

DARK ACTORS PLAYING GAMES WITH IRAQ WMD PROPAGANDA

The National Security Archive has been doing great work going back and collecting the documents leading to the Iraq War, adding some it acquired through FOIA. Its first installment provided new evidence of how quickly the Bush Administration turned to targeting Iraq both before and after 9/11. Its second installment looked at whether anyone had ever even considered alternatives to war. Both are worth reading closely.

But I'm particularly interested in the third installment, which they posted a couple of weeks ago. It traces the collaboration between the US and UK as they developed the propaganda used to generate support for the war. Notably, its list of previously and newly released documents shows intense cooperation as the US intelligence community was working on the NIE and white paper and the UK was working on its own white paper (which the Bush Administration would use to justify the 16 words in the State of the Union). For example, this document includes passages from emails commenting on drafts which may show the UK offering suggestions to the US.

By the evening of Friday, September 13, British officials had a copy of "the latest US Doc. Summary + nuclear section." An email sent at 7:54 p.m. (Document 17) forwarded that document. Internal evidence identifies this as the draft of a CIA white paper, one more recent than the July version, making it at least the third iteration of the paper. An email reply the following Monday makes what appears to be a wording suggestion for the U.S. paper. Although this is a technical point, it demonstrates that the transatlantic exchanges on the respective drafts were

■ a two-way process.

Among other things, the collection of these documents in one place strongly supports earlier suggestions that the final intelligence that went into the Niger claim came from Italy's Nicolo Pollari at a meeting he had with Stephen Hadley on September 9, 2002 (just after the Bush Administration had introduced the Iraq War as its new September product). In addition, the collection adds more evidence refuting the Blair government's claims that the propagandists weren't leading the effort in their sexed up dossier.

But as I was reading it, all I could think of was David Kelly's last email to Judy Miller, warning of dark actors playing games, followed shortly by Tony Blair's apparently unplanned trip to the US, just in time for him to be out of the country when Kelly was suicided (not to mention for him to be here in the aftermath of the Plame outing which Dick Cheney had ordered Judy to be included in). After all, its hard to look at the timeline the NSA lays out without also thinking of Judy Miller's key pieces of propaganda-boosting claims about the aluminum tubes-on September 8 and 13, 2002 (indeed, those articles appeared at the same time as the Brits were strengthening these claims, which makes me wonder whether her work wasn't a key part of pushing the UK to make its claims about the tubes stronger).

We knew the Brits and the US built their propaganda for war together. We knew that Judy Miller was an integral part to that. But when we see the emails going back and forth commenting on each others drafts, it raises once again the question of where the emails back and forth to the war effort's chief propagandist got disappeared to.