

Not CIA's fault

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By Eric S. Margolis

HAVING presided over the two worst intelligence disasters since Pearl Harbour — 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq — the Bush administration and its apologists are now whining, 'OK, we were wrong about Iraq's weapons and supposed threat, but so was everybody else. Besides, it was all CIA's fault.'

No way. The Iraq weapons fiasco was absolutely not caused by an 'intelligence failure,' as the White House and the recent Senate whitewash claimed.

US national security and CIA were corrupted and blinded at the top by extremist ideology, cowardice, and careerism.

Nor was everyone wrong about Iraq. Scores of Mideast professionals, this writer included, insisted from Day 1 that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction, posed no threat to the US, and had no link to Al Qaeda. We were ignored, or dismissed as traitors or cranks.

Here's what really happened. In 2002, vice president Dick Cheney thundered that Iraq was seeking nuclear weapons. A month later, secretary of state Colin Powell proclaimed 'no doubt he (Saddam) has chemical weapons.' Shortly after, President George Bush assured the UN that Iraq had biological weapons.

US national security adviser Condoleeza Rice warned a 'mushroom cloud' threatened

America. Britain's glib prime minister, Tony Blair, made similar ludicrous claims - and is now offering the same 'we were all wrong' excuses.

Many veteran CIA officers dismissed alarmist claims about Iraq as politically-motivated propaganda. The US state department, US air force, and French intelligence challenged claims the Iraq had threatening offensive weapons systems. Many senior Pentagon military officers opposed invading Iraq.

But the word went out: If you value your job and pension, do not, repeat, do not contradict the boss.

The president is hell-bent on invading Iraq. Make it so.

Cheney repeatedly visited CIA, intimidating staff and demanding evidence be found of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction and links to Al Qaeda.

Oblivious to all facts, Cheney keeps warning Iraq still threatens the US. He is increasingly out of touch with reality and may need professional help.

CIA director George Tenet, a careerist bureaucrat, not an intelligence professional, undermined his agency's ethics by eagerly pandering to all of Bush and Cheney's prejudices — over his subordinate's protests. Handlicking took precedence over professionalism. Those with dissenting views were ignored, shunted

aside, or fired.

This column has long reported smouldering anger among veteran CIA officers over Bush's deeply flawed policies towards Iraq and the Muslim World. In late 2001, I was shocked and horrified to hear a distinguished member of CIA's founding families actually claim a 'fifth column' had taken control of Iraq policy and was driving the US to war.

But even the too compliant CIA failed to satisfy Bush and Cheney's growing demands for more damning 'evidence,' so Cheney and defence secretary Don Rumsfeld created two independent intelligence units, office for special plans, and 'Team B,' packing them with far-right neo-conservative lobbyists for Israel from the Wolfowitz, Feith, Perle faction. Their mission: find the smoking guns to justify immediate war against Iraq.

These two intelligence units became the main conduits for disinformation about Iraq, confirming every rumour or lie the White House and media wanted to believe, no matter how absurd.

Iraq-exile Ahmad Chalabi, created, financed, and managed by Pentagon neocons, was the main lie-producer. Chalabi was being groomed by the neocons and their allies in Israel's Likud Party to become the next ruler of Iraq. His tales were trumpeted by the White House and media. Israeli

and British intelligence provided more faked material to whip up war fever.

This was not an intelligence failure. This was strategic deception, a combination the Soviets KGB called 'disinformatzia' and 'maskirovka.'

The disinformation campaign was made possible by an ideologically and religiously extreme president; a vice president lusty for war and oil; neocon ideologues inspired by General Ariel Sharon; and a cowardly Congress that violated its most basic responsibility to the nation. And a national security establishment that lacked the courage to tell the superiors or Americans the truth. In recent years, we have seen the same fate befall ISI as it has been progressively politicized and filled with yes-men.

Purging CIA is not the answer. If anyone should be purged, it is the politicians and neocons in the Pentagon and media, who wilfully misled the US into a catastrophic war that has so far cost the lives of over 880 Americans, 13,000 Iraqi civilians, US \$200 billion, and ruined the good name of the United States around the world.

They and Britain's Tony Blair must not be allowed to escape full blame and retribution by hiding behind the sophistry that everyone — and thus no one — was responsible.—*Copyright Eric S Margolis 2004*