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diane carman

Scandal lurks in shadow of Iraq evidence

By [Diane Carman](#), Denver Post Columnist

It's getting harder to ignore. More and more evidence is emerging to suggest that U.S. intelligence was manipulated to justify going to war with Iraq.

Among the allegations:

U.S. officials cited documents provided by foreign ambassadors - documents that they knew to be forgeries - as proof of the existence of an Iraqi nuclear weapons program.

Aluminum tubes and gas centrifuges that President Bush said were used to "enrich uranium for nuclear weapons" had already been determined by the CIA to be ordinary rocket materials too flimsy to handle nuclear material.

Claims by the administration that Iraq had unmanned aerial vehicles capable of delivering deadly biological agents around the world to the U.S. were known to be false; analysts estimated they didn't have the range even to reach Tel Aviv.

Vice President Dick Cheney had visited CIA headquarters several times in the months before the war to pressure analysts to find evidence that would justify an attack on Iraq.

And evidence that there was no connection between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda was deliberately withheld from Congress and the public in an attempt to mislead everyone about the danger Iraq posed.

Several members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, including Democrats Bob Graham, D-Fla., and Richard Durbin, D-Ill., told The New Republic that they knew that evidence contradicting the Bush administration's claims had been concealed, but they were unable to reveal it because it was classified.

Still, Congress, which spent \$80 million to prove that, yes, Bill Clinton did have sexual relations with that woman, has yet to order an investigation.



Diane Carman

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Rep. Diana DeGette claims to know why.

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"It's obvious. It's because the Republicans control Congress and the White House," the Colorado Democrat said.

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Last week, she called for a bipartisan investigation to determine if there was a "massive intelligence failure" leading up to the war in Iraq.

Either there never was the irrefutable evidence of weapons of mass destruction and we were deceived, she said, or the deadly weapons exist in Iraq where Hussein is believed to be hiding and our intelligence is not capable of finding them.

Regardless of which scenario Americans prefer to embrace, it's a troubling situation.

We deserve an explanation.

Before the war, DeGette said, "both (Secretary of State) Colin Powell and the president unequivocally said there were biological, chemical and possibly nuclear weapons that were poised to strike and that created an imminent threat."

In fact, when Powell made his dramatic presentation of the purported evidence against Iraq to the United Nations in February, DeGette admitted that she found it disturbing.

The congresswoman, who had voted against the resolution to go to war with Iraq, said Powell raised "very serious questions" about the danger Iraq posed.

She had company. Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, R-Colo., called it "shocking."

The public responded similarly.

In the days following Powell's U.N. appearance, polls showed opposition to the pre-emptive war evaporating in the U.S.

Seventy percent of Americans believed that Iraq had chemical and biological weapons. Sixty percent thought the country was developing nuclear weapons.

"On that basis, we went out and attacked another country," DeGette said.

It was the rationale we presented to the world for going to war.

"Now, it's becoming more and more clear that evidence of those weapons never existed," DeGette said.

And while it's unclear whether the intelligence was flawed, misinterpreted or simply manipulated to produce a predetermined outcome, DeGette said, it's clear something went wrong.

"There's one thing the American public doesn't like," she said, "and that's being duped."

If Congress succeeds in stonewalling an investigation, the damage to the intelligence agencies will be severe. Once their integrity is undermined, they become objects of contempt and ridicule.

That's why DeGette predicts that despite her Republican colleagues' loyalty to Bush, Congress ultimately will vote for an investigation.

"The public will demand it," she said.

As the weeks and months go by, if evidence of weapons of mass destruction isn't found in Iraq, containing the scandal will be impossible, she said. The truth will have to emerge.

"This is not about a political gotcha situation," DeGette said.

"One reason people like me are trying to be respectful and not make this into a political issue is that it goes so much deeper than that. This goes to the integrity of our intelligence, the integrity of our foreign policy.

"This is heavy-duty stuff."

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