

Media

Media coverage of intelligence manipulation reflects public acceptance of imperial presidency

By Ivan Eland

Online Journal Guest Writer

May 18, 2005—([Independent Institute](#))—Delayed for two weeks after first reported and buried in the back pages of most major U.S. newspapers is the blockbuster story that key players in the British government believed the case for the invasion of Iraq was “thin” and that the Bush administration was manipulating intelligence to provide a rationale for an aggressive U.S. policy. In contrast, a merely symbolic and exhortative visit to Iraq by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is headline news in the same papers. The media coverage of those two stories—in inverse proportion to their importance—is a symptom of the decline of the republic and the ascension of the imperial presidency.

On May 1, the *Sunday Times of London* published a verbatim summary by a British official of a July 23, 2002, meeting on Iraq involving the British Prime Minister and some of his closest advisors. In the summary, the official encapsulated a report to the prime minister by Richard Dearlove, then head of Britain’s foreign intelligence agency MI-6, who had just returned from talks in Washington. According to the summary, Dearlove had reported that: “Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy.” In addition, the subsequent guerrilla insurgency in Iraq makes prescient Dearlove’s observation that “[t]here was little discussion in Washington of the aftermath after military action.”

The summary of the prime minister’s meeting also reaches the jolting conclusion: “It seemed clear that Bush had made up his mind to take military action, even if the timing was not yet decided. But the case was thin. Saddam was not threatening his neighbours, and his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea, or Iran.”

The realization by the British government—the only nation to send a sizeable force to help the United States invade Iraq—that the case for the invasion was threadbare and that the Bush administration was cynically bolstering it by inflating intelligence should be rocking the American media and public. Yet even after the summary was published in the British media on May 1, the *New York Times*, the flagship of American journalism, concluded on May 8 that “critics who accused the Bush administration of improperly using political influence to shape intelligence assessments have, for the most part, failed to make the charge stick.”

The British memo is only one of many pieces of evidence pointing to deliberate threat inflation by the Bush administration to justify the Iraq War. Deep down, the American public knows that President Bush and his minions were deceitful about the need for the invasion, but they don’t seem to hold him responsible. In fact, they (re)electd him in November 2004, even suspecting that he might have lied the United States into what was then already becoming an Iraqi quagmire.

Less a shaper of public opinion in a market economy with many sources of news, media coverage largely reflects what people want to see, hear and read. People choose media outlets based on their preconceived notions. And they want to see, hear and read about what the imperial president and his celebrity advisors, such as Rice and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, are saying and doing. The

U.S. presidency has become so powerful compared to what the nation's founders had intended that the public has come to expect that the chief executive and his entourage will lie to us for our own good—even on issues as vital to the republic as war and peace. In fact, the people, through their representatives in Congress, no longer have a real say through a declaration of war, whether the nation engages in violence or remains at peace. In recent conflicts, in contravention of the founders' constitutional intent, the president has usurped such decisions and the docile Congress, if asked at all, usually rubber stamps them.

Citizens of ancient Rome slumbered as profligate, unnecessary wars of conquest turned their republic into a despotic empire. Unfortunately, it looks as if the American republic is headed down a similar path.

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