

THE WMD STORY

BUSH, BLAIR, AND THE MEDIA

By William F. Hewitt

On January 30, 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush declared, in his State of the Union address, that Iraq was part of an “axis of evil.” It was at this moment that the Bush administration first publicly identified Iraq as a target. We now know that the war against Iraq in 2003 was many years in the making. We have been learning, more and more in the past year, to what lengths both the Bush administration’s top leadership and the Blair government in the United Kingdom were willing to go to prosecute the war.

Because the issue of “weapons of mass destruction” (chemical, biological and nuclear weapons) was paramount in almost all of the pronouncements by these governments, in seeking resolutions for the use of force at the United Nations, and making a case for war to their publics and to their legislatures, it is this issue, and how it has been covered, that is the focus of this paper. Because of the fact that these two publics, the Americans and the British, get their news almost wholly from their own domestic media, I will restrict my discussion of the coverage to just those two.

In telling the story of the build-up to the war, I will use information gleaned from newspapers, news weeklies, television and radio, and, because of their extraordinary reach, the web sites of various organizations. Although some of these sites cannot be considered journalistic sources, they certainly are geared to promulgate what many people consider crucial information. Notwithstanding *NY Times* columnist Tom Friedman’s caution to beware of information from the internet, it can be a very useful tool.

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At its best, the Internet can educate more people faster than any media tool we've ever had. At its worst, it can make people dumber faster than any media tool we've ever had. The lie that 4,000 Jews were warned not to go into the World Trade Center on Sept. 11 was spread entirely over the Internet and is now thoroughly believed in the Muslim world. Because the Internet has an aura of “technology” surrounding it, the uneducated believe information from it even more. They don't realize that the Internet, at its ugliest, is just an open sewer: an electronic conduit for untreated, unfiltered information.¹

Not incidentally, I found Friedman's column in only a few moments in a search using the keywords “Thomas Friedman internet.” And, of course, almost all of the material I have consulted and will cite came through the web sites of the traditional print and broadcast media sources.

In Bernard Cohen's groundbreaking work, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, we learn about how journalists, and in particular, the foreign policy press and foreign correspondents in the U.S., regard their roles. One role these folks seem to enjoy playing is as a conduit for information on government initiatives - those, though, that fall within the range of their policy preferences.

Many reporters have pointed to the Marshall Plan, and to the effort to slow down the rush toward demobilization after World War II, as outstanding illustrations of how the press rallies behind policies that fall within their broad policy consensus.²

These preferences may have shifted since 1963 when Cohen wrote:

The most common pattern of policy preference among these foreign affairs reporters – one that provides them with a theory that is normative rather than empirical – may be summarized as an attachment to a liberal internationalist position on foreign affairs, if such a phrase still has distinctive meaning. Most of

¹ Thomas Friedman, *NY Times*, May 12, 2002, “Global Village Idiot”

² Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1963), p. 75

these reporters favor policies of heavy United States involvement and commitment in international affairs and international institutions; they support liberal trade policies; *they share a sense of the urgency of responsible participation and inspired purpose as against a narrow parochialism in international affairs;*³ [my emphasis]

Eric Alterman, a reporter for *The Nation*, has written an important book debunking the myth of liberal bias in the present-day American media.⁴ (He also has a web site for the book and its thesis.)

Cohen doesn't only treat the role of the reporter as booster. He also discusses the importance of criticism. His book was partially constructed through extensive interviews with the reporters themselves.

As one columnist remarked, "Our job is to perceive and point out the main directions of policy, or even the failings of policy." Reporters, even for the "objective" news agencies, readily admit to criticizing policy in their stories, and recount with pride the occasions when the press has "forced a reconsideration of policies" by pointing out "the inconsistencies and errors."⁵

Whether or not the American media, for its part, had any useful critical role in the run-up to the war, and especially in the examination of the WMD question, may be a matter for some debate. Unfortunately, the juggernaut was in motion from the time of the State of the Union address in January, 2002, and there doesn't appear now, in retrospect, much that could have stopped it. The key moment was probably the time of the midterm elections in November, 2002. As we shall see, though, the Bush machine's drive to war was fully meant to influence those

³ Ibid, p. 75

⁴ Eric Alterman, *What Liberal Media?: The Truth About Bias and the News* (Basic Books, New York, 2003)

⁵ Cohen, p. 37

elections and the WMD issue was a key, if not **the** key factor in the successful outcome there for the Republicans.

Just past Labor Day in 2002, White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card was asked by the *NY Times* why the administration was trying to convince people then of the need for war against Iraq. He replied, famously: “From a marketing point of view, you don’t introduce new products in August.” Both political commentator Matt Miller on NPR, and Bill Schneider, CNN’s astute senior political analyst, noted, not long after Card’s statement, that the war - or even the threat of war with Iraq - would boost the Republicans at the polls. The elections were forthcoming on November 5. Both commentators referenced Karl Rove’s talk before a Republican group that June on the White House strategy for the midterm elections in which he said war was a key issue for them.⁶ Remember that after the defection of Vermont Senator Jim Jeffords from the Republican Party in protest of Bush’s policies, that body had swung to the control of the Democrats. Also, it was felt that the House of Representatives could conceivably be recaptured by the Democrats in November. Vice President Dick Cheney at the time huffed and puffed and called the allegation of the political use of the war issue as “reprehensible” on *NBC*’s “Meet the Press.”

September was a key month. On September 12, one year and a day after the Al Qaeda attack on the U.S., Bush addressed the U.N. General Assembly. He said, among other things:

⁶ Rove is, of course, the political mastermind behind George W. Bush. A spate of high-profile articles has appeared about him over the past year: in *Time*, as its “Person of the Week” in its 11/7/02 issue; in *Esquire*, 1/03; *The NY Review of Books*, 5/1/03, in reviewing two books about him; and in *The New Yorker*, 5/12/03.

“Right now, Iraq is expanding and improving facilities that were used for the production of biological weapons.” On September 24, the British published a report (a “dossier” in their parlance) saying Iraq could produce a nuclear weapon within one or two years if it obtained a sufficient quantity of fissile material. Prime Minister Tony Blair pronounced: “We have the evidence.” In Britain, *The Guardian* reported:

But Mr Blair is confident that the 55-page dossier on weapons of mass destruction will convince many doubters.

He told colleagues: “Saddam is developing his weapons programme and doing it as fast as he can.”

He has promised the dossier will not merely be a rebundling of known facts, but “as clear evidence as you could get that he is continuing with his weapons programme. The threat is real serious and continuing.”⁷

Moving ahead to October, in his weekly radio address on the 5th, Bush declared: “Iraq has stockpiled biological and chemical weapons, and is rebuilding the facilities used to make more of those weapons.” and “We have sources that tell us that Saddam Hussein recently authorized Iraqi field commanders to use chemical weapons -- the very weapons the dictator tells us he does not have.” Two days later, on the first anniversary of the launch of the Afghan war, in a high-profile speech in Cincinnati, he said:

“The Iraqi regime . . . possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons. It is seeking nuclear weapons.”

“We know that the regime has produced thousands of tons of chemical agents, including mustard gas, sarin nerve gas, VX nerve gas.”

“We’ve also discovered through intelligence that Iraq has a growing fleet of manned and

⁷ Patrick Wintour, *The Guardian*, September 24, 2002, “Blair: we have the evidence”

unmanned aerial vehicles that could be used to disperse chemical or biological weapons across broad areas. We're concerned that Iraq is exploring ways of using these UAVS for missions targeting the United States.”

“The evidence indicates that Iraq is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program. Saddam Hussein has held numerous meetings with Iraqi nuclear scientists, a group he calls his “nuclear mujahideen” - his nuclear holy warriors. Satellite photographs reveal that Iraq is rebuilding facilities at sites that have been part of its nuclear program in the past. Iraq has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes and other equipment needed for gas centrifuges, which are used to enrich uranium for nuclear weapons.”

Administration figures like Cheney, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Defense Policy Board Chairman Richard Perle, and Defense Undersecretary Paul Wolfowitz (the driving genius behind the war initiative) all appeared in speeches, talks, and in the media duly spreading the gospel of the need to rein in the threat of Iraq’s WMD.

They also timed the debates on the war resolution in Congress and the UN resolution on Iraq to precede the elections and to prove their muscle. In mid-October, the Congress, including the Democrats, caved. The House voted 296-133 and the Senate, 77-23, to give pre-authorization, a blank check, for war. CBS News reported on October 11 that Bush said:

“Today's vote also sends a clear message to the Iraqi regime: you must disarm and comply with all existing U.N. resolutions or it will be forced to comply. There are no other options for the Iraqi regime. There can be no negotiations. The days of Iraq acting as an outlaw state are coming to an

end.” On November 8, the U.N. Security Council, a few days after the American elections, but with the debate well focused in the American public’s consciousness by very heavy media coverage, approved its resolution calling for new weapons inspections and disarmament by force if the Iraqis balked.

In a riveting article on November 4 in, of all things, *The American Conservative*, Martin Sieff, chief international analyst for UPI, said that Rove and his team of strategists timed the Iraq war debate to dominate the campaign.

The American people see before them the spectacle of an administration that has failed in all its major domestic policies and abandoned traditional Republican principles on far too many issues. (One could list maintaining effective immigration controls, a balanced budget, general fiscal prudence, a commitment to full civil liberties, and cultural assimilation of millions of new immigrants.) Instead, the administration is campaigning to sustain and increase its power on a policy of international adventurism, new radical preemptive military strategies, and a hunger for a politically convenient and perfectly timed confrontation with Iraq.⁸

It might also be well to remember the words of an important historical figure from the mid-20th Century, Herman Goering:

... the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country.⁹

So, with the first battles of the war won in Congress, at the U.N., and, most importantly, at the polls, Bush and Company prepared for the war itself. Why, one may wonder, if the reason for all the drumbeating was really to win the midterm elections and, that was accomplished, did

⁸ Martin Sieff, *The American Conservative*, November 4, 2002, “Militarism and the Midterm Elections”

⁹ in Gustave M. Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary* (Da Capo Press, New York, 1995)

the Bush administration actually have to prosecute a war? Because Rove's purposes had been served, though, didn't mean that the True Believers' had as yet.¹⁰ Wolfowitz, Perle, and the other "Neocons" in the administration had been planning for this war for years. *The New Yorker* spelled this out nicely in February of 2003.¹¹ Douglas Feith, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, and a key member of this group, was articulate in laying out the scheme for the whole Middle East. Iraq, in effect, would serve as the fulcrum with which the U.S. would democratize the Middle East, thus also preserving Israel's place.

For Rumsfeld and Cheney, not such deep thinkers, the war would provide other opportunities: for Rumsfeld, the chance to demonstrate his beliefs about a lighter, quicker, more focused and therefore immediately lethal military. For Cheney, Iraq meant the promise of riches in construction contracts and oil to his primary constituents in those industries. For Rice and Powell this all meant a deepening of their power. Powell, in particular, although portrayed as a moderate, really burnished his image forever as the Loyal Servant with his performance on February 5. Powell's presentation on WMD flew entirely in the face of the fact that the U.N. weapons inspections teams led by Hans Blix and Mohamed El-Baradei, and with the full weight of the Security Council resolution behind them, had found next to nothing from November 18 through February. They, of course, wound up finding nothing at all of substance in the final month before they were pulled out just prior to the launch of the war. Powell's dog-and-pony show at the U.N. got huge coverage though – more than enough to keep the hearts and minds of

¹⁰ see Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (Harper & Row, New York, 1951)

¹¹ Nicholas Lemann, *The New Yorker*, February 17 & 24, 2003, "Letter from Washington - After Iraq"

the American public fixed on war.

The administration's cause was abetted by a key figure: a member of the previous administration's National Security Council staff and an expert on Iraq. Kenneth M. Pollack, writing in *Foreign Affairs* in early 2002, pressed the case for war, based largely on the WMD threat.¹² He subsequently published a full-length book on the subject¹³ which was reviewed and discussed widely in the media. Brian Urquhart, a man of considerable integrity and erudition, and a former Undersecretary for Peacekeeping Operations at the U.N., reviewed Pollack's book and his thesis quite favorably.

As it is, Saddam Hussein is the industrialized world's worst nightmare, an aggressive, unpredictable, psychotic dictator in the midst of the world's most important oil-producing region, who, in addition to his chemical and biological arsenal, may before long acquire usable nuclear weapons as well.¹⁴

Pollack was at the same time a CNN analyst and ubiquitous on that media outlet. In Pollack's defense, although almost all of his contentions regarding WMD turned out to be false, he always plumped for a multilateral, U.N.-anointed initiative against Iraq, not the Rough Riders charge up San Juan Hill that Bush's and Blair's people were mounting.

Meanwhile, back in the U.K., on January 13, in his monthly televised address, the P.M. said that WMD will get into the hands of terrorists.

“But the inspectors are in there in order to find out the truth and what they find is then put before the United Nations security council. And all I'm saying is if what

¹² Kenneth M. Pollack, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2002, “Next Stop Baghdad?”

¹³ Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq* (Random House, New York, 2002)

¹⁴ Brian Urquhart, *The New York Review of Books*, December 19, 2002, “The Prospect of War”

they find amounts to a breach of the UN mandate then Saddam will be disarmed by force,” Mr Blair said several times. He was adamant that evidence of President Saddam's deceit will be found.¹⁵

It is fascinating to note here that the P.M. is still saying that the U.N. rules, as set forth in November's resolution, are being and will be observed. The reality, of course, is that the U.S., at least for its part, never had any intention of not going to war. Blair's conviction on WMD seemed to be borne out by two reports (dossiers), one from September and one from early February. The second one was publicly repudiated by the government within a week as “lifted from academic sources and compiled by mid-level officials in Alastair Campbell's Downing Street communications department.”¹⁶ (Campbell is Tony Blair's communications director.) This report was to become known as the “dodgy dossier.” Ironically, Colin Powell “... praised the document for providing ‘in exquisite detail Iraqi deception activities.’”¹⁷

In the light of the failure by British or American forces to find any evidence of WMD in Iraq after the war was won, a parliamentary inquiry was launched. Its conclusions, released on July 7, absolved the government of any malice aforethought in the preparation of these documents – documents with which the Prime Minister and his government tried to lead the British public

¹⁵ Michael White, *The Guardian*, January 14, 2003, “We must act now or pay the price, says Blair”

¹⁶ “Timeline: Iraq” from the *Guardian Unlimited* (*The Guardian's* web site), “Special Report - Iraq” – This source was of inestimable value in the preparation of this paper and, it should be noted, I found the resources at this particular web site to be the best on this subject of any news outlet that I consulted.

¹⁷ Ewen MacAskill and Richard Norton-Taylor, *The Guardian*, July 7, 2003, “Experts grow more sceptical about extent of threat posed by Saddam before war

into accepting that war was necessary. In particular, and only by virtue of the deciding vote of the Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman (from the P.M.'s party, of course), 10 Downing St. communications director Alastair Campbell was absolved of almost all wrongdoing in the preparation of the “dodgy dossier” from February. The report by the Foreign Affairs Committee, however, is pretty damning in general about the shoddiness of the work in the preparation of these intelligence briefs. The inquiries took place in concert with (and significantly exacerbated) the controversy that arose because a BBC reporter accused the government, based on information from unnamed sources, of producing a “sexed-up” dossier. A highly respected Ministry of Defence employee and former weapons inspector in Iraq during the 1990's, Dr. David Kelly, was implicated as one of the unnamed sources, was interviewed by the Committee, subjected to enormous media pressure, and was reported dead by suicide on July 19. This tragic occurrence may certainly be a critical determinant of Tony Blair's future as P.M.

At this point, let me just note that the pace and nature of the investigations and reporting on the WMD question have been quite a bit different here in the U.S. from those in Britain.

As the U.S. and British troops built up in Kuwait and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf, with what appeared to be a date some time in March for the “kick-off,” some of the great powers actually fought back, as did many ordinary people. The weapons inspectors were being given extraordinary access, including a 12,000-page report submitted by the Iraqis in January. On February 8, Blix and El-Baradei had talks in Baghdad that they described as “very substantial.” On February 9, the French and Germans proposed a tripling of the number of arms inspectors and surveillance overflights. The U.S. government reacted furiously. On February 10, the French,

Germans, and Belgians vetoed a U.S. request for NATO to make plans to protect Turkey in the event of an Iraqi invasion there. (The Turks, very much to Bush's chagrin, voted on March 1 in their parliament to deny access to their territory to 62,000 American troops, many already deployed on ships ready to disembark for transport toward Iraq.)

In any event, the Bush administration tried to further fan American jingoism by lashing out at, in Donald Rumsfeld's famous phrase, the "Old Europe."

According to polls at around this point, the American public seemed generally convinced that Iraq had chemical and biological weapons (69%), was trying to develop nuclear weapons (62%), had provided direct support to Al Qaeda (55%), and was not cooperating with the weapons inspectors (75%).¹⁸ Those supporting military force had jumped from 60% to 70% in just two weeks from 1/23-24/03 to 2/6-7/03.¹⁹

Nevertheless, on February 15, millions of people, all over the world, took to the streets to protest the war. There were a million people in London, two million in Rome, over 500,000 in New York²⁰ - there were marches in more than 300 cities in over 60 countries.

The geographical spread of dissent - from Canberra to Cape Town and from Delhi to Damascus - is an indication of how uncontained passions are. In Europe, millions took to the streets - great collective undertakings in the age of the individual. The largest demonstrations were in the countries considered to be George Bush's staunchest allies: Britain, Spain and Italy. In London the biggest protest in British history took place. Size was not the only difference. Recent large

¹⁸ *ABC News/Washington Post* Poll, February 6-9, 2003

¹⁹ *Newsweek* Poll, March 13-14, 2003

²⁰ It should be noted that Mayor Bloomberg, a Republican, denied permission for a march on First Avenue past the U.N. Such a march would have had infinitely more visual impact on television than the sight of the people squeezed into a small rally space and the adjacent streets. Were the White House media experts behind the denial of the march permit? Clearly.

demonstrations featured coalitions, such as that formed by farmers, hauliers and hunt supporters, that were largely sectional and self-interested in their nature. This weekend's march in London was both pluralistic and altruistic. Those opposing a war included not only lifelong dissenters and those who view American foreign policy as the root of all terrorism but also deeply unradical adults and children of all colours, faiths and ages. It was, in the words of one television reporter, the “mother of all focus groups”.²¹

NY Times columnist Paul Krugman, in a piece dated February 18, speculated that the disparity in the depth and breadth of the opposition to war between Europe and the U.S. owed to the differences in media coverage, primarily on TV, where most Americans, frankly, get their news.

The coverage of Saturday's antiwar rallies was a reminder of the extent to which U.S. cable news, in particular, seems to be reporting about a different planet than the one covered by foreign media.

What would someone watching cable news have seen? On Saturday, news anchors on Fox described the demonstrators in New York as “the usual protesters” or “serial protesters.” CNN wasn't quite so dismissive, but on Sunday morning the headline on the network's Web site read “Antiwar rallies delight Iraq,” and the accompanying picture showed marchers in Baghdad, not London or New York.

This wasn't at all the way the rest of the world's media reported Saturday's events, but it wasn't out of character. For months both major U.S. cable news networks have acted as if the decision to invade Iraq has already been made, and have in effect seen it as their job to prepare the American public for the coming war.

So it's not surprising that the target audience is a bit blurry about the distinction between the Iraqi regime and Al Qaeda. Surveys show that a majority of Americans think that some or all of the Sept. 11 hijackers were Iraqi, while many believe that Saddam Hussein was involved in Sept. 11, a claim even the Bush administration has never made. And since many Americans think that the need for a war against Saddam is obvious, they think that Europeans who won't go along are cowards.²²

²¹ leader, *The Guardian*, February 17, 2003, “The March of History”

²² Paul Krugman, *The NY Times*, February 18, 2003, “The Great Divide”

The story of how and why two different democracies, the U.S. and the U.K., should have such different public reactions to their governments' push for war is an interesting one. It is also, in its sum, too complex and lengthy to tell here. But there are two noteworthy differences between these two nations: the shape of their governments and the responsiveness of their respective medias to official lies.

Presidential powers have, by the year 2003, been inflated far beyond what the republic's founders intended. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s famous phrase, "the imperial presidency," describes not only a cumulation of power in that office but an attitude. The U.S. Congress, originally charged with the responsibility for war making, has, over time and particularly in the post World War II period, ceded much of its power in this domain to the executive branch. American national security policy has been made with relatively little congressional or public oversight and input, behind the closed doors of the White House, National Security Council, CIA, and Pentagon.

The British, by contrast, have a parliamentary system which necessitates considerable participation by legislators because they are, in effect, the executive as well as the legislative branch. The permanent civil servants at the ministries do have far more continuity at the most senior levels than do those in the U.S. They are still subject, of course, to directions set by the party in power and its leader, the Prime Minister. The governments also differ in their accountability to the electorate. In the U.S., a President is elected only every four years. A Prime Minister may, at any time, lose the "confidence" of the parliament, necessitating the holding of new elections.

The press in the two countries also seem significantly differently attuned in their relationships to government and the public. One very palpable difference lies in the fact that American television and radio is almost wholly commercial. Although Public Television and National Public Radio have their niches here, the presence – really omnipresence – of the BBC in Britain is very important to note. Precisely because the BBC is a government-funded and mandated service, the governors and staff of that body have strived for many years to make completely sure that their news product is independent of undue government influence. The quality of BBC coverage is reflected in that fierce tradition of independence.²³

When, for instance, the “dodginess” of Britain’s second dossier on Iraq’s WMD came to light soon after it was promulgated in February, the British press were in high gear quickly, and the government was forced to respond - they couldn’t brush off the media furor. The British public were also, in the main, not in the least convinced of the need for war. (Interestingly, support for the war surged as soon as it began.)

The political cultures are different to the extent also that the members of parliament seem much more responsive to their constituents than they are to their party’s leadership, in contrast to the American members of Congress who seem to follow their leadership first, their constituents second, and their consciences third (if at all).

On February 26, Tony Blair felt the power of this difference in the parliamentary vote on the war in which 121 of his own party voted against the contention that the case for war had by

²³ I would like to note here the BBC’s comprehensive coverage and universal scope is evidenced in their very informative and useful web site.

then been made. By March 18, the day before the outbreak of war, P.M. Blair had won a motion for war, 412 to 149 – but 139 of those voting against were from his own party. As many as nine ministers and senior government aides had by then resigned in protest, including, the day before, Blair's former foreign minister, Robin Cook.

Other major nations, of course, don't answer (yet) to the dictates of the American President, let alone those of the British Prime Minister. On March 5, the foreign ministers of France, Germany, and Russia declared that they would block any war resolution at the Security Council.

When the war commenced on March 19, the world tensed in anticipation of the use of WMD by Iraq in battle. The Israelis feared the launch of missiles containing gas or germ agents. The American and British ground troops had all been specially inoculated against possible biological weaponry and were also all outfitted with state-of-the-art chemical protection gear. By mid-April, after the fighting had long since peaked, the troops were able to breathe easier, not having been confronted at any point with chemical or biological weapons. By then, there was a lessening of anxiety too in the U.S. and Britain over possible terrorist counterstrikes.

In the aftermath of the war, the question of where the WMD have been has sounded and resounded. Four months after the war, the compass of the questioning is growing as is its intensity. It is possible that Prime Minister Blair will be driven from office. It is not likely that President Bush will face impeachment proceedings although John Dean, President Nixon's counsel and a figure at the heart of that President's scandalous abuse of power, asked if the present situation was not, indeed, worse than Watergate.

To put it bluntly, if Bush has taken Congress and the nation into war based on bogus information, he is cooked. Manipulation or deliberate misuse of national security intelligence data, if proven, could be “a high crime” under the Constitution's impeachment clause. It would also be a violation of federal criminal law, including the broad federal anti-conspiracy statute, which renders it a felony “to defraud the United States, or any agency thereof in any manner or for any purpose.”

It's important to recall that when Richard Nixon resigned, he was about to be impeached by the House of Representatives for misusing the CIA and FBI. After Watergate, all presidents are on notice that manipulating or misusing any agency of the executive branch improperly is a serious abuse of presidential power.²⁴

Unfortunately, the political stars will probably not align for an impeachment proceeding. The Republicans in the House of Representatives would not, in a word, allow it to happen. The American voters may, however, on November 2, 2004, throw this administration out of office. They may not. A lot depends on the quality of the media's handling of the WMD issue. (Another scenario, albeit an alarmist one, is that the Bush administration will declare some sort of state of emergency in the wake of war with North Korea or some other catastrophic event, and suspend the elections.)

A comprehensive account of the lies that were promoted by the Bush administration appeared in *The New Republic* last month.²⁵ The mainstream media may yet give this story its due. They may not.

There have been numerous grievous injuries to the American constitution in the past forty years. President Johnson gave us his “Gulf of Tonkin incident.” Nixon visited “Watergate” on

²⁴ John Dean, *Findlaw.com*, June 6, 2003, “Missing Weapons Of Mass Destruction: Is Lying About The Reason For War An Impeachable Offense?”

²⁵ John B. Judis & Spencer Ackerman, *The New Republic*, June 30, 2003, “The Selling of the Iraq War - The First Casualty”

us. Reagan sold arms illegally to rebels in Nicaragua. The Republican-controlled House of Representatives impeached President Clinton for transgressions that fell significantly short of the Framers' threshold for that process of a "high crime or misdemeanor." In 2000, a bare majority of the Supreme Court hijacked the electoral process. (One must remember that the U.S. Constitution fully provides for the circumstances of a contested Presidential election and it does not give the Supreme Court the authority in this that it assumed.) In these instances the American media has a mixed record, at best. Now that a sizeable number of the top leadership of the American government, clearly in full recognition of what they were doing, has been caught out in a fabric of lies, one can only hope that American journalists and the organizations that employ them will fully live up to their responsibilities, as their British counterparts appear to be doing. The record, however, does not indicate that any guarantees should be forthcoming on this score.