

OPINION

THE BATTALION

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QUESTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE?

Bush administration distorted facts

'Uranium-gate' scandal doesn't exist

The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa," said President George W. Bush in his 2003 State of the Union Address. This statement is now at the center of the controversy over whether the Bush administration exaggerated the threat Iraq posed to the United States when it made the case for preemptive war.



MIDHAT FAROOQI

The White House, hoping to silence its critics, recently declassified sections of a National Intelligence Estimate, prepared in October 2002, concerning Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capabilities. The document, however, raises more questions than it answers. It clearly shows that the administration misrepresented the judgments of the intelligence community on Iraq.

The CIA defines an NIE as the most authoritative intelligence document. It provides the consensus judgments of the intelligence services and is addressed to the chief policymakers — up to and including the president. The October NIE provided key judgments of six major intelligence agencies on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Bush and his Cabinet must have read this document, or at least its summary. Administration officials say even this synopsis flagged all doubts about the intelligence used and noted dissenting judgments by intelligence agencies.

This directly contradicts National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, who, on July 11, claimed, "... If there were doubts about the underlying intelligence to that NIE, those doubts were not communicated to the president, to the vice president or to me."

The first paragraph of the NIE's key judgments refers to a section in which the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, or INR, explicitly stated its doubts about the intelligence. "The activities we have detected do not, however, add up to a compelling case that Iraq is currently pursuing ... nuclear weapons. (The) INR considers the available evidence inadequate to support such a judgment."

Rice maintains that in the NIE, "(W)hat (the) INR did not take a footnote to is the consensus view that the Iraqis were actively trying to pursue a nuclear weapons program, reconstituting it so forth." However, the INR stated that it lacked "persuasive evidence that Baghdad has launched a coherent effort to reconstitute its nuclear weapons program."

The INR also said that claims of Iraq attempting to obtain uranium from Africa were "highly dubious." If the national security adviser, the president and the vice president maintain that they had no idea about the intelligence inconsistencies that existed, overlooking them was their own fault; that, or they are lying.

The NIE did say that Iraq could make a nuclear weapon in a year, but only if it acquired enough weapons-grade material. Otherwise, it predicted that Iraq would have such a weapon by 2007 to 2009. These remarks still do not indicate that Iraq was an immediate nuclear threat, a claim the vice president made when he declared, "We believe (Saddam) has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons" during a March 16 "Meet The

Press" interview. The NIE makes three more judgments with low confidence: that Saddam would use weapons of mass destruction; that Saddam would secretly attack the U.S. homeland; and that Saddam would give weapons to al-Qaida.

Far from certain about these three possibilities, the NIE stated that Saddam "appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks ... against the United States." It also said Saddam might decide to take the "extreme step" of assisting al-Qaida in a terrorist attack only if he was "sufficiently desperate" and felt that it "would be his last chance to exact vengeance." Is this Donald Rumsfeld's "bulletproof evidence" of an Iraq/al-Qaida link?

Bush said last month that, "Iraq could decide on any given day to provide a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist group ..." But rather than "any given day," the NIE judged that this would occur only "if Baghdad feared an attack that threatened the survival of the regime was imminent or unavoidable."

So today, Saddam is at large, and since his life is threatened, the possibility of him cooperating with al-Qaida is more likely now than ever. Conveniently, the chemical and biological weapons he possessed are missing, too. The Bush administration has yet to publicly state that, based on the NIE, Saddam is a bigger threat now than before the United States attacked.

No one wants Saddam back in power. His oppressive policies and murderous actions were wrong. However, distorting the intelligence to frame a guilty man is wrong, and two wrongs don't make a right.

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The Bush administration has been batted around Washington over the past few weeks because of the president's statements on uranium coming from Niger. Though many Democrats would love to affix the



MICHAEL WARD

proverbial "gate" to this latest would-be scandal, it shouldn't happen. The issue is so transparently political it should have fizzled before it even got off the ground. But such is not the case, and the time has come to put it to rest.

In January, President George W. Bush presented his State of the Union Address. In it are the now-famous words: "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

While technically correct, major news sources have confirmed that a U.S.-sponsored trip to Niger to corroborate British findings revealed a discrepancy between American and British intelligence.

In an interview with CNN, former ambassador Joseph Wilson said he was sent to Niger to investigate the British intelligence claims. "I traveled (to Niger)," Wilson stated, "spent eight days out there, and concluded that it was impossible that this sort of transaction could be done."

A critic of the war in Iraq, Wilson's trip is the crux of the entire onslaught Bush's critics have unleashed. The argument follows that the president knew about Wilson's findings, yet disregarded the conclusions so he could make a better case for the war. From Wilson's statements stem questions about what the president knew and when he knew it, harking back to the days of Watergate. But this simply is not another Watergate.

In a Boston Globe column last week, Ellen Goodman brought up an interesting point about making qualified statements. In a critique of the president's statement, Goodman reminisced about her early days of being a fact checker. "No one got into serious, job-ending doo-doo as long as they had a citation. It was OK to print something wrong as long as you could shift the blame." The obvious parallel is that the president did much the same insofar as he quoted British

intelligence in making a claim and thus would be able to shift the blame should the need arise.

However, many are failing to point out that British intelligence is standing behind its story. According to the BBC, Blair said,

"Let me just say this on the issue to do with Africa and uranium. The British intelligence that we have we believe is genuine. We stand by that intelligence." Bush was making a statement of fact which he qualified by attributing the source to British intelligence — intelligence that the British government maintains is true.

Bush was not quoting the National Enquirer or some second-rate expert. While it would definitely be irresponsible to quote an illegitimate source, British intelligence is reliable and respected. Why is this still an issue?

Simply put, the Democrats could use a good presidential scandal and Iraq seems like the perfect deck from which to draw. The war was not unanimously supported. Each day, major news sources report another American death. And while Saddam's sons have been killed, neither Saddam nor weapons of mass destruction have been found. Thus, out of the garden of hindsight grows the question, "Why did we go to Iraq in the first place?" Enter the Democratic National Committee and its irresponsible portrayal of the reasoning for the war.

A political ad that is currently running on the Democratic National Committee's Web site features a short clip of the president during the State of the Union saying "Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa." Curiously absent are the words, "The British government has learned ..."

Without these words the president may well have been the liar that many Democrats would have loved to catch. The president's words were grotesquely and irresponsibly spliced; the president is no liar.

The United States did not go to war with Iraq because "... Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa." In fact, Bush referenced this British intelligence finding only once — no time before or after the State of the Union. Congress had already agreed to the use of force in Iraq two months before State of the Union, lest one try suggest this uranium information was a deciding factor for the Iraqi war. Again, though, it matters little whether this information was vital to a decision because it was a factual statement made, one can assume, with the absence of any attempt to misinform the American public.

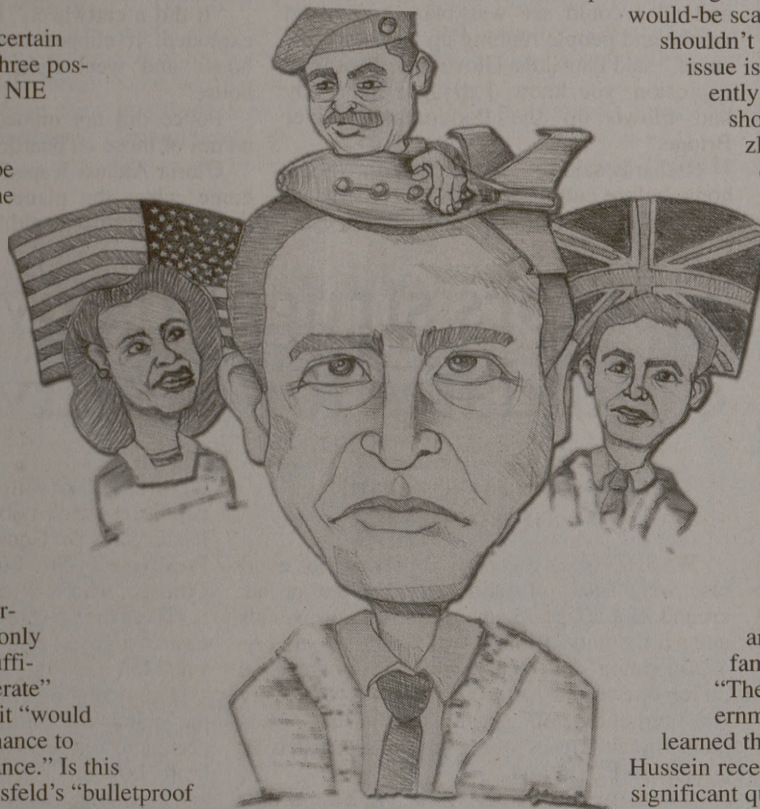
The real scandal behind this uranium issue is that there is really no scandal at all. "Uranium-gate" is more of a hopeful hallucination among Bush's opponents than it is a humiliation for the president. It's time that Democrats and Bush critics give up on this fruitless attempt at creating a scandal.

they have enlisted the Democratic National Committee to find legal means to allow the escapees to return and still thwart the governor and the will of a majority of Texans. Currently, their plan is to file a lawsuit alleging that the suspension of the 2/3 rule is a violation of minority voting rights. Apparently no one at the DNC is concerned with the fact that they are busy subverting the will of the majority of voters in the state.

It seems the Democrats haven't realized that Texas has voted Republican for presidential elections for quite some time, most all statewide offices are held by Republicans and both houses of the Legislature are majority Republican. Although there are and should be rights for the minority party, the system depends upon majority rule, which Republicans hold at the moment. The system also depends upon legislators being there to do their jobs, even if they cannot get what they want.

For a long time, Republicans were the minority party in Texas, but they did not flee and break quorum. Instead, they stayed, even as they lost vote after vote, because they knew that was what they had been elected to do. Democrats should grow up and realize they cannot rule forever, nor can they can win them all.

But that has not stopped Democrats from trying to find inventive ways to subvert the way things are supposed to work in the Senate. According to The Chronicle,



Midhat Farooqi is a junior genetics major. Graphic by Gracie Arenas

Michael Ward is a junior history major.

MAIL CALL

Not all good writers are journalists

In response to Matthew Maddox's July 30 column:

I recently read Matthew Maddox's article in The Battalion entitled "Financial Responsibility." In the midst of many poorly-written articles, feebly defending the closing of the journalism department, Maddox's article shines out. Well written and well researched, the article thoroughly impressed me.

The funny thing is, though, that this, by far the most credible piece of journalism in The Battalion written by a current student, was not written by a journalism major, but by a management major. Just some food for thought while everyone ardently defends the necessity of a journalism major.

Zachary Crannell
Class of 2006

Correct math on Battalion's front page

In response to an August 4 news article:

In this article, The Battalion claims that Texas A&M saw a decrease of 7,000 summer school students this year. Yet Summer and 10-week session enrollments only dropped from 17,179 to 14,478 (a 701 student decrease), and Summer II enrollment only went from 10,309 to 9,530 (a 779 student decrease).

From those statistics, A&M only saw a 1,480 drop in Summer school enrollment, not the 7,000 claimed by the paper. It should not be a math major to figure this out, maybe just more careful editing.

Mark McSpadden
Class of 2004

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to: 014 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647. Email: mailcall@thebatt.com. Attachments are not accepted.

Democrats up to old tricks

Texas is experiencing a case of political déjà vu. Just a few months after the Democratic members of the Texas House of Representatives fled for a vacation in Oklahoma, the Senate Democrats decided that an encore performance in New Mexico would be just the thing to wrap up the special legislative session.

The reason they did this was based on Senate rule changes that Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst planned to institute to pass a congressional redistricting bill favoring Republicans. But the runaways, like children, seem to forget that they, the minority, cannot win every battle, and they have a duty to be present to conduct the business of the Senate, even if this business is not what they wish it to be.

The actions of the Democrats violate their obligation to fulfill their duties as senators and undermine the system of government in Texas. Those senators who decided to run to New Mexico, like their House brethren several months ago, chose to support the national party instead of doing what they were elected to do — legislate.

These senators have used several ploys ranging from making veiled threats to twisting the truth to justify their actions. Before the first special session had even ended, they solicited an opinion by an attorney on the ability of Dewhurst to order state troopers to arrest them as they



DAVID SHOEMAKER

fled the capital. The attorney, Keith Hampton, was quoted in The Houston Chronicle as saying that such action by the Republican leadership could be considered "conspiracy to commit aggravated kidnapping."

Democratic Sen. Mario Gallegos told The Chronicle that he hoped Perry would back down and not call a second special session. But when that didn't happen and the attorney general decided that they could be brought back to the capital, they fled. Democrats claim that Dewhurst's suspension of the 2/3 rule broke tradition and that they could not return until he restored their ability to kill redistricting.

But Dewhurst himself responded to these claims in an editorial in The Chronicle. Dewhurst said the last three times special sessions on redistricting were held, the lieutenant governor at the time suspended the 2/3 rule. In fact, Dewhurst said in 1992 that the Democrats were in the same position as the Republicans are currently. Then-Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock suspended the 2/3 rule because he did not have a 2/3 majority to pass a redistricting bill favorable to Democrats. With Democrats now in the minority, the 2/3 rule has become an unalterable Senate tradition.

But that has not stopped Democrats from trying to find inventive ways to subvert the way things are supposed to work in the Senate. According to The Chronicle,

they have enlisted the Democratic National Committee to find legal means to allow the escapees to return and still thwart the governor and the will of a majority of Texans. Currently, their plan is to file a lawsuit alleging that the suspension of the 2/3 rule is a violation of minority voting rights. Apparently no one at the DNC is concerned with the fact that they are busy subverting the will of the majority of voters in the state.

It seems the Democrats haven't realized that Texas has voted Republican for presidential elections for quite some time, most all statewide offices are held by Republicans and both houses of the Legislature are majority Republican. Although there are and should be rights for the minority party, the system depends upon majority rule, which Republicans hold at the moment. The system also depends upon legislators being there to do their jobs, even if they cannot get what they want.

For a long time, Republicans were the minority party in Texas, but they did not flee and break quorum. Instead, they stayed, even as they lost vote after vote, because they knew that was what they had been elected to do. Democrats should grow up and realize they cannot rule forever, nor can they can win them all.

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David Shoemaker is a junior management major.