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For Wednesday, February 12, 2003

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Hard To Believe

Probably the toughest thing for most Americans to do is to recognize that their own government is deliberately deceiving them. Americans have a tendency to place implicit faith in their leaders.

Unfortunately, there have been too many instances of government deception for me to overcome skepticism. The Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which plunged us into a real war in Vietnam, was based on an incident that never happened. In the buildup to the first Gulf War, two major deceptions were practiced on the American people. One is the infamous tale of Iraqi soldiers yanking babies out of incubators. It never happened. The other is the claim that Iraqi forces were massing for an invasion of Saudi Arabia. That, too, never occurred.

The fact that Saddam Hussein lacks credibility doesn't mean that President Bush and his administration have it. They, too, have been engaging in deception. Both Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell continue to claim that Iraq has a nuclear weapons program. The nuclear inspectors, however, say they have found no evidence of any nuclear weapons program. Moreover, a top Iraqi nuclear scientist who defected to Canada (and therefore has no obligation to tell American officials what they want to hear) broke his silence recently. He was in Iraq up until 1998.

He said Iraq was so devastated by the war that scientists working on the nuclear program were all pulled off and reassigned to help rebuild the country's infrastructure. Dr. Imad Khadduri, now a college instructor in Toronto, said, "All we had after the war from that nuclear program were ruins, memoirs and reports of what we had done ... on the nuclear weapon side, I am more than definitely sure nothing has been done." In an interview with Reuters, he said further, "For Bush to continue brandishing this image of a superhuman Iraqi nuclear power program is a great

fallacious information."

Once again, Powell brought up the aluminum tubes as alleged evidence of Iraq's nuclear program. Technical experts say, however, that the kind of tubes necessary for a nuclear device must not be anodized. Yet the tubes Iraq tried to buy were specifically ordered to be anodized. Again, the nuclear inspectors agree with Iraq and not with Bush and Powell.

Bush has repeatedly cited the 1988 gassing of Kurds in Halabja as evidence of Iraqi cruelty. Recently, Stephen C. Pelletiere, a former CIA analyst, has reminded us of a Defense Intelligence Study that concluded that (1) the Kurds were casualties in a battle for the city between Iraqi and Iranian forces and not the object of the attack; and (2) that it was the Iranian gas that killed the Kurds.

I remember reading a story in The Washington Post about this report. Now, one of two things is inescapable: Either the U.S. government was lying when it issued the report, or the president and his people are lying today when they blame it on Iraq. It has to be one or the other.

As for Powell's dog-and-pony show, the satellite photos and the alleged voice intercepts prove nothing, and both can be easily fabricated. If you don't think American intelligence agencies indulge in fabrications and forgeries, then you have a lot of reading to do on the history of those agencies. The rest of his presentation was based on "anonymous sources" and defectors who, as any veteran intelligence officer will tell you, always have to be taken with a grain of salt. Since their request for asylum depends on the intelligence agency's recommendation, they have a tendency to say what they know the intelligence people want to hear.

In the year 2003, it is way too late for Americans to view their government as a benign big daddy who always tells the truth and always has their best interests in mind. Sadly, government just doesn't work that way. The bottom line is that Iraq is not a threat to the United States, but it does have oil that's not now controlled by any American or British company.

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