

Lying Us Into War: Exposing Bush and His "Techniques of Deceit"

By Dennis Hans

President George W. Bush and his foreign-policy team have systematically and knowingly deceived the American people in order to gain support for an unprovoked attack on Iraq.

Before I catalog the Bush administration's "Techniques of Deceit," let me acknowledge that no U.N. resolution requires the president to be honest with the American people. The fine print of Resolution 1441 imposes no obligation to treat Americans as citizens to be informed rather than suckers to be conned. He may mislead, distort, suppress, exaggerate and lie to his heart's content without violating a single sentence in 1441.

So if compliance with 1441 is all that matters to you, read no further. Turn on the TV and tune in Brokaw, Rather, Jennings, Blitzer or Lehrer, to name five of the journalistic imposters who control what you hear and see, who seem psychologically incapable of conceiving of Bush as a liar, and who wouldn't have the guts to call him one even if they reached that conclusion.

But if you are an American citizen who believes in the bedrock democratic principle of "the informed consent of the governed," read on.

Why lie?

The president and many of his top advisers have wanted to invade and overthrow the government of Saddam Hussein for a long time. But they knew they couldn't sell such a war against Iraq to a majority of Americans and a majority in both houses of Congress if they acknowledged just how pitifully weak and unthreatening Iraq really is. If, however, the administration could portray Iraq as an imminent, mortal threat to the United States - and even a shadowy accomplice in the terrorist attacks of 9-11 - then a majority of the population might come to see an invasion of Iraq not as unprovoked U.S. aggression but as a wholly justified response to what Iraq did to us.

That is precisely what the administration has done. In an October poll by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press, "66 percent believed [Saddam] was involved in the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States." Yes, two-thirds of Americans had come to believe a horrible thing about Saddam that the Bush administration knew for a fact was false, even as it encouraged its lesser spokespeople to continue to promote the connection. According to a Knight-Ridder poll conducted in January

(<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/4911975.htm>), 41 percent of us believe Iraq has a nuclear weapon RIGHT NOW and another 35 percent are unsure or refused to answer the question. Only 24 percent know what Bush knows for an absolute fact: Iraq has no nukes. And even many in that 24 percent might not realize that Iraq would still be several years away from developing a nuke even if we did the unthinkable and allowed them to import the vast array of high-tech equipment needed just to get started.

How do people get such ridiculous thoughts in their head? A dishonest administration plants them there with a steady drumbeat of exaggerations, distortions and lies. In a process I call "lie and rely"

(<http://www.scoop.co.nz/mason/stories/HL0301/S00062.htm>), the administration relies on a cowed and craven news media to present their lies to the American people as fact - or at a minimum, as still-to-be-confirmed assertions by respected officials with a reputation for truth-telling. A handful of print reporters occasionally exposing the most egregious lies can't begin to overcome the effect of the steady drumbeat of lies reported as truth day after day on television.

If we factored out of the opinion polls all the people who have internalized White House disinformation as fact, support for the president's position would plummet. Without the support of these misled millions, Bush wouldn't have been able to ramrod through Congress a blank-check declaration. He wouldn't have had that blank check to use as a bludgeon against the U.N., and the U.S. wouldn't be on the verge of committing an act of unprovoked aggression.

How Bush lies: The Techniques of Deceit

Although Bush presents himself to the world as a plain-spoken, straight-shooting friend of the common man, he regularly employs a variety of techniques to deceive the very people most inclined to trust him.

So far, I have tallied 14 techniques. But there are more to be uncovered, and there are far more examples than I can include here. Consider this the tip of a deceitful iceberg.

In the paragraphs that follow I first will describe the technique of deceit. Then I will illustrate it with one or more quotations or propaganda themes, placing within brackets that portion of the quote that illustrates the technique. Then I will explain how the president applied the technique. Unless otherwise noted, the president's words are from the State of the Union address.

1) Stating as fact what are allegations - often highly dubious ones (this is a staple of Bush's speeches and Powell's U.N. presentation; I'll limit myself to three):

a) "From three Iraqi defectors [we know] that Iraq, in the late 1990s, had several mobile biological weapons labs. These are designed to produce germ warfare agents and can be moved from place to a place to evade inspectors. Saddam Hussein [has not disclosed] these facilities. He [has given no evidence] that he has destroyed them."

Comment: What we "know" is that defectors make this unproven claim. We don't know if they were paid or coached to make the claim, or volunteered it on their own. For more on this, see Point 9 of the analysis (<http://www.traprockpeace.org/firstresponse.html>) of Powell's address by Dr. Glen Rangwala, Lecturer in Politics at Cambridge University, an advisor to Labor Party opponents of Tony Blair and perhaps the world's foremost authority on U.S. claims about Iraq, which may explain why one never sees him in the U.S. media. Rangwala notes that one defector made no mention of the labs in his first press conferences. It was several months later, after "debriefings" by the U.S. and the Iraqi National Congress, that he started talking about mobile labs. Hans Blix told the Guardian newspaper of Britain (http://truthout.org/docs_02/020603A.htm) he has seen no evidence that these mobile labs exist. Acting on tips from the U.S. about labs disguised as food-testing trucks, he investigated. "Two food-testing trucks have been inspected and nothing has been found," he said. That doesn't mean that such labs don't exist, but at this point there simply is no proof of that claim. It is NOT an established fact.

b) "The British government [has learned] that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

Comment: Wrong verb. What he should have said is the Brits assert this but have produced no evidence of its veracity. The Brits have offered no date for these efforts, but "recently," in this case, may well mean "the 1980s." IAEA director Mohamed Elbaradei has for weeks been asking - so far, in vain - for the U.S. and Britain to provide "specifics of when and where." He said in a Jan. 12 interview, "We need actionable information." (Interview cited by Rangwala in his invaluable "Counter-Dossier II," (<http://traprockpeace.org/weapons.html>).

c) "We've [learned] that Iraq has trained Al Qaeda members in bomb making and poisons and deadly gases." (Bush's televised October speech)

Comment: The L.A. Times reported a few days after that speech that CIA director "Tenet's letter was more equivocal, saying only that there has been 'reporting' that such training has taken place. Unlike other passages of the letter, he did not describe the reporting as 'solid' or 'credible.'"

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/wire/la-na-cia11oct11.story>

2) Withholding the key fact that destroys the moral underpinning of an argument (and, in Powell's case, reveals him to be a blood-drenched hypocrite):

"Iraq's weapons of mass destruction are controlled by a murderous tyrant, who [has already used chemical weapons to kill thousands of people.]" (Bush's October speech)

Comment: The problem here is that much of Bush's national-security team aided and abetted those crimes. After the worst attack, on Halabja in 1988 near the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the Reagan team covered for Saddam by implicating Iran, then prevented Congress from imposing tough sanctions on Iraq. Joost R. Hiltermann, an official with Human Rights Watch, shows in a recent column for the International Herald Tribune (<http://www.commondreams.org/views03/0117-01.htm>) that Saddam was likely emboldened to use ever more lethal concoctions to polish off the Kurds because he knew from past gassing experience in 1983, 1984 and 1987 that he could always count on the support of Reagan, Powell and George H. W. Bush. The latter's son has yet to mention this in any of his righteous condemnations of Saddam. There are any number of governments who have the moral standing to condemn Saddam's gassing of the Kurds. The one headed by George W. Bush does not.

Powell, of course, is the current administration's knight in shining armor, the trusted figure who commands the respect even of the European leaders who cannot stomach Bush. But give a listen to Peter W. Galbraith, former U.S. ambassador to Croatia and now professor of national-security studies at the National War College in Washington, D.C.:

"the Kurds have not forgotten that Secretary of State Colin Powell was then the national security adviser who orchestrated Ronald Reagan's decision to give Hussein a pass for gassing the Kurds."

http://www.boston.com/globe/magazine/2002/1215/coverstory_entire.htm

3) Misrepresentation/Invention:

a) "I would remind you that when the inspectors first went into Iraq and were denied - finally denied access, a [report] came out of the Atomic - the IAEA that they were [six months away from developing a weapon]. I don't know what more [evidence] we need." (Bush speaking at a news conference Sept. 7 with Tony Blair)

Comment: As Joseph Curl reported three weeks later in the conservative Washington Times, there was no such IAEA report: "In October 1998, just before Saddam kicked U.N. weapons inspectors out of Iraq [actually, they were withdrawn], the IAEA laid out a case opposite of Mr. Bush's Sept. 7 declaration: 'There are no indications that there remains in Iraq any physical capability for the production of weapon-usable

nuclear material of any practical significance,' IAEA Director-General Mohammed Elbaradei wrote in a report to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan" (<http://www.washtimes.com/national/20020927-500715.htm>). To this day, the administration has yet to produce a convincing explanation for Bush's bogus assertion.

4) Delegated lying/Team lying:

Iraq was involved with 9-11 hijacker Mohamed Atta, via an Iraqi agent who met him in Prague in the spring of 2001, and thus the Iraqi regime may have participated in some fashion in 9-11. (summary of major, long-lasting propaganda theme)

Comment: For the most outrageous, easily disproved, yet highly effective lies, such as the Iraqi connection to 9-11, sometimes the wise course is to assign personnel far removed from the president to push the lie. That way, the president's credibility won't suffer when the facts - known to the administration months before it stopped peddling the lie - come out. And in a perverse fashion, the man at the top of this disinformation pyramid, the president, GAINS credibility for the disinformation in his own speeches, because commentators will note what a cautious and careful performance it was, given that he steered clear of the not-yet-confirmed 9-11 connection.

The farther out of the loop the designated lie-pushers are, the better: The administration can more easily keep from them the intelligence data that flat-out refutes the lie, which helps those lie-pushers who are more convincing when they THINK what they're saying might be true than when they know for a fact it's not true. For our purposes, whether the speaker believes what he says is irrelevant. What matters is that the administration is consciously deceiving the public.

The most aggressive pushers of this story have been neoconservative extremists Richard Perle, James Woolsey, Ken Adelman and Frank Gaffney, who either serve on the Defense Policy Board or are otherwise tangentially connected to the administration. (Gaffney has even tried to link Iraq to the 1995 terror bombing in Oklahoma City.) See this article (<http://slate.msn.com/id/2070410/>) for details on how this myth stayed alive long after intelligence pros definitely disproved it. Of course, now that the Atta link has petered out, another al Qaeda "connection" of comparable validity is being spread - this time by Powell and Bush.

5) Straw man:

"The risks of doing nothing, the risks of assuming the best from Saddam Hussein, it's just not a risk worth taking."

Comment: Notice that Bush doesn't name anyone who advocates "doing nothing."

The whole idea behind DOING inspections and containment is that everyone knows we can't take Saddam at his word. Here, for instance, is former President Jimmy Carter's eminently sensible and non-violent "do-something" strategy to ensure the security of Iraq's neighbors as well as the United States:

<http://altnet.org/print.html?StoryID=15084>.

6) Withholding the key fact that would alert viewers that the purported grave threat is non-existent:

"Weve also discovered through intelligence that Iraq has a growing fleet of manned and unmanned aerial vehicles that could be used to disperse chemical and biological weapons across broad areas. We are concerned that Iraq is exploring ways of using UAVs for missions [targeting the United States]." (October speech)

Comment: Bush omits the fact that the vehicles have limited range, thus requiring Saddam to transport the vehicles to our coast line WITHOUT BEING DETECTED. The odds of that happening start at a billion to one. (Dana Millbank exposed this lie last October in the Washington Post. The Post link has expired, but you can read this summary of the lies Millbank exposed:

<http://www.thedubyareport.com/malleablefacts.html>.

7) Using mistranslation and misquotation to plant a frightening impression in the minds of trusting citizens that is the exact opposite of what you know to be true:

"Saddam Hussein has held numerous meetings with Iraqi nuclear scientists, a group he calls [his 'nuclear mujahedeen' -- his nuclear holy warriors]." (October speech)

Here Bush plays on two fears of the public: of Islamist holy warriors and nuclear weapons. But Saddam runs a secular state and has no ties to Islamist terrorists such as al Qaeda (despite other lies to the contrary). As for nukes, Iraq's production capabilities had been destroyed completely by 1998, and today Elbaradei is in the process of verifying that Iraq has not taken even the first baby steps in what would be a mammoth effort to rebuild a nuclear infrastructure - an infrastructure that would be virtually impossible to hide.

Equally insidious on Bush's part is the mistranslation and misquotation. In "Counter-Dossier II" (<http://traprockpeace.org/weapons.html>), Dr. Glen Rangwala, observes that the speech Bush is referring to was delivered by Saddam "on 10 September 2000 and was about, in part, nuclear energy. The transcription of the speech was made at the time by the BBC monitoring service. Saddam Hussein actually refers to 'nuclear energy mujahidin,' and doesn't mention the development of weaponry. In addition, the term 'mujahidin' is often used in a non-combatant sense, to mean anyone who struggles for a cause. Saddam Hussein, for example, often refers to

the mujahidin developing Iraq's medical facilities. There is nothing in the speech to indicate that Iraq is attempting to develop or threaten the use of nuclear weapons."

Was Bush aware of the mistranslation and misquotation? We'd have to inject him with truth serum to find out. Even if some senior intelligence official did the deed and kept the accurate quote and translation from Bush, it's obvious who is setting the deceitful tone in the administration. The official would have every reason to believe that this is just the sort of dirty trick - played on the unsuspecting American citizenry, not Saddam Hussein - that this president would love.

8) Putting the most frightening interpretation on a piece of evidence while pretending that no other interpretation exists:

"Our intelligence sources tell us that he has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes [suitable for nuclear weapons production]."

Those tubes, unaltered, happen to be a perfect fit for a conventional artillery rocket program. For details, see the tubes section in my essay "An Open Letter to the U.N. About Colin Powell" (<http://commondreams.org/views03/0204-07.htm>).

The Washington Post's Joby Warrick

(<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A35360-2003Jan23.html>) adds this: "The tubes were made of an aluminum-zinc alloy known as 7000-series, which is used in a wide range of industrial applications. But the dimensions and technical features, such as metal thickness and surface coatings, made them an unlikely choice for centrifuges, several nuclear experts said. Iraq used a different aluminum alloy in its centrifuges in the 1980s before switching to more advanced metals known as maraging steel and carbon fibers, which are better suited for the task, the experts said. Significantly, there is no evidence so far that Iraq sought other materials required for centrifuges, such as motors, metal caps and special magnets, U.S. and international officials said."

Following Powell's address, Susan Taylor Martin of the St. Petersburg Times (http://www.sptimes.com/2003/02/06/Worldandnation/A_strong_case__but_is.shtm) reported this: "Powell's speech was 'not quite accurate' on two points, according to the Institute for Science and International Security, a nonpartisan organization in Washington that deals with technical aspects of nuclear proliferation. Contrary to Powell's claim, anodized tubes are not appropriate for centrifuges and the anodization, designed to prevent corrosion, would have to be removed before the tubes could be used, said Corey Hinderstein, assistant director: 'It's not to say it would be impossible to use anodized tubes for centrifuges but it adds an extra step.' She also challenged Powell's comment that the tubes must be intended for a nuclear program because they meet higher specifications than the United States sets for its own

rocketry. 'In fact, we found European-designed rockets that had exactly this high degree of specificity,' Hinderstein said."

9) Withholding highly relevant information that would weaken your case, because what you really want to obtain from the citizenry is "the UNINFORMED consent of the governed":

North Korea's "secret" nuclear-weapons program wasn't a secret to the administration last fall. Yet it kept the information to itself, waiting till very late in the congressional debate over Iraq to inform not the entire public and Congress, but merely a relative few members of Congress. Thus, the Bush team didn't have to explain - well before each House even began to debate the various Iraq resolutions - exactly why the administration had no problem seeking a non-invasion solution to a crisis far more grave and imminent than Iraq.

10) Bold declarations of hot air:

a) "[The only possible explanation], the only possible use he could have for those weapons, is to dominate, intimidate or attack."

Comment: "Deterrence" is also a generally understood reason to develop WMD. Just ask the leaders of North Korea, Israel, Pakistan, India, Russia and the U.S. Deterrence and regional "balance of power" considerations were obvious factors in Saddam's efforts in the 1980s to develop nuclear weapons. Not the only factors, but factors nonetheless.

b) "Every chemical and biological weapon that Iraq has or [makes] is a direct violation of the truce that ended the Persian Gulf War in 1991." (October speech, national television)

Comment: As Rahul Mahajan correctly observes (<http://www.accuracy.org/bush/>), "There are no credible allegations that Iraq produced chemical or biological agents while inspectors were in the country, until December 1998. The reason we don't know whether they are producing those agents or not since then is that inspectors were withdrawn at the U.S. behest preparatory to the Desert Fox bombing campaign." Visit the Institute for Public Accuracy website (<http://www.accuracy.org>) for detailed critiques of Bush's major addresses on Iraq.

11) Creating in the public mind an intense but unfounded fear:

"[Knowing these realities], America must not ignore the threat gathering against us. Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof -- the smoking gun -- that could come in the form of a [mushroom cloud]." (October speech)

Comment: Iraq cannot turn American cities into mushroom clouds because it has no nuclear weapons and no long-range missiles to fire the nukes it does not have. The world is not about to let Iraq under Saddam resurrect its nuclear-weapons program. But even if the world did, Iraq would still be several years away from being able to develop that bomb.

12) Citing old news as if it's relevant today, while leaving out the reason it's not:

a) "The International Atomic Energy Agency [confirmed] in the 1990s that Saddam Hussein [had] an advanced nuclear weapons development program, [had] a design for a nuclear weapon and was working on five different methods of enriching uranium for a bomb."

Comment: IAEA has also confirmed, that they shut the program down and destroyed all the production facilities - seemingly relevant facts: In October 1998, Elbaradei reported to the U.N: "There are no indications that there remains in Iraq any physical capability for the production of weapon-usable nuclear material of any practical significance" (<http://www.washtimes.com/national/20020927-500715.htm>).

13) Transference:

"[This nation fights reluctantly], because [we] know the cost, and [we] dread the days of mourning that always come."

Comment: Bush is deliberately confusing the sensible, compassionate American people with his bellicose, bullying self.

14) Hallucinatory lying:

Bush's assertion, based on absolutely no evidence, that Saddam hopes to deploy al Qaeda as his "forward army" against the West: "We need to think about Saddam Hussein using al Qaeda to do his dirty work, to not leave fingerprints behind," he told a Republican audience in Michigan prior to the congressional elections. (See David Corn's report at The Nation's website: <http://thenation.com/capitalgames/index.mhtml?bid=3&pid=124>.)

Comment: "We need to think about" Bush using Adelman, Woolsey, Perle and Gaffney to do Bush's dirty work, so as to not leave presidential fingerprints on the hoariest lie of all - that Iraq was an accomplice in 9-11.

15) Withholding the key fact that would show your principled pose to be a pose devoid of principle:

"Saddam Hussein [attacked Iran in 1980] and Kuwait in 1990." (U.N. speech, Sept. 12, 2002)

Comment: The Swedish government is entitled to condemn Iraq for invading Iran. The current U.S. government - featuring key players from the very Reagan administration that supported Iraqi aggression through much of the 1980s- is not. If you surround yourself with officials who supported the aggression in real time, you're not entitled to be angered by it 20 years later.

Conclusion: What to do with a president who is trying to lie us into a war

It is not one single lie that has an effect on the public. It is the cumulative effect of dozens of lies, big and small, reiterated daily and challenged rarely. That is the effect that has brought us to where we are today.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, speaking January 19 on ABC (http://www.democraticunderground.com/articles/03/01/25_rumsfeld.html), offered the media splendid advice on how they should handle in their broadcasts and articles a leader that lies:

"Well, first, Saddam Hussein is a liar. He lies every single day. . . . He is still claiming that he won the war. His people are being told every day that they won. It was a great victory in 1991 when he was thrown out of Kuwait and chased back to Baghdad. Now, it seems to me that almost every time you quote something from him, you should preface it by saying 'here's a man who has lied all the time and consistently.'"

That's good advice for Brokaw and company, but what about the citizenry? What should we do?

Do we as a nation want to follow our dishonest president into an aggressive, unnecessary war? I say the wiser course is to stop the war train in its tracks and intensify inspections, which will give the American people the breathing space to decide what exactly we should do with a leader who has sunk this low.

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