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Bush & His Dangerous Delusions

By Robert Parry
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In George W. Bush's world, Saddam Hussein defied United Nations demands that he get rid of his weapons of mass destruction and barred U.N. inspectors; al-Qaeda's public statements must be believed even when contradicted by its private comments; and U.S. withdrawal from Iraq is unthinkable because it would let al-Qaeda "extend the caliphate," a mythical state that doesn't really exist.

There's always been the frightening question of what would happen if a President of the United States went completely bonkers. But there is an equally disturbing issue of what happens if a President loses touch with reality, especially if he is surrounded by enough sycophants and enablers so no one can or will stop him.

At his Oct. 11 news conference, Bush gave the country a peek into his imaginary world, a bizarre place impenetrable by facts and logic, where falsehoods, once stated, become landmarks and where Bush's "gut" instinct, no matter how misguided, is the compass for finding one's way.

In speaking to White House reporters, Bush maneuvered casually through this world like an experienced guide making passing references to favorite points of interest, such as Hussein's defiance of U.N. resolutions banning WMD (when Hussein actually had eliminated his WMD stockpiles).

"We tried the diplomacy," Bush said. "Remember it? We tried resolution after resolution after resolution." Though the resolutions had worked – and left Hussein

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stripped of his WMD arsenal – that isn't how it looks in Bush's world, where the resolutions failed and there was no choice but to invade.

At other news conferences, Bush has filled in details of his fictional history. For instance, on July 14, 2003, just a few months after the Iraq invasion, Bush began rewriting the record to meet his specifications.

“We gave him [Saddam Hussein] a chance to allow the inspectors in, and he wouldn't let them in. And, therefore, after a reasonable request, we decided to remove him from power,” Bush [told reporters](#).

In the real world, of course, Hussein admitted U.N. inspectors in fall 2002 and gave them unfettered access to search suspected Iraqi weapons sites. It was Bush who forced the U.N. inspectors to leave in March 2003 so the invasion could proceed.

Over the past three years, Bush has repeated this false claim about the barred inspectors in slightly varied forms as part of his litany for defending the invasion on the grounds that it was Hussein who “chose war,” not Bush.

Meeting no protest from the Washington press corps, Bush continued repeating his lie about Hussein showing “defiance” on the inspections. For instance, at a news conference on March 21, 2006, Bush reprised his claims about his diplomatic efforts.

“I was hoping to solve this [Iraq] problem diplomatically,” Bush said. “The world said, ‘Disarm, disclose or face serious consequences.’ ... We worked to make sure that Saddam Hussein heard the message of the world. And when he chose to deny the inspectors, when he chose not to disclose, then I had the difficult decision to make to remove him. And we did. And the world is safer for it.”

Determined to Invade

In reality, documentary evidence shows that Bush was determined to invade Iraq regardless of what U.S. intelligence found or what the Iraqis did.

For instance, the so-called “[Downing Street Memo](#)” recounted a secret meeting on July 23, 2002, involving British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his top national security aides. At that meeting, Richard Dearlove, chief of the British intelligence agency MI6, described his discussions about Iraq with Bush's top advisers in Washington.

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Dearlove said, "Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy."

At an Oval Office meeting on Jan. 31, 2003, Bush and Blair discussed their determination to invade Iraq, though Bush still hoped that he might provoke the Iraqis into some violent act that would serve as political cover, according to minutes written by Blair's top foreign policy aide David Manning.

So, while Bush was telling the American people that he considered war with Iraq "a last resort," he actually had decided to invade regardless of Iraq's cooperation with U.N. weapons inspectors, according to the five-page memo of the Oval Office meeting.

The memo also revealed Bush conniving to deceive the American people and the world community by trying to engineer a provocation that would portray Hussein as the aggressor. Bush suggested painting a U.S. plane up in U.N. colors and flying it over Iraq with the goal of drawing Iraqi fire, the meeting minutes said.

"The U.S. was thinking of flying U-2 reconnaissance aircraft with fighter cover over Iraq, painted in U.N. colours," the memo said about Bush's scheme. "If Saddam fired on them, he would be in breach." [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Time to Talk War Crimes](#)."]]

Regardless of whether any *casus belli* could be provoked, Bush already had "penciled in" March 10, 2003, as the start of the U.S. bombing of Iraq, according to the memo. "Our diplomatic strategy had to be arranged around the military planning," Manning wrote. [NYT, March 27, 2006]

In other words, neither the U.N. inspectors' negative WMD findings nor the Security Council's refusal to authorize force would stop Bush's invasion on March 19, 2003. [For more on Bush's pretexts for war in Iraq, see Consortiumnews.com's "[President Bush, With the Candlestick...](#)"]]

Comfortable History

But Bush remains so comfortable with his fabricated history – and so confident that the White House press corps won't contradict him – that he now sketches the false landscape in a few quick strokes, as in "Remember it? We tried resolution after resolution after resolution."

When Bush is not taking gullible people on a tour of his imaginary history, he is testing how well sophistry works as logic, such as his oft-repeated claim that Americans must believe what Osama bin Laden says.

“What I say to the American people when I’m out there is all you got to do is listen to what Osama bin Laden says” regarding al-Qaeda’s goals and the importance of Iraq, Bush said at the Oct. 11 news conference.

Yet, while Bush argues that bin Laden’s public ravings should seal the deal – and thus lock U.S. troops into Iraq for the indefinite future – Bush never considers the well-documented possibility that al-Qaeda is playing a double game, baiting the United States about leaving Iraq to ensure that U.S. troops will stay.

In a rational world – if one wanted to give any weight to al-Qaeda’s thinking – you would look at unguarded, internal communications, not the public propaganda.

For instance, more credence would be given to an intercepted Dec. 11, 2005, communiqué from a senior bin Laden lieutenant known as “Atiyah” to the then-chief of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a document discovered by the U.S. military at the time of Zarqawi’s death in June 2006.

In the [letter](#) about al-Qaeda’s strategy in Iraq, Atiyah told Zarqawi that “prolonging the war is in our interest.” A chief reason, Atiyah explained, was that Zarqawi’s brutal tactics had alienated many Iraqi Sunni insurgents and thus a continued U.S. military presence was needed to buy time for al-Qaeda to mend fences and put down roots.

The “Atiyah letter” – like a previously intercepted message attributed to al-Qaeda’s second-in-command Ayman Zawahiri – indicated that a U.S. military pullout could be disastrous for al-Qaeda’s terrorist bands, which are estimated at only about 5 to 10 percent of the anti-U.S. fighters in Iraq.

Without the U.S. military presence to serve as a rallying cry and a unifying force, the al-Qaeda contingent faced disintegration from desertions and attacks from Iraqi insurgents who resented the wanton bloodshed committed by Zarqawi’s non-Iraqi terrorists.

The “Zawahiri letter,” which was dated July 9, 2005, said a rapid American military withdrawal could have caused the foreign jihadists, who had flocked to

Iraq to battle the Americans, to simply give up the fight and go home.

“The mujahaddin must not have their mission end with the expulsion of the Americans from Iraq, and then lay down their weapons, and silence the fighting zeal,” said the “Zawahiri letter,” according to a text released by the office of the U. S. Director of National Intelligence.

The “Atiyah letter,” which was translated by the U.S. military’s Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, also stressed the vulnerability of al-Qaeda’s position in Iraq.

“Know that we, like all mujahaddin, are still weak,” Atiyah told Zarqawi. “We have not yet reached a level of stability. We have no alternative but to not squander any element of the foundations of strength or any helper or supporter.”

Indeed, the “Atiyah” and “Zawahiri” letters suggest that one of al-Qaeda’s biggest fears is that the United States will pull out of Iraq before the terrorist organization has built the necessary political infrastructure to turn the country into a future base of operations.

The Caliphate Scam

Zawahiri was so concerned about the possibility of mass desertions after a U.S. withdrawal that he suggested that al-Qaeda leaders in Iraq talk up the “idea” of a “caliphate” along the eastern Mediterranean to avert a disintegration of the force.

Even with these two fretful al-Qaeda letters in hand, Bush continued to warn Americans about al-Qaeda’s intent to follow up a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq by turning the country into a launching pad for a vast Islamic “empire” that would spell the strategic defeat of the United States.

In a Sept. 5, 2006, speech, Bush declared, “This caliphate would be a totalitarian Islamic empire encompassing all current and former Muslim lands, stretching from Europe to North Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia,” Bush said. “We know this because al-Qaeda has told us.”

Bush returned to this theme in his Oct. 11 news conference. His administration’s “strategic goal is to help this young democracy [Iraq] succeed in a world in which extremists are trying to intimidate rational people in order to topple moderate governments and to extend the caliphate,” Bush said. “They want to extend an ideological caliphate that has no concept of liberty inherent in their beliefs.”

But – like much of Bush’s world – al-Qaeda’s “caliphate” doesn’t really exist. Indeed, before the Bush administration took power in 2001, Islamic extremists had been routed across the Arab world, from Algeria to Egypt to Jordan to Saudi Arabia – explaining why so many al-Qaeda leaders were exiles holed up in caves in Afghanistan.

Plus, given the strife between Sunni and Shiite sects, it’s hard to conceive how a unified global Islamic “caliphate” would be imaginable. Most likely, if the U.S. government dealt with Muslims with greater sophistication, they would take care of al-Qaeda and similar extremists like they did before.

In Bush’s world, however, the “caliphate” is not just a ploy by al-Qaeda leaders to keep impressionable young jihadists in line; it is an entity that would be “extended” if U.S. forces withdraw from Iraq.

So, as he rationalizes the horrendous death toll in Iraq – estimated at about 655,000 dead by researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health – Bush doesn’t see a disaster of historic proportions. In his world, the bloodshed is simply another reaffirmation of his decision to invade.

“I applaud the Iraqis for their courage in the face of violence,” Bush said. “I am amazed that this is a society which so wants to be free that they’re willing to – that there’s a level of violence that they tolerate.”

It’s difficult to envision any rational person making such a statement. If anything, the level of killing in Iraq is a combination of sectarian violence and the determination of many Iraqis to drive out what they see as the American invaders. But in Bush world, such realities never intrude.

Still, perhaps, the greatest danger from Bush’s delusions is that they will come to supplant any American notion of reality and spell the doom of the United States as a democratic Republic based on an informed electorate.

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq*, can be ordered at secrecyandprivilege.com. It’s also available at Amazon.com, as is his 1999 book, *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth.'*

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