

FEBRUARY 17, 2004

SCHAKOWSKY: BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S MISSTATEMENT OF THE DAY - IRAQ WAR INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) issued today's "Bush Administration's Misstatement of the Day" on Iraq war intelligence.

During his weekly radio address, President Bush said on Saturday, February 14, 2004: *The best intelligence is necessary to win the war on terror and to stop proliferation.* (President Bush, 2/14/04)

However, evidence is growing that in fact the Bush Administration did not use the "best intelligence" while making its case for

[war with Iraq](#)

. An editorial in today's *New York Times*

titled "Distorting the Intelligence" states:

In making its case for war, the administration leapt well beyond the battlefield chemical weapons that Iraq had used in the past and repeatedly raised the specter that Iraqi nuclear and biological weapons might cause truly enormous casualties. Top officials warned that Saddam Hussein might use these terrifying weapons against the American homeland, either by providing them to terrorists or by firing biological weapons directly from points offshore. In making such claims, the administration went beyond the intelligence consensus in important areas.

The common thread here is that the Bush administration took unlikely worst-case scenarios and inflated them drastically to justify an immediate invasion without international support. Below is the full text of the editorial:

The New York Times

Distorting the Intelligence

February 17, 2004

The Senate Intelligence Committee made the right call last week when it decided to examine whether top administration officials had exaggerated or misused the intelligence on Iraq's weapons programs. Whatever horrendous errors the intelligence analysts made were surely compounded when the president and other senior officials emphasized unlikely worst-case scenarios to win support for the invasion.

In making its case for war, the administration leapt well beyond the battlefield chemical weapons that Iraq had used in the past and repeatedly raised the specter that Iraqi nuclear and biological weapons might cause truly enormous casualties. Top officials warned that Saddam Hussein might use these terrifying weapons against the American homeland, either by providing them to terrorists or by firing biological weapons directly from points offshore. In making such claims, the administration went beyond the intelligence consensus in important areas.

Nuclear -- The president and his top aides were artful in suggesting that, in Mr. Bush's words,

"we cannot wait for the final proof -- the smoking gun -- that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud." In a speech shortly before the Congressional vote authorizing force against Iraq, President Bush warned that if Iraq could "produce, buy or steal" highly enriched uranium a bit larger than a softball, it could have a nuclear weapon in less than a year. That was technically true, but the president failed to say that the intelligence community considered it unlikely. An effective embargo was in place to prevent Iraq from acquiring fissile material. The consensus view, as stated recently by George Tenet, the director of central intelligence, was that Iraq would need five to seven years to make a bomb. Even that estimate proved way off, given the decrepit state of Iraq's nuclear program.

Biological -- The National Intelligence Estimate prepared just before the Congressional vote concluded, erroneously, that Iraq's biological weapons program was active and that most elements were larger and more advanced than before the gulf war. But at least the document was cautious in assessing what weaponry Iraq had, concluding only that Iraq had "some" lethal biological agents and could quickly make more. President Bush, on the other hand, threw caution aside. In his major speech before the Congressional vote, he extrapolated wildly from a U.N. finding that Iraq could have produced a lot more anthrax than it admitted and warned darkly that Iraq had probably produced enough anthrax to make "a massive stockpile of biological weapons that has never been accounted for, and is capable of killing millions."

Aerial Attacks -- Some members of Congress voted for force in Iraq out of fear that Mr. Hussein was prepared to launch a biological attack on the American homeland. A month before the vote, Mr. Tenet and Vice President Dick Cheney went to Capitol Hill to brief House and Senate leaders on the supposedly dire threat posed by Iraq's unpiloted airborne vehicles, which they described as capable of spreading chemical or biological agents. Senator Trent Lott, the Republican who was one of four leaders briefed by Mr. Tenet and Mr. Cheney, said recently that the information "did have an effect on us, no question," and Senator Bill Nelson, Democrat of Florida, complained at a recent hearing that he had been led to believe that the threat was imminent. What is disturbing in this episode is that the Air Force, the agency most expert on the unpiloted vehicles, dissented from the intelligence consensus and thought that the aircraft were actually designed for reconnaissance. The Senate committee ought to look hard at this case to determine why the National Intelligence Estimate overrode the Air Force experts and what role Mr. Cheney might have played in either shaping or hyping the threat.

Terrorist Link -- The most frightening specter raised by top officials was that Mr. Hussein might provide terror weapons to Al Qaeda or other terrorist groups for use against the United States. This was a big leap beyond what intelligence analysts were predicting. The National Intelligence Estimate concluded that Iraq was drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks with its own personnel but might, if it became sufficiently desperate, take "the extreme step" of helping terrorists conduct a chemical or biological attack against the United States. As it turned out, of course, there seem to have been no weapons to give to anyone.

The common thread here is that the Bush administration took unlikely worst-case scenarios and inflated them drastically to justify an immediate invasion without international support. The Senate committee will need to find out not just why the intelligence was so wrong, but also the extent to which the administration misused it to stampede the nation.