



Capital Games by DAVID CORN

Bush Misled US Into Iraq War--An Official Finding?

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George W. Bush misled the nation into war.

Who says?

Representative Jane Harman, the ranking Democrat on the House intelligence committee.

On the basis of what?

On the basis of information preliminarily reviewed by the intelligence committee as part of its ongoing investigation into the prewar intelligence on Iraq.

On June 25, during the House debate on the intelligence authorization bill, Harman delivered an informal progress report on her committee's inquiry. Her remarks received, as far as I can tell, little media attention. But they are dramatic in that these comments are the first quasi-findings from an official outlet confirming that Bush deployed dishonest rhetoric in guiding the United States to invasion and occupation in Iraq. This is not an op-ed judgment; this is an evaluation from a member of the intelligence committee who claims to be basing her statements on the investigative work of the committee. Here's what she says:

* On Bush's prewar assertions about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction: "When discussing Iraq's WMD, administration officials rarely included the caveats and qualifiers attached to the intelligence committee's judgments....For many Americans, the administration's certainty gave the impression that there was even stronger intelligence about Iraq's possession of and intention to use WMD."

* On the evidence upon which the WMD assertions were based: "The committee is now investigating whether the intelligence case on Iraq's WMD was based on

Washington--a city of denials, spin, and political calculations.

They may speak English there,

but most citizens still need an interpreter to understand its ways and meanings. David Corn, the Washington editor of *The Nation* magazine, has spent years analyzing the policies and pursuing the lies that spew out of the nation's capital. He is a novelist, biographer, and television and radio commentator who is able to both decipher and scrutinize Washington.

In his dispatches, he takes on the day-by-day political and policy battles under way in the Capitol, the White House, the think tanks, and the television studios. With an informed, unconventional perspective, he holds the politicians, policymakers and pundits accountable and reports the important facts and views that go uncovered elsewhere.



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circumstantial evidence rather than hard facts and whether the intelligence community made clear to the policy-makers and Congress that most of its analytic judgments were based on things like aerial photographs and Iraqi defector interviews, not hard facts."

* On the supposed Hussein-al Qaeda connection: "[T]he investigation suggests that the intelligence linking al Qaeda to Iraq, a prominent theme in the administration's statements prior to the war, [was] contrary to what was claimed by the administration."

She is not beating around the bush. She asserts that the President overstated the WMD case, ignoring nuances and uncertainties in the intelligence reporting, and created a false impression about what was known about the threat posed by Iraq. She maintains that Bush rashly claimed Hussein was in cahoots with the evildoers of 9/11, when intelligence indicated otherwise. This is damning stuff. Never mind all the recent claptrap from administration apologists about the Iraq war having been fought for the good of the repressed Iraqis. The primary rationale for the war Bush offered in public was based on two notions: Iraq possessed ready-to-go WMDs *and* Saddam Hussein was in league with al Qaeda and could slip these awful weapons to Osama bin Laden at any moment. (Last fall, Bush exclaimed--with no caveats or qualifiers--that Hussein was "dealing" with al Qaeda.) The danger, Bush and his crew argued repeatedly, was imminent and real--so clear-and-present that the United States could not afford to wait any longer or take a chance on enhanced and more intrusive inspections.

Now Harman says Bush had no right to declare, as he did on March 17, that "intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised," or to say Hussein was a bin Laden ally. Harman, a California moderate who is no hothead and who voted for the Iraq war, is essentially branding Bush a liar. If her remarks accurately reflect the committee's work, it means the administration will be confronted with evidence it misrepresented intelligence in its attempt to whip up support for the war. And it may well be confronted in public. Harman notes that Representative Porter Goss, the Republican chairman of the committee, has promised to hold public hearings, perhaps in July, and to produce an unclassified report as soon as possible. (Soon after Harman made her remarks on the floor, Goss led a successful effort to defeat an amendment offered by Representative Dennis Kucinich, a Democratic presidential candidate, that would

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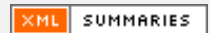
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have required the inspector general of the CIA to investigate the allegation that Vice President Dick Cheney pressured the agency to produce reports supporting the administration's policy on Iraq.)

"It is already clear that there were flaws in US intelligence," Harman says. "Iraq's WMD was not located where the intelligence community thought it might be. Chemical weapons were not used in the war despite the intelligence community's judgment that their use was likely. I urge this administration not to contemplate military action, especially preemptive action, in Iran, North Korea or Syria until these issues are cleared up." She also suggests that an independent commission might be needed to examine the MIA WMD controversy.

Harman's statement was a sneak preview. If she is not blowing smoke, Bush's prewar deceptions may end up more thoroughly substantiated than was his case for war.

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Thanks to *Secrecy News* for bringing Harman's comments to my attention. To see the whole debate on the intelligence bill--which includes Harman's statement--click [here](#).

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