

When truth is the first casualty

In a press briefing in September 2001, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld noted occasions during World War II when false information about US troop movements was leaked to confuse the enemy. He paraphrased Winston Churchill, saying: "Sometimes the truth is so precious it must be accompanied by a bodyguard of lies." [Scott Peterson, The Christian Science Monitor, September 06, 2002]

"The policy of the US is regime change, with or without [weapons] inspectors." — White House spokesman Ari Fleischer

CASE STUDY

The Bush-Blair meeting, 7 Sept. 2002

THE CLAIM

British Prime Minister Tony Blair: "The threat from Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction, chemical, biological, potentially nuclear weapons capability ... that threat is real", citing a newly released satellite photo of Iraq identifying new construction at several sites linked in the past to Baghdad's development of nuclear weapons.

US President George Bush: "I don't know what more evidence we need," citing a 1998 report by the U.N.-affiliated International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that said Iraq could be six months away from developing nuclear weapons.

THE FACTS

The 1998 IAEA report did not say that Iraq was six months away from developing nuclear capability. Instead the Vienna, Austria-based agency said in 1998 that Iraq had been six to 24 months away from such capability before the 1991 Persian Gulf War and the U.N.-monitored weapons inspections that followed. The war and the inspections destroyed much of Iraq's nuclear infrastructure.

Mark Gwozdecky, a spokesman for the U.N. agency, disputed Bush's and Blair's assessment of the satellite photograph, which was first publicized on 6 September. Contrary to news service reports, there was no specific photo or building that aroused suspicions, he told NBC News' Robert Windrem. Gwozdecky said the new construction indicated in the photograph was no surprise and that no conclusions were drawn from it. "There is not a single building we see," he said. [<http://www.msnbc.com/news/802167.asp>]

CASE STUDY

The International Institute of Strategic Studies report

THE CLAIM

Iraq could field nuclear weapons "within months" and the IISS report provides evidence that would justify an attack on Iraq.

CASE STUDY

The babies in incubators story

THE CLAIM

In late 1990 in the leadup to the 1991 Gulf War, members of the US Congress and the American public were swayed by the tearful testimony of a 15-year-old Kuwaiti girl, known only as Nayirah. In the girl's testimony before a congressional caucus she described how, as a volunteer in a Kuwait maternity ward, "I saw Iraq soldiers come into the hospitals with guns, and go into a room where 15 babies were in incubators. They took the babies out of the incubators, took the incubators and left the babies on the cold floor to die." Seven US Senators later referred to the story during debate; the motion for war passed by just five votes. In the weeks after Nayirah spoke, President Bush senior invoked the incident five times, saying that such "ghastly atrocities" were like "Hitler revisited."

THE FACTS

Nayirah was in fact the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to Washington and had no connection to the Kuwait hospital. She had been coached — along with the handful of others who would "corroborate" the story — by senior executives of Hill and Knowlton in Washington, the biggest global PR firm at the time, which had a contract worth \$11.6 million with the Kuwaitis to make the case for war.

"We didn't know it wasn't true at the time," Brent Scowcroft, Bush's national security adviser, said of the incubator story in a 1995 interview with the London-based Guardian newspaper. He acknowledged "it was useful in mobilizing public opinion."

THE FACTS

"There's nothing new here, no killer fact that makes me believe we should go to war." — Paul Beaver, of Jane's Defence Weekly commenting on the IISS Strategic Dossier "Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Net Assessment" (quoted in The South African Star, 10 Sept 2002)

CASE STUDY

Aluminium tubes

THE CLAIM

Iraq is trying to acquire aluminium tubes which may be used in manufacturing a centrifuge to manufacture weapons-grade material.

THE FACTS

"We're going to go to war over thousands of aluminum pipes? This is patently ridiculous. These are aluminum pipes coming in for civilian use. They are not being transferred to a covert nuclear processing plant. I'm going to need a helluva lot more than some aluminum tubes before I'm convinced there's a case for war."

— Ex-U.N. weapons inspector Scott Ritter

CASE STUDY

Why the inspectors left Iraq

THE STORY

Iraq threw the weapons inspectors out in 1988

THE FACTS

Iraq did not expel UN weapons inspectors in 1988. The head of the inspection team, Richard Butler, ordered the inspectors to leave Baghdad in anticipation of an attack ordered by US President Clinton. The Russian ambassador, Sergei Lavrov, criticised Butler for withdrawing the inspectors without seeking the permission of the UN Security Council. [Washington Post, 17 December 1988]

CASE STUDY

The rationale for bombings since 1991

THE STORY

Bombing raids by US/UK since 1991 have been directed at Iraq developing weapons of mass destruction.

THE FACTS

Senior U.S. officials told NBC News that the main targets of December 1998 attack weren't military but economic. The cruise missiles weren't aimed at any alleged nuclear or biological weapons factories but specifically at the Basra oil refining facilities in southern Iraq. NBC also quoted Fadhil Chalabi, a London oil industry analyst, as saying Iraq's oil producing neighbors are "hoping that Iraq's oil installations will be destroyed as a result of American air strikes. Then the [U.N.-mandated] oil-for food program would be paralyzed and the market would improve by the disappearance of Iraqi oil altogether." [By Martin Kelley "NVWeb Upfront" Featured Essay, January 15, 1999]

CASE STUDY

The weapons inspectors who spied

THE STORY

Repeated claims by the government of Iraq that weapons inspection teams, run by the United Nations Special Commission or UNSCOM, were full of "American spies and agents" were simply an excuse to "throw them out".

THE FACTS

On January 7, 1999, the New York Times confirmed rumors that United States planted spies on the United Nations: "United States officials said on Wednesday that American spies had worked undercover on teams of United Nations arms inspectors ferreting out secret Iraqi weapons programs." The Washington Post and Boston Globe further reported that the operation was aimed at Saddam Hussein himself. NBC News reported that U.N. communication equipment was used by US intelligence to pass along intercepted Iraqi messages. [Martin Kelley, "NVWeb Upfront" Featured Essay, January 15, 1999]

CASE STUDY

The April Glaspie story

THE CLAIM

Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 without any support from the United States

THE FACTS

Only weeks before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990, the US ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, told the Iraqis: "We don't have an opinion on inter-Arab disputes such as your border dispute with Kuwait, and we have directed our official spokesman to reiterate this stand," and "I have a directive from the President, personally, that I should work to expand and deepen relations with Iraq." No wonder that Saddam Hussein was under the impression that the US would not intervene! Glaspie, in congressional testimony on 20 March 1991, said that her strongest statements had been deleted from the Iraqi-released transcript of her meeting with Saddam. The Government has refused to release its transcript of the meeting. After her testimony, some commentators suggested that Glaspie had not been as forceful with Saddam Hussein as she subsequently claimed, whilst others thought she was a scapegoat for diplomatic infighting. "The new official line is a transparent lie," commentator William Safire wrote. Glaspie gave a candid postwar interview to the New York Times in which she said, 'We never expected they would take all of Kuwait' — suggesting that the Americans were indeed expecting some military action by Iraq.

[Penny Johnston, 'The case of April Glaspie', Pegasus Mideast.Forum, 19 April 1991]

Victorian Peace Network

03 9659 3582

More info: www.vicpeace.org info@vicpeace.org