

what bush didn't want

YOU

to

KNOW

about iraq

by michael i. niman

When Iraq presented its weapons declaration to the United Nations in December 2002, the Bush administration immediately attacked the report as incomplete, hinting that producing a partial report might be a justification to unleash on that nation the most lethal killing machine history has known.

In a way, the Bush folks were telling the truth. The UN report as distributed was missing key pieces of information about Iraq's weapons programs. But that's because the United States removed over 8,000 pages of information from the 11,800 page document before passing it on. The missing pages implicated twenty-four U.S.-based corporations and the successive Ronald Reagan and George Bush administrations in connection with the illegal supplying of Saddam Hussein's Iraqi government with myriad weapons of mass destruction and the training to use them.

According to the report, Eastman Kodak (which, among others, seems not to have fundamentally changed since collaborating with the Nazis in World War II), Dupont, Honeywell, Rockwell, Sperry, Hewlett-Packard, and Bechtel were among the American companies aiding the Iraqi weapons program leading up to Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. The report also reiterated information previously documented by Senator Robert C. Byrd (Democrat, West Virginia) and, before that, stated in a host of alternative newspapers, magazines, and radio shows around the world. These reports detailed how the U.S. Government directly supplied weapons of mass destruction to Hussein—weapons he then used against his own people while the United States resupplied his arsenal. In addition to biological and chemical weapons components such as anthrax, various U.S. government agencies—including the

Department of Energy, Department of Commerce, and Department of Agriculture, as well as the Livermore Los Alamos and Sandia nuclear weapons labs—also supplied Hussein's government with material for its nuclear weapons program and training in how to use that material.

Then, of course, Dick Cheney's Haliburton outfit received the contract to rebuild Hussein's oilfields after the 1991 Gulf War. This is a new twist on the child's game of building up and knocking down blocks—but only with a fat government subsidy and tens of thousands of dead bodies.

None of this comes as any surprise to people who have been following the Iraq situation for the past two decades. In fact, it was American peace activists—not the gung-ho, pro-war, flag-sticker-on-the-SUV chicken hawks—who first raised the warning about Iraq's U.S.-supported weapons program. In short, the cat's been out of the bag for quite awhile on this story—hence outright denial of the Iraqi report's allegations wasn't a feasible option for the Bush administration. Yet with the Iraqi report strengthening calls for war crimes indictments against key Reagan and Bush Sr. administration officials—such as former and current Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld for collaboration with Hussein on the massacres of Iraqi Kurds—George W. Bush felt compelled to do something about the embarrassing material. Hence, with all the finesse of a frat boy tossing a coke spoon from a speeding Land Rover with troopers in hot pursuit, Bush simply ordered more than 8,000 incriminating pages of the report snipped and trashed. Who would know?

This is one of the more frightening aspects of today's Bush-league White House: its sheer gall and arrogance. It's what led Senator Trent Lott (Republican, Mississippi) to express to the "out group" the sort of bigotry he's on record as confiding to the "in group" for years: they're all high on their own power, believing they can get away with anything. By comparison, Richard Nixon comes off like a jaywalker.

The mechanics of this theft were simple. Iraq presented one CD-ROM copy of the document to the International Atomic Energy Agency, where it was classified “secret,” and another to the UN Security Council, all of whose other permanent members (Britain, France, China, and Russia) shared the Bush administration’s desire to suppress the report, since they were also implicated for their roles in arming Iraq. Russia and China, in fact, are still arming Iraq (remember this next time you see some yahoo in the Wal-Mart parking lot loading his flag-draped gas-guzzling SUV with Chinese sweatshop booty). The Security Council is currently chaired by a temporary member, Columbia, whose brutally repressive government is propped up by the presence of the U.S. military, currently fighting a “low-intensity” war in that country. Hence, it didn’t take much pressure for Columbian officials to look the other way as the U.S. representatives snipped two-thirds of the report. The other members of the Security Council all received the doctored document.

The Bush plan fell through, of course, since the Iraqis weren’t about to stand by and be chastised and threatened for not completing a report that they actually completed. The original document was filed on a compact disc. Now, with CDs costing about a dime, the expense of producing and leaking a few extra copies was clearly within reach for a country whose dictator has gold-plated toilet seats in his half-dozen palaces.

Nobody can say for sure how many dimes Iraq spent before one of the CDs finally landed in the hand of Andreas Zumach, a journalist with the Berlin newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*, who broke the story about the missing pages on December 19, 2002. By December 20, people around the world were once again reading about how the United States armed Iraq. But now they were also reading how the United States brazenly tried to engineer world opinion by altering Iraq’s own document and floating bogus claims of noncompliance with UN reporting requirements. Globally, Bush’s cheap ploy yielded a full-tilt backfire, with American credibility flushed down the drain.

back in the United States, however, it’s another story. Mediawise, Americans might as well

live on a different planet from their global neighbors. With the exception of the alternative media—most notably Amy Goodman’s “Democracy Now” radio show, which broke the story in the United States on December 19 in an interview with Andreas Zumach—the U.S. corporate media censored this piece of headline-grabbing news. Hence, Americans continue to be in “axis of evil” mode, itching to kick some Iraqi ass.

A partial exception to this occurred on December 30 when the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* revisited this story they originally ignored back when Iraq was a U.S. ally. With Iraq now on the enemies list, old news seems to have gained a new purpose and is suddenly in vogue. However, the U.S. origin of the very weapons we are rightfully condemning Iraq for having possessed is still mostly missing from the mainstream news coverage. Moreover, as of this writing, nothing at all has been said by these outlets about the government’s surreptitious 8,000-page abridgement of Iraq’s report. Indeed, you may be reading about it here for the first time.

My own media observations in Buffalo, New York, reveal how galling this situation can become. On January 5, 2003, *Buffalo News* editor Margaret Sullivan, in an audacious display of self-praise, wrote that unlike politically partisan newspapers of days gone by, “mainstream newspapers these days set out to be objective in their news coverage.” She adds, “Reporters are expected to get both sides of every situation and to keep their opinions out of their news stories.” But her paper hadn’t then and hasn’t now reported any side of the story of U.S. government censorship of Iraq’s report—an especially negligent omission considering the United States is marching off to war based on partial data and misinformation. Indeed, since the *Buffalo News* has exhibited a habitual failure to report stories embarrassing to the Bush junta, Sullivan doesn’t seem all that serious about tackling the challenges of journalism.

Similarly, Don Boswell’s Western New York Public Broadcasting Association (WNYPBA) is another gatekeeper standing between Buffalonians and international news. While millions of other Americans at least had the opportunity to learn of the doctored report by listening to Goodman’s *Democracy Now* radio show, Western New

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Yorkers weren't among them due to WNYPBA president Boswell's refusal to carry the program on either of his organization's two radio stations. The reason why is no mystery. When Boswell was vice-president of the Dallas, Texas, PBS affiliate, he was quoted by the *Corporate Philanthropy Report* of April 1991, explaining how such decisions are made. According to Boswell, "We now work more closely with the creative department at the station to try to keep them from producing unfundable projects." Given WNYPBA's close relationship to the corporate community, it's no wonder it shuns the "unfundable" but hard-hitting *Democracy Now*. This is especially frustrating since Western New Yorkers indeed pledged thousands of dollars to WNYPBA during its last fundraising drive on the condition that it broadcast *Democracy Now*. It's this public commitment that has brought the show to other cities. WNYPBA, however, seems more interested in placating the corporate community and collecting the more lucrative corporate underwriting than bringing serious news programming to its "all-news" station.

Clearly there is a desire—whether for love of country or love of money—to keep certain history a secret. And since others who once heard the story may have forgotten it, a short review seems in order.

We can begin by remembering that, for most of his tenure in politics, Saddam Hussein was the United States' man in Iraq. His regime, for all of its obvious and glaring faults, proved itself one of the most powerful secular governments in the Persian Gulf and, as such, stood in the way of the fundamentalist tide passing for anti-imperialism in the region. So, when fundamentalists took over Iran, the United States moved closer to Iraq.

According to documents released by a host of U.S. government agencies, the Reagan and Bush Sr. administrations, starting in 1983, supplied Hussein's regime with conventional, chemical, and biological weapons components. This continued until Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Included in the eighty shipments of biological and chemical components were six strains of botulinum toxin, three strains of anthrax, three stains of gas gangrene bacteria, West Nile fever virus, and Dengue fever virus. In December 1983—shortly after the first shipments of biological components arrived in Iraq—Donald Rumsfeld, today's U.S. Secretary of Defense, traveled to Baghdad as an envoy representing then-president Ronald Reagan. Once there, Rumsfeld met with Hussein, ostensibly to discuss U.S. aid for Iraq's war against Iran. Shortly thereafter in 1984 Iraq used chemical weapons against Iran. In 1988 it used them against one of its own oppressed ethnic minorities, the Iraqi Kurds.

In 1986 the United Nations Security Council condemned Iraq's use of chemical weapons, with the United States standing alone as the only nation to vote against censuring Iraq. The U.S. media at the time all but ignored the UN action, as well as Iraq's use of chemical weapons. Iraq was, after all, an ally. But after Iraq became the enemy in an Orwellian switcheroo, the information about its chemical and biological program was still downplayed by the U.S. media. In 1994—when information about the U.S. origins of Iraqi chemical and biological weapons became public during an investigation of Gulf War syndrome—a mysterious group of ailments affecting Gulf War veterans—the mainstream press still chose to ignore what was becoming an increasingly embarrassing story.

This revisionist history has continued thus until the present—which is why so few Americans understand that the Iraqi dictator is just one more monster created by the United States and that his feared chemical and biological weapons program is simply an out-of-control outgrowth of a shortsighted U.S. foreign policy. Had the United States just skipped such stupidity it could have omitted the last forty years worth of wars, the World Trade Center would probably still be standing, and Americans would be far more secure. Without a bloated military budget Americans would also probably be a healthier, better educated, fed, and housed population.

But there's only so much we can gain by reviewing the past. We also need to look forward and ask the right questions. What enemies are being created today who will come back to bite us ten or twenty years down the line? Where are U.S. bombs creating generations of America-hating martyrs whose lives are so miserable and empty that they will throw them away as weapons in a hateful war? This cycle has lasted for two generations of Bushes and been kept alive in the interim by the Bill Clinton White House. It needs to end now if our children will ever have a hope to live free of fear. The United States needs to ditch this shortsighted "enemy of our enemies is our friend" mentality and stop supporting megalomaniacs like Hussein and fanatics like Osama bin Laden, who inevitably will spread their disease across the globe. We all need to join the world community and act thoughtfully, working for a more secure future for everyone. We can't let hatred or short-term political goals dictate foreign policy.

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