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## The Bush Deceit

By *Peter D. Zimmerman*

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It was not just 16 words. It was every word concerning Iraq's nuclear weapons program in George W. Bush's 2003 State of the Union speech.

▼ **ADVERTISING** The president's principal argument for going to war -- to prevent a "smoking gun that would appear as a mushroom cloud" -- was based on bad intelligence that was misused while good intelligence was ignored.

Available evidence demonstrates that Saddam Hussein, an evil man who should have been evicted in 1991, lacked a serious nuclear weapons program in 2003. And if Mr. Bush had not held out the threat of Iraqi nuclear weapons "within months," it is doubtful that Congress would have given him a blank check.

How can one conjure up a benign explanation for the president's assertions?

The claim that Niger was selling uranium was based on disputed intelligence, since retracted by the White House and CIA. The National Intelligence Estimate on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction carried prominent warnings that knowledgeable agencies and analysts dissented from its conclusions. It is hard to believe that national security adviser Condoleezza Rice or her deputy, Stephen J. Hadley, missed or forgot about the red flags.

If the Bush administration had been wrong only about the Niger purchase, it would have indicated carelessness. But the references to nuclear weapons, taken as a whole, indicate dissatisfaction with the truth of the matter and a disregard for inconvenient facts.


Political leaders must not tell intelligence analysts what to write; the intelligence services cannot tell the elected decision maker what to do. The president, of course, is free to disregard intelligence, but he is not free to lie about it -- either directly, indirectly or by innuendo -- when making the case for war.

President Bush said that in the early 1990s Iraq "had an advanced nuclear weapons development program, had a design for a nuclear weapon and was working on five different methods of enriching uranium for a bomb." Not exactly.

Nuclear weapons experts serving as inspectors for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) called the bomb "design" more of a parts list than a description of a buildable device. The five ways to enrich uranium really boiled down to two -- electromagnetic separation and gas centrifuges, neither working well. Iraq's crude experiments in the 1990s showed that it was a very long way from nuclear success.

President Bush said that Iraq had sought to buy "high-strength aluminum tubes" to be used in gas centrifuges to make bomb-grade uranium. The proliferation experts at the Department of Energy could not comment publicly, but they dissented privately. The inspectors of the IAEA produced clear evidence of the truth: rocket bodies, not nuclear


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weapons. The tubes could be used for centrifuges only after lengthy and complex reworking. The facts had been available to the White House for months, as declassified excerpts from an October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate demonstrate.

The current President Bush was not the first leader to take the United States to war with Iraq using phony intelligence.

In September 1990 his father's administration claimed that Iraq had hundreds of tanks and 300,000 troops in Kuwait massed on the Saudi border. But independent analysis by me and a colleague, using extremely sharp Soviet satellite photos, showed no evidence whatever of a significant Iraqi force in Kuwait. Nonetheless, in 1990 the American people were told that an attack on Saudi Arabia was imminent.

Postwar analysis showed that the independent analysis published in this country in the St. Petersburg Times was dead accurate: There were not 300,000 but fewer than 100,000 Iraqi troops and only a few Iraqi tanks in Kuwait.

George W. Bush's backing and filling, his staff's confused explanations, revised explanations and new explanations, plus the immutable fact that most of his arguments for war in Iraq were misleading, have seriously damaged his credibility abroad and are eroding it at home.

When an American president needs to take the nation to war, Americans must be able to trust him and must believe that the case for conflict is sound. The next time Bush wants to use armed force to preempt or prevent an attack on this country, he will have to prove his case far more completely than before. Two presidents of the United States have forfeited the benefit of the doubt.

*The writer, a physicist, was chief scientist of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and science adviser for arms control at the State Department during the Clinton administration.*

*He will answer questions about this column during a Live Online discussion at 4 p.m. today at [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).*

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