

How did the U.S. government lead its people to war?

A Mechanism for War

Dismissing Other Policy Options

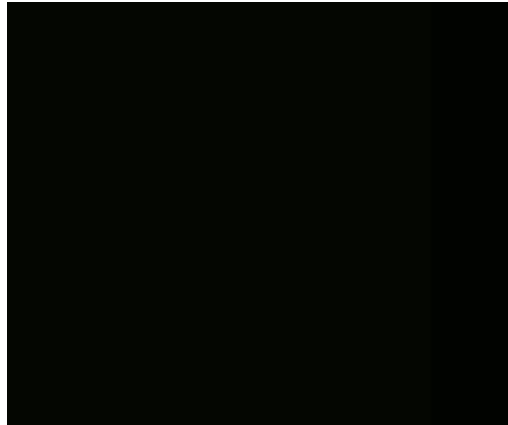
Campaign Against Containment

Containment is a policy used in international relations to isolate and weaken an enemy state through a variety of means short of war. This policy proved effective during the 45 years of the Cold War against the Soviet Union, a military superpower. Containment tactics included, among other things, propaganda, espionage, food aid to third-world nations, and strategic placement of military bases as a deterrent to military confrontation.

Since the Bush administration was seeking *military action* against Iraq, Bush officials needed to undermine any public perception that containment could be a viable strategy with respect to Iraq.

This campaign against containment started as early as the spring of 2002, with President Bush's June 1 commencement speech at West Point:

Video: CAMPAIGN AGAINST CONTAINMENT



On August 26, Vice President Cheney addressed the Veterans of Foreign Wars:

CHENEY: ...Old doctrines of security do not apply. In the days of the Cold War, we were able to manage the threat with strategies of deterrence and containment. But it's a lot tougher to deter enemies who have no country to defend. And containment is not possible when dictators obtain weapons of mass destruction and are prepared to share them with terrorists who intend to inflict catastrophic casualties on the United States.

Bush officials cited the impossibility of containing dictators who could share their WMD with terrorists. In fact, Hussein had neither links to al-Qaeda nor any WMD.

Furthermore, it's doubtful that Hussein would have shared WMD *even if he did* have them. The political scholars [John Mearsheimer \(University of Chicago\)](#) and [Stephen M. Walt \(Harvard University\)](#) have written:

Given the deep antipathy between fundamentalists like Osama bin Laden and secular rulers like Saddam Hussein, the lack of evidence linking them is not surprising. Even if American pressure brings these unlikely bedfellows together, Mr. Hussein is

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Manufacturing a Problem

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not going to give al-Qaeda weapons of mass destruction. He would have little to gain and everything to lose since he could never be sure that America surveillance would not detect the handoff. If it did, the United States response would be swift and devastating.

Finally, it is worth noting that a policy of containment *had already worked successfully* in controlling and weakening Iraq. After the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War in 1991, the U.S. supported such a policy against Iraq, using economic sanctions, U.N. weapons inspections, the stationing of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and the creation and patrolling of no-fly zones over areas of Iraq. As Secretary of State Colin Powell had acknowledged to reporters on February 20, 2001, "containment has been a successful policy in limiting Baghdad's ability to threaten other regional countries."

Campaign Against Inspections

• Casting doubt that inspections could work

Long before the U.N. reinstated weapons inspections in Iraq in November 2002 – to facilitate complete disarmament of Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction – Bush officials embarked on a campaign to cast doubt on the efficacy of inspections and to undermine them as a strategy to resolve the situation.

They contended that *U.N. weapons inspections couldn't succeed* because:

1. Iraqis were skilled in deception and hiding weapons.
2. Hussein could not be trusted.
3. Hussein would not cooperate.
4. Inspectors were actually "dangerous" – Cheney asserted that inspections would lull the U.S. into a false sense of security.
5. The previous inspection regime after the first Gulf War had failed.
6. Iraqi scientists and engineers were being intimidated by Hussein's regime and therefore could not cooperate with inspectors.
7. It was impossible and fruitless task – Bush painted a bleak picture of inspections, likening them to a "scavenger hunt" for weapons hidden across "a country the size of California."

Video: CAMPAIGN AGAINST INSPECTIONS - PART 1

• Undermining the new U.N. weapons inspection regime

Iraq agreed to allow the return of U.N. inspectors as early as September 16, 2002 – six months before the war began. Two months later, on November 18, 2002, the U.N. inspectors returned to Iraq.

[On January 18, 2003, Charles Hanley of *The Associated Press*](#) reported that "international experts have uncovered no 'smoking guns' in Iraq in almost 400 inspections since late November." Reports from the U.N. were that the Iraqis were generally being cooperative.

These unfolding facts created an extremely difficult dilemma for the United States, since it had predicated its hostility towards Saddam Hussein on the claim that he definitely possessed weapons of mass destruction – yet no WMD had been found to date, and a more comprehensive inspection regime still might not yield any WMD.

In order to accomplish their goal of justifying an invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration fabricated a framework that would eventually doom the inspection process and lead to war:

- First, the Bush administration stated that the **only** way inspections could succeed was for Saddam to fully cooperate and comply;
- then, they went further by saying that the inspections had **no chance** of succeeding if Saddam did not fully cooperate and comply;
- finally, they declared that the **only proof** of Saddam's compliance **was to be determined by** the handing over of his weapons of mass destruction to U.N. weapons inspectors. Failure to do so would be considered a lack of compliance and a breach of U.N. resolutions.

Video: CAMPAIGN AGAINST INSPECTIONS - PART 2

This framework excluded the following two important possibilities:

- That inspectors had the ability and the resources to discover WMDs (if they existed), even with **modest or no cooperation** from Saddam Hussein.
- That Saddam Hussein **had no** weapons of mass destruction.

The terms of this framework made failure of the inspections inevitable; the stated measure of Saddam's cooperation and compliance – handing over weapons of mass destruction – would be impossible if he did not have any WMDs (as we now know was indeed the case).

Overall, what makes this campaign against inspections particularly tragic is that inspections actually had been effective during the 1990's, and again during the 4 months from November 18, 2002 through March 17, 2003 – regardless of how one judged the cooperation levels of Saddam Hussein. All evidence points to the fact that the 1991 – 1998 inspections regime led to the elimination of all Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

As the current inspections failed to find any WMD, Bush officials challenged these outcomes, questioning once again the effectiveness of inspections.

Even though Hans Blix, head of UNMOVIC (U.N. Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission), had requested a few more months to complete their inspections – stating that Iraq was cooperating more than it had in 10 years – and despite a proposal from key U.S. allies, France and Germany, to triple the number of inspectors, President Bush announced on March 17, 2003 that military action against Iraq was imminent, and that for their own safety, all inspectors should leave Iraq immediately.



It is interesting to note...

As early as February 24, 2002 – nine months before renewed weapons inspections even began – Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld was already working to undermine the usefulness and efficacy of weapons inspections on Face the Nation.

RUMSFELD: They have advanced their weapons of mass destruction programs. They've developed greater degrees of mobility. They are very accomplished liars, as to what's going on. You could put inspectors all over that place, and it would be very difficult to find anything.

REPORTER: So, are you saying that weapons inspections would be worthless?

RUMSFELD: No, I'm saying that if one thought that the old [inspections] regime was successful, they're mistaken...

You would have to have a much more intrusive regime and many more inspectors and the Iraqis not controlling when they could come in, where they could go, what they could do. And the Iraqis aren't going to agree to something like that.

REPORTER: I'm not sure I understand. Are you saying it's more important than ever for us to be able to go in there and inspect, or are you saying that maybe it doesn't make that much difference? I'm just not clear.

RUMSFELD: I'm saying that, under the best of circumstances, inspectors have a very, very difficult time, because you're dealing with a regime that is repressive, that kills people, their own people frequently, that lies in very skillful ways, that's had years to take advance technology, go underground, hide things, deny things, create mobility where they can actually keep them moving ahead of any inspectors. And it's just very difficult to do.

You're quite right, it's enormously important that we have knowledge about what he's doing. He has shown that he is willing to use weapons of mass destruction on his own people. He has used chemical weapons on his own people.

REPORTER: But what you also seem to be saying is that it may not be that important. We may not gain that much -- am I understanding you correctly -- by having the ability to get in there and inspect.

RUMSFELD: I guess what I'm saying is that we have to be very honest with ourselves about what we could accomplish, and recognize that using an old regime that didn't work very well except with the assistance of defectors, and trying to have that work today, with the technology having advanced, with much greater skill in denial and deception, we would be fooling ourselves. We would have to have a much more intrusive inspection regime, in my view.

No Negotiations

In the months leading up to war, President Bush issued a series of ultimatums, threatening military action. He and his cabinet asserted that there would be no negotiations and no discussions with Iraq because those options ended "a long time ago." They argued that Hussein had WMD, as well as some capacity for nuclear weapons development, and warned that Hussein had to show his weapons and disarm immediately – or face military action.



Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz said he was willing to sit down and talk about all of the issues involving Iraq. This offer was not accepted by the U.S., who charged Iraq with being untrustworthy and playing games.

We now know that Hussein did not possess any WMD, and that this policy of "no negotiations" undermined Iraq's ability to use diplomatic means to resolve the situation peacefully.

Video: NO NEGOTIATIONS

BUSH: ...Saddam Hussein must disarm. There's no negotiations. Those ended a long time ago. There's no need for us to try to sit down at a table. There's no discussion to be had... No discussion. No debate. No negotiation. The burden of proof is on Saddam Hussein.

RICE: It is high time that the international community tell Saddam Hussein and his regime that this is not an issue of negotiation with the U.N. about obligations that they took in 1991...
No, nobody is going to negotiate anything with this regime.

BUSH: ...there are no negotiations to be held with Iraq. They have nothing to negotiate. They're the people who said that they would not have weapons of mass destruction. The negotiations are over.

SCOTT McCLELLAN (White House Press Secretary): No more games, no more cheat and retreat, no more deny and deceive, no more rope-a-dope in the desert with inspectors. No negotiation.

[\[continue to the next section: 'We Have No Choice'\]](#)

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