

IRAQ REDUX? MEDIA PARROTING DUBIOUS IAEA IRAN CLAIMS

In a remarkable column in the Guardian, Brian Whitaker points out both the uncritical way in which most of the press is merely parroting the accusations in the IAEA report on Iran's nuclear technology and how this process feels very much like the propaganda campaign that led to the invasion of Iraq:

"One of the oldest tricks in the run-up to a war is to spread terrifying stories of things that the enemy may be about to do. Government officials plant these tales, journalists water them and the public, for the most part, swallow them." I wrote this paragraph in December 2002, some three months before the US launched its invasion of Iraq, but it seems just as applicable today in relation to Iran.

The Iraq war of 2003 followed a long media build-up in which talk about Saddam Hussein's imaginary weapons of mass destruction, simply by virtue of its constant repetition, led many prominent journalists to abandon their critical faculties. The Washington Post, for instance, devoted an extraordinary 1,800 words to an extremely flimsy (but scary) story suggesting Iraq had supplied nerve gas to al-Qaida. The paper later conceded that its coverage of the Iraqi WMD issue had been seriously defective, but by then it was too late to undo the damage.

Whitaker then goes on to cite a number of media stories that breathlessly cite the IAEA allegations without any meaningful evaluation of

the claims therein. He cites b's work at Moon of Alabama on the nanodiamond alternative to the claims of an explosive trigger device as an example of how one would go about critically examining the claims in the report.

He then closes with this:

Of course, these are extremely murky waters and I'm not at all sure who to believe. There is probably a lot of deception taking place on both sides. But what seems to me extraordinary is the reluctance of journalists – especially in the US mainstream – to acknowledge the uncertainties and their willingness to accept what, as far as Iran is concerned, are the most incriminating interpretations.

In addition to the examples Whitaker cites in his column (please read the entire column), I would offer the video above, where Christiane Amanpour interviews David Sanger. In this interview, as in most other media reports, there isn't even acknowledgment that the report itself admits that there is no proof that an active nuclear weapons development program has indeed been restarted in Iran after it was halted in 2003. Instead, Amanpour and Sanger go into speculative details of how the US can intervene and prevent full development of a nuclear weapon. They do stop short of war, but certainly point out how it would not be surprising.

There is one more sadly ironic parallel between the current buildup of rhetoric over Iran and the buildup to war in Iraq. Throughout this process it should be kept in mind that the CIA's WMD program took a very big hit when Robert ~~Novak~~ Dick Cheney outed Valerie Plame on July 14, 2003 as the Bush administration madly tried to to justify the faulty intelligence it fabricated and spread prior to the March, 2003 Iraq invasion. Had Plame not been outed, the CIA's capability in gathering WMD intelligence

could have continued unabated, rather than needing a major regrouping after one of its major operatives was outed. Perhaps the current state of intelligence on what is happening in Iran would be much better had that not happened.

There are a number of posts at Moon of Alabama providing chapter and verse on the debunking of the IAEA report, so I won't repeat those details and links here. Instead, I would just note that the credibility of the report has been brought into question by a number of independent observers, but that is a very difficult piece of information to obtain if one is exposed only to the traditional media outlets. Let's hope that the Iraq 2003 parallel isn't so complete that traditional media only realize the low quality of the current "intelligence" after a war has started.