of government.

Many in the administration believed that the toppling of Saddam Hussein combined with the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan would bring forth a new era of democracy while also neutralizing any threats from non-state actors to the security of the United States in the region. The benefits seemed to outweigh the costs and to those who were advocating for war, truth was not as important as ensuring that their goals would be met.

The IC, in conclusion, would become a major source of justification for war. Indeed, during the lead up to the war it would be tasked primarily with finding evidence to support the invasion. This was not, to say the least, a proud or even honorable episode in the post-World War II history of the IC. Still, the conclusion here is that the United States under President George W. Bush would have invaded and occupied Iraq in early 2003 even if the IC had done its job well and even if it had told the president that there was no evidence of Iraq possessing WMDs.

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