

# **Weapons of Mass Destruction? Or, of Mass Deception?**

## **Media in Iraq War and After**

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*The close relationship, a symbiotic one, between the media and the government of the day has long existed. In the run up to the Iraq war and afterwards, the Bush Administration and legislators in the US and UK exerted enormous pressure on the global media so that it lost all semblance of its independence, swallowing wholesale the bogey of bio-terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. This affected the entire structure of news gathering, production, portrayal and dissemination. In this 'culture of fear' in the age of 'New World Disorder', the primary victims of the 'mass deception' or 'mass illusion' produced by this nexus of policymakers and the media were law and democracy. At a time when the media is being drawn once again to create a new 'terror, Iran, the role that it has played in the recent past should be clearly understood.*

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After the end of the Cold War an immediate enemy hunt has begun for the politicians and secret services as well. Especially in the last 15-year period, 'yellow journalism' creating a 'culture of fear' replaced the sensitive equilibrium of the world political map. Consequently, it was a unique opportunity for policymakers, officials and journalists in search of the enemy, ever since no more hostile sides, country or ideology remaining. Besides, in the 'new world disorder' just a brief statement is sufficient in order to blame a country or even to plead as a pretext of *casus belli*: "... acquisition and developing weapons of mass destruction". More importantly, media manipulation facilitates this statement to become a 'magic word', which could easily open the doors of conventional wars, or even tiny nuclear wars using tactical nuclear weapons. Nowadays, the political establishment and the media agenda are struggling to create a new 'threat': Iran.

This paper, in order to analyse the mechanism of 'engineering war', brought two communication scholars and a journalist together and aims to present how the Bush administration was successful using its political and diplomatic agenda, how the media became blindfolded by the pressures of both the US and UK legislators and to what degree the misperceptions, misinformation and disinformation were used by the global media in covering the bioterrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

Ignacio Ramonet describes the media as a weapon in his article titled 'Set the Media Free' (*Le Cinquième Pouvoir*),

In the new war of ideology that globalization has forced on us; the media are used as a weapon. Since we now face an explosive multiplication and over-abundance of information, our news is being contaminated-poisoned by lies, polluted by rumours, misrepresentations, distortions and manipulation<sup>1</sup>.

Hence, the victims of this 'mass deception' produced by the symbiosis of policymakers and the media are, without a doubt, law, democracy and loss of human life.

# I

## Facts and Fiction Concerning WMD

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) became the *casus belli* of post-modern wars of our era where “all knowledge and morality are constructions built by the powerful”.<sup>2</sup> WMD has never been found in Iraq by the invading Anglo-American coalition to this day; anthrax, and any other biological threat to US, or “evil appearances” are some examples of the fiction manufactured by those who are acquiring the asymmetrical power. Public understanding of the war on Iraq relied on the media to separate *factum* and *fictionis*, resulting in the rise of conspiracy theories unmistakably and missing the reality.

Scrutinizing the WMD issue by facts, the confession of The Commission on Intelligence Capabilities of the US Regarding WMD is revealing: “The harm done to American credibility by our all too public intelligence failings in Iraq will take years to undo”. And what prompted this conclusion are:

- CIA assessments in Iraqi WMD's were all wrong
- Belief in Iraqi nukes was poor analysis of aluminium tubes
- Belief in Iraqi BW's was based on one unreliable person
- Belief in Iraqi CW's was based on flawed imagery
- Iraq never had delivery systems to attack US mainland
- CIA never questioned assumption that Saddam had WMD's
- Conclusions on Iran and North Korea are all classified.<sup>3</sup>

Before we analyse the essential factors leading to ‘mass illusion’ and the rise of conspiracy theories resulting from missing the reality, a brief literature and document note on WMD facts will be more useful.

### WMD Lexicon: Definitions, Types and Treaties

The abbreviation WMD referring ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction’ is a former Soviet military term<sup>4</sup> and today is most widely used by US official documents and in the international community to define nuclear, biological, chemical weapons (NBC). The US military broadened this definition and included radiological weapons (CBRN: Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear) and excluded “the means of transporting or propelling the weapon where such means is a separable and divisible part of weapon”.<sup>5</sup> This juxtaposition reflects an attempt to distinguish them from conventional weapons by virtue of their ability to “compress the time and the effort needed to kill” (injure or incapacitate).<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, there is no actual treaty or customary international law that contains an authoritative definition.<sup>7</sup> After 9/11, WMD nomenclature became broader and resilient, also “used so variously as to confuse rather than enlighten readers” as cited in Lord Brockwell’s report.<sup>8</sup>

The first record of the term ‘weapons of mass destruction’ is from a December 28, 1937 article in *The Times*’ about the blanket bombing of Guernica by the German air force during the Spanish Civil War. In 1945, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, the Atomic Energy Commission used these words: “...atomic weapons and of all other weapons adaptable to mass destruction”.<sup>9</sup> And, in the arms race of the Cold War, WMD was exclusively applied to thermo-nuclear bombs.<sup>10</sup>

The followings contains brief information on WMD, according to the widespread broadened CBRN's definitional use:

***Chemical weapons (CW):*** “Use various chemical substances, dispersed in liquid, vapour and gas or aerosol form, to cause sickness, paralysis, unconsciousness or death as a result of physical contact or inhalation. Chemical production facilities can easily be converted to CW production.”<sup>11</sup>.

***Biological weapons (BW):*** Biological warfare, also known as germ warfare, is the use of any organism (bacteria, virus or other disease-causing organism) or toxin found in nature, as a weapon of war. It is meant to incapacitate or kill an adversary. The level of damage depends primarily on the biological agent's transmissibility, lethality and susceptibility to countermeasures.<sup>12</sup> China (denied), Israel, North Korea, Poland (destroyed), Russia, South Africa (Project Coast-cancelled), United Kingdom (cancelled), United States (NKNAOMI) (officially cancelled, but still has it at Fort Detrick, Maryland)<sup>13</sup>.

***Radiological weapons:*** Also called ‘dirty bombs’ (a type of nuclear weapon) and radiological dispersion devices (RDDs), designed to spread radioactive contamination consisting of a nuclear or conventional explosive and causing radiation sickness, cancer, death and contamination of the target.<sup>14</sup>

***Nuclear weapons:*** Derive energy from the nuclear reactions of fission and/or fusion to produce large explosions and hazardous radioactive materials. Nuclear weapons can be delivered by artillery, plane, ship, ballistic missile etc. and can be either tactical weapons or strategic weapons. Radiation and radioactive debris affect large populations in surrounding areas, depending on weather conditions. The declared nuclear powers are the US, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, The People's Republic of China, India, and Pakistan. North Korea has stated recently that it has nuclear capabilities; Ukraine may possess an obsolete Soviet nuclear stockpile due to a post-Cold war clerical error.<sup>15</sup> Israel has an active military nuclear programme and a nuclear weapons capability.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the uranium conversion plant at Isfahan is the recent debate on Iran's nuclear energy capabilities. Once again, developing nuclear energy programme and nuclear weapon acquisition is subject to mystification.

In order to comprehend WMD issue more clearly, the followings WMD-related international treaties should be mentioned:

***Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapon (NPT):*** Opened for signature on 1 July 1968, entered into force on March 5, 1970 and 188 states have joined the NPT. The five declared nuclear weapon states (NWS) agreed not to transfer nuclear weapon technology to other states and non-NWS parties agreed not to develop or acquire nuclear weapons. The treaty establishes a safeguard system under the responsibility of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).<sup>17</sup>

***Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC):*** Supplement to the 1925 Geneva Convention, BWC opened signature on 10 April 1972, entered into force on 26 March 1975 and signed by over 100 states. The development, production and stockpiling of bacteriological (biological) weapons is outlawed. Particularly, the convention prohibits only creation and storage, but not usage of these weapons.<sup>18</sup>

***Chemical Weapon Convention (CWC):*** Adopted by the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on September 3, 1992. Opened for signature on January 13, 1993 and entered into force on April 29, 1993. The CWC prohibits development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons. It also provides for the elimination of an entire category of weapons of mass destruction under universally applied international control.<sup>19</sup>

***Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT):*** Adopted on September 10, 1996 by the UN General Assembly and opened for signature on September 24, 1996. The CTBT will enter into force 180 days after until it has been ratified by 44 nuclear-capable states member of the Conference of Disarmament. CTBT had been ratified by 108 states and signed by further 62 states until January 1, 2004. Thirty-two of the nuclear-capable states have ratified and an additional nine states have signed but not ratified. The US signed the treaty in 1996 but later voted not to ratify it. India, Pakistan and North Korea not signed the accord.<sup>20</sup>

After the Gulf War in 1991, Iraq was charged with WMD acquisition and the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 687 of April 3, 1991 defined the systems which Iraq required to abandon:

8a: All chemical and biological weapons and all stock of agents and all related subsystems and components and all research, development, support and manufacturing facilities related thereto;

8b: All ballistic missiles with a range greater than one hundred and fifty kilometres, and related major parts and repair and production facilities; and

12: Decides that Iraq shall unconditionally agree not to acquire or develop nuclear weapons or nuclear-weapons-usable material or any research, development, support or manufacturing facilities [...].<sup>21</sup>

Iraq was also required to allow unrestricted inspections of declared sites by the U.N. Special Commission (UNSCOM), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).<sup>22</sup>

According to the *National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction* of 2002, “WMD, in the possession of hostile states and terrorists represent one of the greatest security challenges facing the United States.”<sup>23</sup> To this neo-con statement was added the CIA Assessment on WMD and the Blair Dossier on Iraq, and ended up with the illegal invasion of Iraq by coalition forces.

Many critics have criticised the United States for its ‘unilateralism’, noting its skirting of several major international treaties including the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (from which it withdrew), the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (which it did not ratify), the International Criminal Court (did not ratify, and refuses to accept its jurisdiction) and the Kyoto Protocol on the Environment (signed, but did not ratify). Even more worrying is the alleged tendency of the U.S. to take armed action against governments particularly the invasion of Iraq (despite having over 30 nations in the coalition) and its history of bypassing or ignoring the United Nations.<sup>24</sup>

### **Symbiosis of Policymakers and Media**

During the Cold War, unqualified and inconsequential interior policies and politicians mainly trying to gain time, replaced diplomacy supported world policies. Furthermore, secret services intensified work on polarization and this was made accessible to these policies and politicians. Nowadays it is getting more obvious that, especially in the US, all the intelligence on Iraqi War were, really, merely rumours, that contributed to the fiction of the policymakers’ statements.

A symbiotic relationship, a nexus, has always existed between the policymakers and the media. The policymakers' are a dominant source on national security and intelligence concern making the media more dependent on them and from this dependency derives the spin and manipulation on information.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, this is mostly acceptable for the national policies concern. It is also a natural consequence of the world of liberal, democratic, capitalist countries. On the other hand, this relationship cannot be accepted if it risks the human life at home or abroad. This can easily lead to imprecise coverage, minimization of independent analysis, failure in distinguishing between terms such as 'acts of terrorism' and the 'acquisition or use' of WMD as we all witnessed after the 9/11.

### **'Terrorism, Rogue States and WMD': Fatal Combination For Mass Illusion**

The 'neoconservatives' and a number of conservative arguments as well, hold that the most serious threats to American security come from the combination of "terrorism, rogue states and WMD."<sup>26</sup> This 'trilogy' of "terrorism, rogue states and WMD" is of vital importance in engaging the US establishment in a campaign of lies and disinformation and speculation to blame the September 11 attacks and the anthrax mailings on Iraq and Saddam Hussein.<sup>27</sup>

Different definitions of terrorism are produced by the media, politicians, think tanks, academics, but in particular by governments. Most of the definitions outline primary criteria; the target, objective, motive, perpetrator, and legitimacy or legality. On the other hand, the radical academician and dissident critic Noam Chomsky comments that the term 'terrorism' is used to refer to the terrorism that they carry out against us, whoever 'we' happen to be. Since the rich and powerful set the terms for discussion, the term 'terrorism' is restricted, in practice, to the terror that affects the US and its clients and allies. He argues that terrorism is used not objectively for any particular type of behaviour, but as a characterisation that demonises a perceived enemy in order to promote moral repulsion and outrage.<sup>28</sup>

States such as North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Sudan, Libya are generally hostile to the US, and are often accused of sponsoring terrorism and/or seeking to acquire or develop WMD have been called 'rogue states' by the Bush administration. Since the 9/11 attacks, the term 'rogue state' has been supplemented in the US by the term 'axis of evil' adopted (January 29, 2002) by President George W. Bush with reference to Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Some critics charge that 'rogue state' merely means any state that opposes the U.S., but does not necessarily pose a wider threat. Others accuse the U.S. of being a rogue state itself, whose foreign policy is sometimes accused of having the sort of brutality and capriciousness of those it considers 'rogue states'. In his book *Rogue Nation: American Unilateralism and the Failure of Good Intentions* (2003), Clyde Prestowitz claims that the U.S. is as much of a 'rogue state' as any other, even by its own standards.<sup>29</sup>

In the US and much of the Western world, corporate media have followed the Bush administration in demonizing bin Laden and terrorism while celebrating US policy and military interventions. Douglas Kellner argues how the mainstream media in the US privileged the 'clash of civilizations' model, established a dualism between Islamic terrorism and civilization, and largely circulated war fever and retaliatory feelings and discourses that called for and supported a form of military intervention. And he concludes by stating that the media in a democracy should critically debate urgent questions facing the nation. In the terror

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\* It's a term used almost exclusively by the government of the US and has not gained wide acceptance.

crisis the mainstream US corporate media, especially television, promoted war fever and military solutions to the problem of global terrorism.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, this trilogy is the basis of the mass illusion created by political and diplomatic apparatus, using the global media as a 'weapon'.

## II

### **Media as a Weapon: 'Yellow Journalism' in Age of 'New World Disorder'**

The term 'yellow journalism' refers to news organizations for whom sensationalism, profiteering and in some cases propaganda and jingoism, take dominance over factual reporting.<sup>31</sup> Sensation-mongering journalism of 19<sup>th</sup> century, pioneered by William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer's lurid publications seems to be quite harmless while compared to contemporary media. Through the acceleration of globalisation and concentration of big conglomerates, the contemporary media used manipulation, lies and brainwashing to poison minds.

In fact, we have all witnessed that George W. Bush administration itself systematically disseminated lies to promote its war policy on occupation of Iraq by being in cooperation with the mainstream media in managing public opinion and 'engineering consent' to their policies.<sup>32</sup>

#### **Manipulation, Disinformation and Spin**

There are many examples of how the news was manufactured by the media in a disinformed and misinformed manner. One of the examples is an article, headlined 'Illicit Arms Kept Till Eve of War, An Iraqi Scientist Is Said to Assert' published on the front page of the *New York Times* reported that a former Iraqi scientist who worked in a secret arms programme led a US military team to material that proved to be 'the building blocks' of banned weapons. The most extraordinary thing about this article is that it presents no facts to confirm either the existence of the weapons, or the 'building blocks' of such weapons or the scientist who supposedly uncovered them. All that is offered by *Times* reporter Judith Miller is an unsupported and undocumented assertion by members of the American military unit, Mobile Exploitation Alpha Team. In one of her previous articles, on September 4-5, 2001, a week before the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, Judith Miller wrote a two-part series in the *Times* that purported to be an exposure of a secret US germ warfare programme. The articles were actually written in direct collaboration with the Pentagon and Miller portrayed the germ warfare programme as strictly defensive, writing, "Officials stressed that the plant never made anthrax or any other lethal pathogen". This claim was later proven false. Her article is entirely constructed from anonymous assertions, none of which are susceptible to independent confirmation.<sup>33</sup>

According to another article titled 'War Propaganda' by Michel Chossudovsky, this was how the propaganda was carried out: Two sets of "eye-popping statements from a variety of sources (including official national Security statements, media, think-tanks etc.) are supported by simple and catchy 'buzzwords', which set the stage for manufacturing the news:

Buzzword 1: "Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda (Osama) is behind most news stories regarding the "war on terrorism" including "alleged", "future" "presumed", and "actual" terrorist

attacks. What is rarely mentioned is that this outside enemy Al-Qaeda is a CIA “intelligence asset” used in covert operations.

Buzzword 2. The weapons of Mass Destruction statement is used to justify the “pre-emptive war” against the “state sponsors of terror” i.e. countries such as Iraq, Iran and North Korea which allegedly possess WMD. Amply documented in the case of Iraq, a large body of news on WMD and biological attacks is fabricated.<sup>34</sup>

In their book *Weapons of Mass Deception: the Uses of Propaganda in Bush’s War on Iraq*, Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber expose the aggressive PR campaign in which “information warriors” and “perception managers” sold an entire war to the American public on the war with Iraq. Rampton and Stauber deconstruct the ‘true lies’ behind the war:

- “Top Bush officials advocated the invasion of Iraq even before he took office, but waited until September 2002 to inform the public, through what the House termed a “product launch”.
- White House officials used repetition and misinformation-the big lie tactic-to create the false impression that Iraq was behind the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US, especially in the case of the alleged meeting in Prague five months earlier between 9/11 hijacker Mohammed Atta and Iraqi intelligence officials.
- The “big lie” tactic was also employed in the first Iraq when a Kuwaiti girl named Nayirah told the horrific-but fabricated-story of Iraqi soldiers wrenching hundreds of premature Kuwaiti babies from their incubators and leaving them to die. Her testimony was printed in a press kit prepared by Citizens for a Free Kuwait, a PR front group created by Hill and Knowlton, then the world’s largest PR firm.
- In order to achieve “third party authenticity” in the Muslim world, a group called the Council of American Muslims for Understanding launched its own web site, called OpenDialogue.com. However, its chairman admitted that the idea began with the State Department, and that the group was funded by the US government.
- Forged documents were used to prove that Iraq possessed huge stockpiles of banned weapons.
- A secretive PR firm working for the Pentagon helped create the Iraqi National Congress, which became one of the driving forces behind the decision to go to war”<sup>35</sup>.

In a study conducted by Lewandowsky, Strizke, Oberaur and Morales, titled ‘*Memory for Fact, Fiction and Misinformation*’, the effects of reports and retractions in the media had on people’s memory regarding the search for WMD in Iraq during the 2003 Iraq war are documented. This led to three conclusions:

1. The repetition of tentative news stories, even if they are subsequently disconfirmed, can assist in the creation of false memories in a substantial proportion of people.
2. Once information is published, its subsequent correction does not alter people’s beliefs unless they are suspicious about the motives underlying the events of news stories are about.
3. When people ignore corrections, they do so irrespective of how certain they are that the corrections occurred.<sup>36</sup>

The degree to which, since the war ended, US citizens believed the misconception that WMD had been discovered in Iraq varied with the respondents preferred media source as Table1 indicates.<sup>37</sup>

**Table 1**

Media Source	Respondents believing
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	<b>WMD had been found in Iraq since war ended (per cent)</b>
FOX	33
CBS	23
NBC	20
CNN	20
ABC	19
Print media	17
PBS-NPR	11

\*Source: *Misperceptions, the Media and the Iraq War*, **PIPA**, October 2, 2003.

Consequently, the ‘Fourth Estate’ failed in its obligation to serve the citizenry with information and analysis needed for a crucial decision: War or peace. Instead, the media beat the war drums in the months before the invasion. Reporters and editors aided and supported Bush in committing war crimes by giving validity to his false claims. Instead of asking sceptical questions about Saddam Hussein’s supposed deadly weapons and how they constituted a threat to US and its allies because he planned to share these chemical, biological and nuclear arms with the terrorists who did the 9/11 deeds, they accepted the unsupported word of the White House.<sup>38</sup>

### **III Conclusions**

Contemporary warfare does not have to call for WMD to result in immense mass killings. In the second half of the last century, the loss of human lives at the various war zones was as follows: 2.8 million in Korean War, 3 million in Vietnam, 1 million in India-Pakistan, 1.4 million in Indonesia, 740 thousand in Afghanistan, 1.5 million in Iran-Iraq, 340 thousand in Lebanon, 230 thousand in Balkans, approximately 400 thousand in both Gulf Wars and 11 million since 1954 in Angola, Burundi, Congo, Rwanda, Algeria and South Africa.<sup>39</sup> And to this must be added 6,000 more human lives lost every day, because of AIDS.<sup>40</sup> As a matter of fact, ‘mass destruction’ is already present.

Furthermore, thousands of tons of chemical and biological weapons, the more than 3,000 long and mid-range nuclear missiles warheads developed by the US and the acquisition of thousands of tactical nuclear, biological and chemical ammunition beyond the treaties are a fact. Today, the US so far is the biggest manufacturer of tactical nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destructions and those related frightening fictions and paranoia. As a consequence of this ‘culture of fear’ in the age of ‘New World Disorder’, the primary victims of the ‘mass deception’ or ‘mass illusion’ produced by the nexus of policymakers and the media are law, democracy and loss of human life in no doubt.

To conclude, as Douglas Kellner says in his ‘*Media Spectacle and the Crisis of Democracy*’: “Without an expanded and improved alternative media and informed citizenry, democracy will continue to atrophy”.

#### **Notes**



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