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## Interviews

# Weapons of Misperception

Kenneth M. Pollack, the author of "Spies, Lies, and Weapons: What Went Wrong," explains how the road to war with Iraq was paved with misleading and manipulated intelligence.

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In March of 2003, when America entered into war against Iraq, did Saddam Hussein pose an imminent threat? Theories about this question abound, but the tide of opinion is turning toward "no." As months go by with little sign of any weapons of mass destruction, and as new evidence surfaces that the Bush Administration relied on false or manipulated intelligence to support its objectives, the reasoning behind America's assault on Iraq is increasingly coming to seem less sound. Even Kenneth Pollack, whose influential book *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq* (2002) swayed a number of officials to join the call for war, has now amended his stance regarding Saddam's possession of weapons of mass destruction. In "[Spies, Lies, and Weapons: What Went Wrong](#)" (March *Atlantic*) he argues that Saddam most likely scaled back his weapons programs in 1996—keeping only the minimum amount of material necessary to restart the programs at some point in the future—and that the threat Saddam posed was likely far less dire than most imagined.

Based on a review of the available information and on his knowledge from time spent as an analyst for the CIA and as a member of the National Security Council for two terms, Pollack now believes that experts and observers the world over were seriously mistaken regarding Iraq. After a period in 1994-1995 during which key discoveries, defections, and disclosures revealed the extent of Iraq's continued efforts to obtain weapons of mass destruction, Saddam may have recognized the degree to which those programs were hindering his efforts to get sanctions lifted. At this point, Pollack argues, Saddam likely reduced his programs and destroyed his weapons, retaining only a very limited research-and-development capability while ensuring that teams of scientists were kept together, in anticipation of one day restarting the programs.

If this is indeed what happened, how did the world, and particularly the world's top intelligence agencies, miss such a crucial turn of events? The simple answer, Pollack suggests, is that we never considered the possibility. The intelligence community made what might be called an "informed misperception"—based on what was known about Saddam, it

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was reasonable to assume that he would never willingly give up his weapons. After the UN inspectors were withdrawn from Iraq in 1998, any information the intelligence agencies received was colored by the unchecked belief that Saddam would continue to pursue weapons whatever the cost. Without inspectors on the ground, the agencies were forced to rely more heavily on defectors' reports for information on Saddam's programs—many of which now seem to be false.

Pollack does not suggest, however, that the seemingly false pretenses under which the U.S. entered Iraq were all, or even mostly, the intelligence community's fault. His most scathing criticism falls on the Bush Administration and, particularly, its tendency to misstate the facts of the case when trying to persuade the country to go to war. In his eyes, the Administration consistently engaged in "creative omission," overstating the imminence of the Iraqi threat, even though it had evidence to the contrary. "The President is responsible for serving the entire nation," Pollack writes. "Only the Administration has access to all the information available to various agencies of the U.S. government—and withholding or downplaying some of that information for its own purposes is a betrayal of that responsibility."

Kenneth Pollack is the director of research at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. He was an Iran-Iraq military analyst for the CIA, and the director of Persian Gulf Affairs and Near East and South Asian Affairs for the National Security Council.

We spoke by telephone on December 30.

—Elizabeth Shelburne

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**In your piece, "Spies, Lies and Weapons," you argue that we fundamentally misjudged Saddam's weapons of mass destruction program—that, in fact, he had scaled his programs back to the point of almost nonexistence. Can you talk a little bit about why you think this?**

For this article, I went back over the evidence that we had throughout the 1980s and 1990s and compared it with the information that is starting to trickle out of Iraq—such as what has been learned in the debriefings of Iraq scientists, what David Kay, of the Iraqi Survey Group, and his team have found, and other pieces of information that have surfaced. Prior to 1996, it looks like Saddam was trying to hold on to the maximum amount of his programs that he could. He was certainly trying to maintain a major research-and-development capability, and also a production capability that would allow him to reconstitute his WMD arsenal at any time, should he have chosen to do so. In this 1995-1996 time frame, it seems that Saddam realized that this effort was becoming counterproductive. More and more of it was being discovered by the United Nations. Hussein Kamel, his son-in-law and the head of the WMD programs, defected to the West, which caused the Iraqis to turn over huge amounts of documents. As a result of that whole fiasco, the UNSCOM inspectors learned a tremendous amount about the Iraqi efforts to conceal the WMD programs. There were a number of other important discoveries during that time. All of this made it almost impossible to get the sanctions lifted, which was, of course, Saddam's primary goal. So, it seems to have been

the case that probably in 1996, Saddam made an important decision. He shifted from trying to maintain the maximum possible WMD programs to simply trying to maintain the minimum necessary to, at some point in the future, reconstitute them *after* the sanctions were lifted.

**You mention that this widespread and seemingly incorrect perception began in the late 1990s, predating the current Bush Administration. You also mention that you were surprised during your second stint at the NSC at the dramatic change in the intelligence analysis of Saddam's WMD capabilities. How did the consensus move from being unsure of the presence of WMD in Iraq to being convinced of it?**

I and others in the Clinton Administration saw an important change in the U.S. perspective on Iraq's WMD. In the mid-1990s, the intelligence community was convinced that the Iraqis were maintaining WMD capabilities, research and development, productions, and probably some weapons. But there wasn't a tremendous amount of fear because there was a widespread belief that the nuclear program was probably dormant. In the late 1990s, however, there was a tremendous amount of anxiety in the intelligence community, because there was a belief that the nuclear program had been reconstituted and that the Iraqis were making much greater progress in acquiring a nuclear weapon than they had before. As best I can tell, this change in belief was because of a combination of factors.

Probably the most important of these was the loss of the UN inspectors. At the time, obviously, we knew that losing the UN inspectors would be losing an important piece of the intelligence puzzle; but I don't think anyone realized just how big a piece that was. The UN inspectors had a tremendous capacity to watch what the Iraqis were doing. They were on the ground in Iraq; they had access to sights that neither U.S. intelligence nor any other intelligence service had; they were constantly speaking to Iraqis; they had a very large team that did nothing but try to check every jot and tittle of every document that the Iraqis presented. They had a tremendous collection capability and a tremendous analytic capability against Iraq. When the inspectors were pulled out, all that was lost.

There were also other important elements of what the UNSCOM inspectors did that were extremely important. For example, when a Western intelligence agency received a report—usually from a human source, but sometimes from a technical one—that suggested that there was WMD activity at a particular location, you could give that to the UNSCOM inspectors and they would go and check it out. They would come back and say, "Here's what we found. We found this, but we didn't find that." Or, "Yeah, something suspicious is maybe going on." Or sometimes, "it looked completely clean to us." If nothing else, this was a very good way of establishing on-the-ground truth about the different facilities. It was also an important source of reassurance, especially on the nuclear front. Since it's hard to keep a nuclear program secret, you could send the UNSCOM inspectors to certain places. They could bring their technical instruments and determine if there was radioactive material at the facility. UNSCOM activities were a very important check on things.

When the inspectors left Iraq, however, and that capability was lost, all of a sudden you lost 90 percent of your ability to collect intelligence on Iraq's WMD programs. You had no independent or, for lack of a better

term, objective way of vetting reports. In addition, because you weren't getting information from the inspectors to begin with, the Western intelligence agencies became desperate for information. They started to look much harder at defector reporting.

In the late 1990s, you had more defectors coming out of Iraq who were telling the intelligence communities all kinds of very disconcerting things about progress that the Iraqis were making. In retrospect, many of the reports seem very questionable. Many of them indicated that the Iraqis were reconstituting their nuclear program, were making much greater progress on biological weapons, were doing very aggressive research and development, and had restarted production facilities. All of these are things that the U.S. has yet to actually find concrete evidence of in Iraq. But, because you didn't have UNSCOM around, this was really the only information out there. The loss of the inspectors meant that the intelligence community came to rely more and more heavily on the defectors' reports and had less and less ability to actually check on their truthfulness.

**So then, this belief that Saddam had reconstituted his nuclear weapons program came from defector reports?**

By and large, yes.

**It's surprising to me that there wasn't a move to put some sort of more rigorous questioning or internal vetting into place. Was there no movement toward that in the CIA or other intelligence organizations?**

The intelligence agencies did vet these defectors as well as they possibly could. They actually disregarded the reports of many of the defectors who came out of Iraq. There were all kinds of people coming out of Iraq, with all kinds of wild stories about what Saddam was up to. Some of those reports were discounted entirely because the intelligence community didn't trust the people. My guess is that only a quarter to a third of the defector reporting was ever believed. It's just that at the moment, given what we've found in Iraq, it looks like even that number was too high.

Part of the problem is trying to establish the reliability of a source. If somebody claims to be a nuclear physicist, what do they know about nuclear physics? You also want to ask about whether the information they're providing matches up with other sources. In an ideal world, you'd like to be able to compare the reporting of a defector against things that you absolutely know to be true. The inspectors gave that kind of credibility.

**Were there people in the intelligence agencies who said, we just don't have enough information to have an opinion or to be able to ascertain what the true story is?**

Certainly some people were more cautious than others. A very good example of that is the State Department's intelligence shop, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, which is referred to as INR. INR dissented on the reconstitution of Iraq's nuclear program. They felt the evidence was not persuasive enough.

A couple of things are worth keeping in mind here. The first is that, in 1991, the entire U.S. intelligence community had been fooled by Iraq—in

the other way. The Iraqis had a massive nuclear-weapons program and were much closer to a weapon than anyone had suspected. At that time, INR was the worst about saying that the Iraqis had absolutely nothing. In fact, INR refused to concede that the Iraqis even had a nuclear-weapons program at all. So this time around, the idea that INR was again the one saying that the Iraqis weren't threatening—didn't have a program—and that everything was dormant, just seemed like more of the same. In some cases, it was literally the same analysts at INR who had made the judgment in 1991 that proved to be so horribly wrong. Because of this, a lot of people in the intelligence community simply discounted them. Their feeling was that INR never thinks the Iraqis have nuclear weapons. They were wrong last time and they are wrong this time.

The context of all this is actually an important second element of this story. It is important to remember the mindset of most analysts on Iraq. The Iraqis had a track record; they had consistently demonstrated that they were absolutely determined to acquire weapons of mass destruction. If my analysis is correct and they shifted over to dismantling their WMD programs in 1996, that would be the first time that they really broke from the past pattern.

The fact that we didn't have very good information this time was not an obvious signal that he was doing something different and had chosen to disband many of the programs. It seemed simply to be a sign that he had gotten even better at hiding them from us. Of course, it is important to remember that what we have found in Iraq does indicate that the Iraqis were retaining programs. It is not the case the Iraqis dismantled everything—it's just that they dismantled most. What they kept was only a residual element that would enable them to reconstitute at some point in the future. The weapons were clearly much less threatening than the U.S. intelligence believed them to be, but it's not as if they didn't have any WMD programs at all.

**You too were a believer in the idea that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. How did that happen and on what evidence did you come to that conclusion?**

My evidence came straight from the intelligence community. As an analyst at the CIA and as a member of the NSC when Hussein Kamel defected, everything I saw indicated that the Iraqis still had these programs. When I went back to the NSC in the late 1990s, I was simply relying on the intelligence community to tell me what the right answer was. I did not simply accept their judgment uncritically, however. I did press them, and I asked them why they thought what they thought. They seemed to have reasonable answers and sources out there. I pressed them on why they believed their sources, and they responded with what seemed like a reasonable set of suppositions. I was certainly not alone in this—this was a consensus among the U.S. government, it was a consensus among the UN inspectors, it was a consensus of American experts outside the U.S. government. In fact, it was a consensus in the entire international community.

It's important to remember that any intelligence service or country with the ability to monitor Iraq and its weapons programs—Germany, France, Britain, Russia, Israel—was a hundred percent certain that Saddam had these programs. There may have been some debate over just how aggressive they were or how far along they were. The Germans were the

most alarmist of all on the subject of a nuclear weapon. They thought the Iraqis might have one in as little as two or three years. Our own intelligence community tended to be a little more conservative; they thought it was more like four to six years away—or five to seven. But no one doubted that Saddam had these weapons.

**Your book, *The Threatening Storm*, argued that we would eventually have to go to war in order to remove Saddam and keep him from acquiring nuclear weapons. The book was said to have been very useful to the Bush Administration in the run-up to war. Can you tell me how and why it was helpful? Was the book's argument ever misrepresented?**

I think there were a lot of people who did nothing but read the subtitle to the book, which was *The Case for Invading Iraq*. I made it very clear that while I did have one belief in common with Bush Administration, which was that it would eventually be necessary to go to war to prevent Saddam Hussein from acquiring nuclear weapons, I had very different ideas about why the war was necessary, how it should be fought, and what the United States needed to do to deal with all the unintended consequences that might result. For example, I never believed that it was necessary for the United States to go to war as early as 2003. I did not believe the threat was imminent.

I also thought that it was critical for the United States to do a whole bunch of important things first. We needed to deal with the war on terrorism, get the Middle East peace process back on track, and develop a comprehensive plan for the reconstruction of Iraq. All of these were major sections in my book. The case I made for war was very different from the case the Bush Administration made for war. There was a lot in my book that would be critical of the Bush Administration's actual run-up to war and that argued against the arguments that the Bush Administration were making.

**So then, in some ways, your argument was misrepresented?**

I certainly can't point to any Bush Administration official who held up my book and misrepresented it. But it certainly was the case that a lot of people misunderstood what my case for war was. In fact, my case for war was as much a critique of the Bush Administration and an argument against what the Bush Administration was doing as it was an argument for it. One of my most important points was that going to war was a potentially very messy undertaking that had all kinds of big problems associated with it. I argued that it was critical, therefore, that the United States do everything it could to prevent those unforeseen, potential problems from arising before we went to war. If we didn't, we would just end up substituting one set of problems for another.

**And would you say that's come to pass?**

Certainly we have created a whole lot of problems that we didn't need to. Two of them come to mind. One, I think that clearly we should have and could have done a much better job planning for post-war reconstruction. Of course, the wonderful companion piece by James Fallows points out that there was a tremendous amount of good planning that *was* going on within the U.S. government, but that it was the hubris of certain other individuals within the government that caused us to simply disregard all

those plans. My own perspective and the one you get from reading Jim's piece is that the vast majority of problems that we are currently experiencing in post-war Iraq were entirely avoidable. This did not need to be as messy, as dangerous, as deadly, and as expensive as it has proved to be.

Another problem is that many of the troubles we are experiencing in the Middle East are the result of the Administration's absolute unwillingness to engage in the Middle East peace process before going to war with Iraq. Their argument was always that the road to Jerusalem ran through Baghdad. My argument was the exact opposite—the road to Baghdad needed to run through Jerusalem. That wasn't to say that you needed a peace agreement before you could go to war with Saddam Hussein. I thought that was unlikely and unnecessary. But we did need to get the negotiations back on track. I think we could have avoided a lot of the violence, tension, and animosities in the Middle East today if we'd pursued that route rather than the one we did.

**You mention that you saw an earlier generation of analysts mistakenly assess the progress Saddam had made on a nuclear weapon before 1991. Looking back, did you see any of the same mistakes being made by analysts from the late nineties until the war albeit in the other direction?**

In both cases, the analysts had a certain set of preconceptions. This is always the case and is inevitable in analysis work. Having been an analyst myself, I don't say it as a judgment against analysts—that somehow they were not doing their job. Analysts always have to examine their assumptions, but you wouldn't be a human being if you didn't have a set of them. To be honest, you wouldn't be a very good analyst if you didn't have them. You have to have a theory about what is going on when you go in. You have to be willing to challenge the theory and be willing to change it when there is disconfirming evidence, but you have to have some kind of overarching theory.

Before 1991, the theory of the technical analysts was that the Iraqis were not very good at things, they were terribly inefficient, their scientists weren't very skilled or knowledgeable—it was a Third World country that really didn't have the capability to build a nuclear weapon. In particular, one of the problems was that many of these analysts were mirror imaging, which is a tremendous problem in Western analysis of the Middle East. It's analysts saying, If we were them, this is the way we would do it. The problem is, of course, that we aren't them and they don't do things the way we would.

In 1991, we found that they had taken a number of different routes, many of which were much cruder than the ones we would have used. In some cases, they were using technology that was considered obsolete, but that nevertheless was perfectly useful. One of the most important methods that they were using to enrich uranium was one of the methods that the United States had used during World War II. That has been superseded many times over, so the assumption was that nobody would do it that way now. But if you were a country that didn't have the technology, resources, and skill, maybe you *would* do it that way. Nobody was thinking about it in those terms.

This time around, in the late 1990s, the assumptions were much better

founded. The assumptions were that Saddam Hussein is absolutely determined to acquire weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons. That set of assumptions clearly colored judgments on everything else. If someone came out and said, "Saddam Hussein has a nuclear bomb," he was more likely to be believed than the person who came out and said, "Saddam has nothing, he doesn't even want a nuclear weapon anymore."

**So there would have been very few, if any, people, who ever posited, even as a hypothetical, that Iraq didn't have any imminent WMD programs?**

I can't think of anyone who did not believe that the Iraqis had a weapons of mass destruction program. There was simply no one.

**Around 1994-1995, UNSCOM inspectors, who had been in the country since 1991, began to think they were done in Iraq—that they had found all the weapons there were to find and that Iraq no longer had any WMD capabilities. You mention that many intelligence agencies disagreed with them. Why did UNSCOM think their job was done? Why did the intelligence services disagree?**

UNSCOM inspectors had gone into Iraq and spent two or three years searching around. They thought they'd pretty much gotten everything that was out there. In retrospect, even from the vantage point of 1996, it was clear that the Iraqis had figured out how to fool the UNSCOM inspectors. They had changed the way that they were operating and they were keeping UNSCOM from seeing things. The intelligence services, on the other hand, were getting information that indicated that the inspectors were getting fooled. The analysts had seen the Iraqis do this before and they simply believed that the Iraqis were doing it again.

In this case, they were right. The preconceived notions of the analysts were absolutely correct. It was UNSCOM that was wrong. The Iraqis did still have the programs. All of that came out in the 1995-1996 time frame, when Hussein Kamel defected and there were a series of other revelations where UNSCOM and foreign-intelligence services caught the Iraqis red-handed with SCUD production facilities, a complete biological production facility, all kinds of illegal trades and transactions, and purchases abroad. After this, the inspectors realized how completely wrong they had been—like the saying "fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." They really thought they had disarmed the Iraqis. They wanted to transition the files and were actually saying nasty things about the U.S. having an obsession with the Iraqis. After 1995-1996, the inspectors turned 180 degrees. From then on, they too were absolutely convinced that Saddam would stop at nothing to acquire the weapons. They were convinced they had an enormous problem—a problem that would probably never go away as long as Saddam Hussein was in power.

**How were they so duped? If they were the only people on the ground, the only ones charged with finding the weapons, how did they get the situation so wrong?**

The Iraqis are very good at this sort of thing. They're very good at counterintelligence—they infiltrated the UNSCOM operation, they had agents and friends in all kind of foreign governments who provided them

with information and tip-offs regarding UNSCOM. As a result, the UNSCOM people themselves believe that out of 250 no-notice inspections, only six of them ever actually surprised the Iraqis, which is incredible.

Beyond that, they also just took a whole lot of preventative measures. They did bury some stuff, they did break programs up, they did assign personnel to seemingly innocuous programs, such as hoof and mouth vaccines. But they kept whole teams together and they all knew that at some point Saddam would tell them to start working on something like anthrax.

In other cases, they set up completely legitimate facilities, which they knew could some day be transitioned over to making weapons of mass destruction. But for the moment, they were making baby milk or something along those lines.

### **What did UNSCOM do after 1995-96 to prevent the same thing from happening again?**

After 1995-96, UNSCOM was simply much more aggressive in how it went about things. Also, they started with a different set of assumptions. (We're back to these assumptions and why they are important.) They were no longer skeptical of what the U.S. and other intelligence agencies said about Iraq and were no longer agnostic about whether or not the Iraqis had weapons. They became very supportive of Western intelligence agencies and the materials they were finding. They were certain that the Iraqis were hiding things, which caused them to change both their method of operation and their approach to looking for weapons in Iraq.

One of the most important things they did was to go after the concealment mechanism. UNSCOM realized that they might not be able to get at the programs themselves, but they could start by going after the methods and organizations that the Iraqis were using to hide them. They thought if they could get that, then maybe they could get at the weapons themselves. UNSCOM went after them to try to break open Iraq's hidden doors.

### **You mention that the CIA and other intelligence operations only had meager assets in Iraq. What exactly does "meager assets" mean?**

Iraq was an extremely difficult environment for any foreign intelligence agency to operate in. Iraq was a closed, totalitarian society. Kanan Makiya, an Iraqi expatriate, had the wonderful phrase, the Republic of Fear. Saddam had created a Stalinist, self-policing society, where the people were so terrified that every word they uttered was being heard by some Iraqi authority that they just wouldn't say anything.

Foreigners in Iraq were tailed and harassed. In the United States or other parts of the world, they want to keep tabs on those they believe are foreign intelligences operators. But, they do it surreptitiously. In Iraq, it was very clear—you had someone walking fifty feet behind you at all times. If you did anything the Iraqis didn't like, they started harassing you. They'd throw you out of the country, they'd beat you up, they'd break into your home. They would make it very clear that if you kept doing things they didn't want, you could pay a very heavy price for it. They tapped all of the outgoing phone lines and tried to keep tabs on all the communication going into and out of Iraq.

They had an enormous network of informers throughout the country. Most Iraqis believe that in a country of 24 million people, 2 to 4 million of those people were on the payroll of various government organizations. Whether it was true or not doesn't matter. All that mattered was that the Iraqis believed it. They assumed that one out of every four or five people they knew was reporting for the government. In this kind of environment, it is almost impossible for case officers to operate, to recruit Iraqis, to gather information on this society and especially to meet with sensitive personnel. The idea that an Iraqi government official or a scientist would meet with someone connected to the Americans was unheard of. That made it extraordinarily difficult for the United States or any other country to maintain a network of spies inside of Iraq. As a result, there was very little human intelligence that was forthcoming out of Iraq.

**So it wasn't that we had made a choice not to devote more assets to Iraq; it's that it was a nearly impossible place for us to devote more assets.**

Correct. The CIA and other intelligence agencies devoted tremendous assets to Iraq. It was an extremely high priority, with a real emphasis on trying to collect against Iraq. But it was an extraordinarily difficult target. I think no matter what level of effort we put against it, it was going to be extremely hard.

That said, there are always more resources that can be devoted to a problem. Think about two examples, the first being the Soviet Union. Like Iraq, the Soviet Union was an extremely hard target. Yet the United States turned itself inside out to try to find out what was going on there. We had far more failures than successes, but I think arguably we had better collection against the Soviet Union than we did against Saddam's Iraq.

The second example is terrorism. Before September 11, the United States had a tremendous intelligence effort against terrorism. It was one of our highest priorities, with all kinds of people working on it and huge resources being lavished on it. After September 11, the resources that were lavished on terrorism were expanded exponentially. There are always greater levels you can go to if something is that high a priority. In retrospect, we may have wanted to put even great resources against Iraq. It's hard to fault the U.S. intelligence community for devoting the percentage of its assets that it did, but we might have asked the question, Are we devoting enough to intelligence in general?

**You also criticize the Administration for their interpretation of the available intelligence. Would you say they failed the American people?**

There are certain members of the Administration who did a disservice to the American people. I don't want to fault the entire Administration, because I think there were a lot of people in the Administration who were saying things that were completely true and what they were doing was completely above-board. But there were others in the Administration who really weren't.

The thing that upset and disappointed me the most was that there were some Administration officials, and particularly some high Administration officials, who were making statements that weren't the whole truth. The

one thing for which I can find no excuse is this question of not telling the American people the whole truth. The nuclear issue is the most important example of this. The judgment of the intelligence community, expressed in a number of written documents, some of which have been made public, was that Saddam had reconstituted his nuclear-weapons programs and that he could possibly acquire a nuclear weapon in one to two years *if* he managed to get fissile material on the black market. The intelligence community felt that it was much more likely that he would not be able to acquire a nuclear weapon for five to seven years. In making the case for war, a number of high-level officials in the Administration stressed the one-to-two year figure, which made the threat from Iraq seem imminent. The intelligence community couldn't rule it out, but the best judgment was that it was a more distant threat.

I think the Administration was only telling part of the truth to the American people because it was trying to justify a war in 2003. The intelligence estimates just didn't really support that imminence. The Administration could have said, "Look, the intelligence community thinks it may be five to seven years away, but they do think it's also possible that they could get it in one to two years. After 9/11, we shouldn't take even that kind of a risk." I think that would have been a much more honest way of presenting it to the American people.

**But it might not have resulted in going to war.**

That is my sense. My sense is that the Administration recognized that that kind of argument would not generate the same enthusiasm for a war in 2003 as the argument the way they cast it did. As far as I'm concerned, these are not political arguments. This is an argument about U.S. national security and about going to war. That's supposed to transcend politics. Of course, I've lived in Washington long enough to know that it's rare that national security actually does end up transcending politics—but that doesn't make it right.

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