

Preparing for the Next Deception **by Robert P. Abele**

(Excepting the two introductory paragraphs, the following article is an excerpt from the forthcoming book by Dr. Robert P. Abele, entitled *The Anatomy of a Deception*, published by University Press of America. It is set for an October release.)

The news from Obama's speech at the U.N. this morning (September 25, 2009) was accusatory and grim: Iran is hiding a nuclear processing plant from the international community, to which the U.S. would not hesitate to respond militarily.¹ And so the drumbeat to war begins anew. While this may seem like a hasty and superlative conclusion given Obama's remarks, this latest attempt to keep pressure on Iran to remain militarily weaker than Western nations has a historical precedent in U.S. interest in regional hegemony. The U.S. has given Iran plenty of reason for seeking a nuclear deterrent (i.e. by its complete economic and military support of Israel, and by its invasion of Iraq).² While I am not attempting to argue that a nuclear-armed Iran would necessarily make the world safer (one could turn the same argument made by Western leaders against them regarding the possession of nuclear weapons by the U.S. and especially by Israel), any analysis of the latest accusations made by Obama and western leaders must be put in historical perspective.

Although the circumstantial evidence seems to indicate that Iran did in fact hide this second processing plant from the IAEA, this accusation was strategically made by Obama at the U.N. to demonstrate Western resolve in the face of a threat to its hegemony in the Mideast. It is the beginning of the next chapter of our corporate wars—which we may rightly entitle “The Obama Wars”—which may not be televised, but can be recognized as being fought already: the continuing war in Iraq; the expansion of war in Afghanistan; drone use in the Pakistan war; and for now, new rhetorical (only) wars against Iran. The Obama administration is simply continuing with the long-running series of the historical U.S. push for world military dominance.³ As is by now well-known, the U.S. has had its eye on control of Iran for many years, beginning with the U.S. installation of Mohammad Rezā Shāh Pahlavi as the Shah of Iran in 1953. But before commencing with the next corporate-sponsored installment of America's attack on other countries, whether it is Iran or not, perhaps we would benefit by a quick look back at how they led us into Iraq and Afghanistan. Understanding that history and its structure (contrary to the Obama desire to “look forward, not backward”) will allow us to see the manipulations and machinations that are and have been used by the corporate government to keep us at war with the world. If knowledge is indeed power, and power belongs to the people, we can stop future military attacks by the U.S. by knowing in advance how the government will attempt to manipulate citizens into believing that the U.S. (or its Israel surrogate) “must act” militarily against Iran.

Summary of How We Got into Iraq and Afghanistan

The book *Anatomy of a Deception* lays out the main premises of the decision of the U.S. government to invade Iraq and Afghanistan. In sum, there are at least four converging factors that led to the invasion of both countries: the general philosophy of *Realpolitik* of the U.S. government, which the U.S. has used with rigorous historical consistency to support Mid East, Central American, and other world-regional dominance; critical thinking derelictions and culpable information ignorance on the part of the media, passed on to the uncritical populace, particularly concerning the public debate on invading Iraq; violations of basic ethical principles; and violations of international law.

The book traces the philosophical reasons our government led us down this path to invasion stem from three things: the history of U.S. ambitions in the Middle East; the imperialist philosophy of the U.S. government; and the neoconservative philosophy of Leo Strauss and his followers. Specifically, there were numerous critical thinking failures made in the public debate over going to war on Iraq that are seen in this study. Just by way of example, here are a few of the critical thinking omissions we saw with regard to Iraq alone. When these categories are applied to Afghanistan, the same pattern can be observed. The interesting thing about these derelictions is that together they constitute the historical pattern the U.S. government uses when it wants to dominate another country or region. Watch for it again as Israel and the U.S. ramp up their rhetoric against Iran and other mideastern countries, such as Syria, Lebanon, and even the East, such as Pakistan, in order to increase its hegemony over this region.⁴ Some call it “propaganda;” I call it the cultivation of “groupthink,” the antithesis to which is critical thinking. Applied to Iraq alone, here is what we saw (specific instances and the arguments given, along with supporting premises and footnoted evidence of the critique of those instances and arguments, can be seen in the book):

- *A lack of evidence* for justifying either invasion, seen especially in Colin Powell’s speech to the United Nations regarding Iraq.
- *Hasty Generalizations*—i.e. drawing the strongest possible conclusions from weak evidence for the conclusions.
- *Suppressed Evidence*—i.e. picking only evidence that supported the predetermined U.S. administration conclusion that an invasion of Iraq was needed. This includes redefining terms to better suit their position (e.g. “deterrence;” “torture”). It also includes ignoring evidence such as increasing Iraqi compliance with U.N. mandates for inspections and WMD destruction; doubts about the American case for the invasion expressed other U.S. government agencies (e.g. CIA) as well as U.N. inspectors and groups (e.g. IAEA).
- *False Premises*—Facts given were erroneously stated or just plain false, and were shown to be so *at the time* they were being used.
- *Questionable Sources*—e.g. Iraqi defectors (some unnamed; some named), shown *at the time* they were being used to be bogus witnesses with bogus information; rejecting reports

from other government agencies (e.g. CIA) in favor in insider administration reports (e.g. Douglas Feith).

- *Arguments from Ignorance*—e.g. Iraq did not prove that they did not possess WMD's, so they are hiding something and/or they must have them.
- *Non-sequiturs*—when attempting to compile evidence to meet normative criteria (either ethical or legal), the premises given were in some cases not necessary and in nearly all cases insufficient to support the conclusion that the invasion of Iraq was justified.
- *Vague and overly-broad generalizations* in premises and conclusions—e.g. Iraq is “a terrorist entity that has attempted to reach beyond its own borders to support and engage in illegal activities” (John Nichols).
- *Characterizations* used in place of evidence—e.g. “Butcher of Baghdad;” “Dr. Death;” “Chemical Ali;” “he has gassed his own people,” etc.
- *Use of circumstantial evidence* to justify conclusions—e.g. Christopher Hitchens argued that Saddam Hussein “harbors every species of gangster” but presented only one very dubious case (al Zarfawi).
- *Red Herring/Post hoc fallacies*—e.g. “humanitarian intervention” in 2003 as necessary, but such arguments were based on pre-1991 actions done by Hussein. In addition, the same arguments ignored the fact that U.S. sanctions and regular missile attacks on Iraq both caused and deepened the humanitarian crisis in Iraq.
- *Contradictions*—e.g. U.S. does not have to follow the U.N., but the U.S. is fulfilling U.N. resolutions in invading Iraq.
- *Failure to take proper accounting of potential consequences* from the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

There were also numerous ethical violations in the public case for going to war:

- *Use of self-interest over principle*—the latter is engaged with general or universal rules of conduct toward others.
- *Ignoring or flatly rejecting international law*—e.g. Nuremberg Charter; Geneva Conventions; U.N. Charter, etc.
- *Moral inconsistency*—i.e. picking and choosing which U.N. resolutions to follow, and also using principles to support self-interest.
- *Interpreting U.N. resolutions* narrowly or broadly to suit the U.S. interest in invading Iraq.
- *Hubris*—believing that conquering Iraq would be quick and easy (a “cakewalk” according to Assistant Defense Secretary Ken Adelman), and that we would be “greeted as liberators” (Vice President Cheney), and that, while the rest of the world disputed the U.S. concerning the morality of an invasion, the U.S., with its presumed exceptionalism, believed it had the moral and/or legal right to unilaterally invade anyway (with only a bit of assistance from a few other countries).

- *Ignoring or giving only superficial acknowledgement* of the rigorous requirements of Just War Theory.
- *Refusal to negotiate with Iraq or cooperate with the United Nations*—both are requirements of Just War Theory, but also related to hubris.
- *Preventive war* (as distinguished from pre-emptive war).
- *Piling on the bad behaviors of person or country x, y, or z—in this case, Saddam Hussein*—as premises for invasion, without listing or naming the distinctly moral premises needed to conclude from those bad behaviors that an invasion was justified.
- *Double standards regarding U.S. actions and Iraqi alleged actions*—e.g. support of terrorists, as in Luis Posada Carilles living with impunity in Miami, and Iraq allegedly harboring al Zarqawi.
- *Duplicity (Machiavellianism)*—appealing to high-sounding norms (e.g. freedom; liberation; democracy) while engaging in precisely the opposite behavior (e.g. invasion; domination; control; ethnic cleansing; targeting civilians and infrastructure; torture).
- *Disrespect for the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq.*
- *Violation of Iraqi civilians*—between 500,000 and one million Iraqi citizens are dead either through or as a consequence of the U.S. invasion.
- *Ignoring predictable damage to America’s moral culture, its reputation, and its domestic economy that results from American bellicosity.*
- *American military casualties and the wrecked lives* of the thousands of American families whose loved ones have been (and will be) killed in Iraq.
- *Torture of citizens of the purported “enemy,”* in violation of all ethical principles and international laws concerning the use of torture.

Given all this, the obvious question that arises is:

What Must We Do to Avoid this Deception in the Future?

First, we citizens must become—and remain—more informed about the workings of our government and what they are doing than we have heretofore been. Granting from the start that there is much that is kept secret from us, the fact of the matter, as has been demonstrated in the book, is that enough information was available to us prior to the invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003, to cogently debate the issue and to come to the conclusion that such a proposal was unfounded empirically, not logically sound, unethical in its formulation, and illegal according to international law. These are all categories of knowledge which citizens must be as adept at engaging as they can be. That is the only way to stop this type of action from happening again.

Second, we, the citizens of the United States, must return to distinctively ethical principles and values rather than purely pragmatic dialogue and actions. This must be accompanied by a development of critical thinking when it comes to government pronouncements and propaganda

intended to take us to war. We must demand of government accountability, and that implies that we become informed of the issues at hand.

Third, we must demand more from our media. The media, from the ostensibly liberal *New York Times* to FOX News, was not only completely delinquent in actually investigating the government case for invading Iraq, but they in fact served as volunteer cheerleaders for the invasion. Judith Miller at the *Times* was responsible for pushing the now-famous “Iraq aluminum tubes” lie, and for reporting, on the basis of second-hand sources, that the U.S. had found the Iraqi WMD’s they were looking for. Katie Couric gushed as the anchor of NBC’s *Today* program that “I think Navy SEALs rock!”⁵ and Dan Rather pandered that “I want my country to win, whatever the definition of ‘win’ may be. Now, I can’t and don’t argue that that is coverage without prejudice.” The American media was nothing short of disgraceful in its coverage of the planned Iraq invasion.⁶ Even worse, this media, with few exceptions, has repeatedly shown its willingness to capitulate its duty to inform citizens and to challenge those in power, in favor of obliging the interests of those in power, to the point that one might rightfully ask what the difference is between American media and former Soviet-owned media.

This is not new: the same pattern has replayed throughout U.S. history. The government lies, the U.S. corporatized media uncritically and complicitly replays the lie and even magnifies it by advocating its support, in the face of evidence to the contrary, the war is commenced, the truth starts to overtake the lies, people withdraw their support, the war drags on. We have seen this pattern repeatedly in American history: USS Maine (1898); Gulf of Tonkin (1964); Dominican Republic (1965); Grenada (1983); Panama (1989); Kosovo (1999); Iraq (2002-2003), just to name a few of the more prominent cases.⁷ The case of media complicity in the planned Iraq invasion is demonstrated clearly by the overwhelming voice given to pro-war advocates and the marginalization of dissenting voices. In one study, conducted by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, the following media outlets were studied: ABC World News Tonight, CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, and PBS NewsHour with Jim Lehrer. The study lasted about two weeks, from 1/30/03-2/12/03.⁸ A total of 393 on-camera sources were on these programs, more than two-thirds of whom were U.S. citizens, and more than 75% of whom were former military officials. Only three of the 393 sources used were anti-war, less than 1%. If media-maintained government propaganda trumping up war support is nothing new, then pre-Iraq invasion coverage fit right in with our history. We need news sources for democracy to function properly as invoking an open dialogue, not as Stalin-like propaganda machines for government manipulation of the populace by extreme one-sidedness. This is why it is critically important that citizens become more sophisticated about what they consume as truth. This implies using several sources of information, and that we avoid relying heavily on what is euphemistically called the “mainstream media.”

Fourth, we must demand that our government follow international law. If anything should convince us of the need for the adherence of all nations to international law and its standards, it is the shift of the United States from a nation which at least acknowledged the rule of law to the

rogue state that we have become in foreign affairs through the policies of the Bush administration. This is particularly true with regard to our invasion and occupation of Iraq. Condemned by international law and the world at large, it is a glaring instance of the need for compliance with international law on the part of all nations. Without compliance with international law, no international cooperation is possible. Nations need structure in order to work together, and international law is that structure. McGwire again writes that the most important reason to condemn the invasion of Iraq was that “such an operation threatened to undermine the very fabric of international relations. That decision repudiated a century of slow, intermittent and often painful progress toward an international system based on cooperative security . . . agreed norms of behaviour and a steadily growing fabric of law.”⁹

The importance of international law is underscored when we realize that there is no true security between nations without it. How can one nation condemn another for its actions if there is no ground for condemnation?

More important than this, the United States representatives must acknowledge that all principles of ethical conduct and thus law are based on the principle of universality: “If one does it, then anyone may do it.” Think of what would happen if every nation in the world made the same claims that the U.S. has done, does now, and did with abandon under the Bush administration regarding invasion of other countries and the right to nuclear first strikes. For a specific example, since 1992, the United States has exported more than \$142 billion dollars worth of weaponry to states around the world.¹⁰ The U.S. dominates this international arms market, supplying just under half of all arms exports in 2001, roughly two and a half times more than the second and third largest suppliers.¹¹ U.S. weapons sales help outfit non-democratic regimes, soldiers who commit gross human rights abuses against their citizens and citizens of other countries, and forces in unstable regions on the verge of, in the middle of, or recovering from conflict.

Conclusion

The point of the book is not that we *now* know the Bush administration lied to us and to the world in order to take the United States into an unnecessary war—i.e. a war of aggression upon the sovereign state of Iraq. Rather, the point has been that all of the issues and problems of their deceit were there from the start, and could have and should have been noticed, and in some cases, unmasked, by a thinking and ethically conscious public and media. That it was not is to our collective shame. That we can avoid this in the future is the point of this book. We cannot expect a significant change in this type of U.S. action in the world in the administration of President Barack Obama. Not only does the United States have a long history of unethical and illegal behavior toward other nations (some of which has been spelled out in this study), but Obama himself pledged repeatedly to continue the “war on terrorism” (even in his inaugural speech), to step up the war in Afghanistan by deploying even more troops there, and has made no pledge to withdraw all troops from Iraq. So although Obama may nuance U.S. actions abroad, by no means does he plan to change them. It is up to us, the citizens of the U.S., to put pressure not just on Obama, but on our alleged Representatives and Congress people, to make the change

needed. They will not do so by themselves. By engaging the tools of critical analysis and moral principle, we will be able to recognize our government's moral failures and their own terrorism, and then be in a position not to be led by the propaganda that the government and media use to direct our support for future wars. If we think these issues through by demanding more information and by weighing that information against the proposed action, and filtering it through the lens of ethical principles and international laws, we can stop our government from taking us down the dark road of wars of aggression and torture. It is our government, not theirs, and it is up to us to hold them accountable for their actions. With such information, critical thinking, and ethical consciousness, we can guide the U.S. back to a more positive relationship with the world, and restore democracy at home.

Notes

¹ Charles Babington and Robert Burns, "Obama Warns Iran: 'Come Clean' on Nukes," Associated Press, September 25, 2009.

² For more on this, see Noam Chomsky, *Failed States* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), p. 73.

³ In addition to *Failed States*, see also Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003);

⁴ See, for example, Pepe Escobar, *Globalistan* (Ann Arbor: Nimble Books, 2006).

⁵ *Today*, NBC, April 3, 2003

⁶ CNN, April 14, 2003

⁷ For details on the media as megaphone for government interests in these and other military adventures, see Norman Solomon, *War Made Easy* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005)

⁸ "In Iraq Crisis, Networks are Megaphones for Official Views," FAIR study, 3/18/03.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Data compiled from addition of Foreign Military Sales (FMS) deliveries and Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) deliveries, FY1990-FY2000. a. "Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Construction Sales and Military Assistance Facts as of September 26, 2001." DSCA. Available online: DSCA 2001 Facts Book.

¹¹ "Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 1994-2001." *CRS Report for Congress*, by Richard F. Grimmet. August 6, 2002. Order Code RL31529. Available online: Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations.