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The only antidote to the poison of war is the public's courage to disagree with their leader.

– Ramman Ken

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May 13, 2005

John Bolton's Yellowcake

by Ray McGovern

What role did John Bolton play in the Bush administration's efforts to manufacture the intelligence needed to justify the invasion of Iraq? As it turns out, a hidden but important role. Remember the "yellowcake from Niger"?

Briefly reported last week in Steve Clemons' **The Washington Note** was that a Congressional subcommittee, citing a State Department inspector general's report, found that Bolton ordered and received updates on the notorious "Fact Sheet" of Dec. 19, 2002, that claimed Iraq had been trying to procure uranium "yellowcake" from Niger. In other words, John Bolton played a key role in ordering that discredited intelligence be used to support the president's case for war, three months before the attack on Iraq.

A Plan to Fix the Facts

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TomPaine.com readers, unlike those malnourished by "mainstream media," were among the first **to learn of the leaked document** published by the London *Sunday Times* on May 1, in which the head of British intelligence told Prime Minister Tony Blair that President George W. Bush had decided to make war on Iraq. The date, you will remember, was July 23, 2002 – long before the president consulted Congress, and long before any intelligence was cooked up to "justify" such a decision.

The official minutes of that meeting show that the U.K. intelligence chief, Richard Dearlove, just back from consultations in Washington with then-CIA director George Tenet and other officials, announced matter-of-factly that the attack on Iraq is to be "justified by the conjunction of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction." British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw is quoted as confirming that Bush had decided on war, but interjects ruefully that the case for WMD was "thin." Not a problem, says Dearlove: "Intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy."

Boltonization

But how does this kind of "fixing" play out? Insights leap out of recently declassified e-mail messages from the

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Ray McGover

office of Undersecretary of State John Bolton, archdeacon of politicization. I was particularly struck to learn from the *Washington Post* that Bolton's principal aide and chief enforcer, Frederick Fleitz, is actually a CIA analyst on loan to Bolton. In this light, his behavior in trying to cook intelligence to the recipe of high policy is even more inexcusable. CIA analysts, particularly those on detail to policy departments, have no business playing the enforcer of policy judgments, have no business conjuring up "intelligence around the policy."

was a CIA analyst for 27 years – from : John F. Kennedy administration to that of George H. W. Bush.

Fleitz must have flunked Ethics and Intelligence Analysis 101. Or perhaps the CIA does not offer the course any more. This is the same Fleitz who "explained" to State Department intelligence analyst Christian Westermann that it was "a political judgment as to how to interpret this data [on Cuba's biological weapons program] and the I.C. [intelligence community] should do as we asked."

E-mails released more recently show Fleitz acting as stalking horse for Bolton to make sure the intelligence fit the policies Bolton was pushing. Fleitz is furious that State Department intelligence experts feel it their duty to demur on Bolton/Fleitz judgments regarding the efficacy of missile export controls against China. Fleitz, whose home office at CIA is the one which gave us "high confidence" judgments on the presence of WMD in Iraq,

apparently ordered up analysis from CIA to suit his boss' strongly held judgment that the controls on exports to China were deficient.

Not surprisingly, Bolton liked the analysis that was served up by Fleitz' CIA colleagues and told him to pass it to Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. But State's intelligence analysts had the temerity to do their job, and attached a cover memo taking the opposite position, viewing the export controls positively. Questioned on this by Senate staffers last week, Fleitz admitted that his experience in his CIA home office gave him a personal stake in how the analysis was treated. This is doubly inappropriate.

The idea of seconding intelligence analysts to policy departments dates back almost three decades to a time when many analysts found themselves working in a vacuum, blissfully unaware of policymakers' interests and needs. The analysts' (otherwise laudable) search for relevance has now swung the pendulum too far in the other direction, with folks like Fleitz "cherry-picked" by folks like Bolton to "support" policy in wholly inappropriate ways. That top CIA officials allow the Boltons of this administration to get away with that shows CIA managers to be weak, witting, and willing accomplices in this corruption of the intelligence process.

Enter the Yellowcake

The Fleitz technique is one way to Boltonize intelligence, but there are other ways to counter attempts by intelligence analysts to "tell it like it is," when "like it is" needs to be "fixed" around a policy. Just go around the analysts.

An instructive example of this can be seen by harking back to a key juncture in the saga on Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction," in which Bolton achieved his aims by simply cutting State Department intelligence analysts out of the flow.

Painful as it is to bring up the embarrassing canard about Iraq seeking uranium in Niger, that sad chapter illustrates how Bolton operates when he knows he cannot bully intelligence community analysts to come up with the desired "analysis." Before President Bush's key speech on Oct. 7, 2002, setting the stage for Congress' vote on the war three days later, then-CIA director Tenet personally intervened to prevent the president from using spurious "intelligence" on the alleged attempts to acquire "yellowcake" (slightly enriched uranium) from Africa.

Just two months later, however, this canard reappeared in an official State Department "Fact Sheet" dated Dec. 19,

debunking Baghdad's submission to the UN Security Council accounting for Iraqi weapons programs. The "Fact Sheet" directly cited the "yellowcake" deal as proof that Saddam Hussein was lying to the United States about his nuclear program (which had been "reconstituted" only in the rhetoric of Bolton's patron, Dick Cheney).

Small problem: State's intelligence analysts had long shared CIA's skepticism about that report. Indeed, in the National Intelligence Estimate of Oct. 1, 2002, they had branded it "dubious."

What accounts for new life being injected into this canard? We learned some time ago from a former senior Bush State Department official that the impetus came from Bolton's office. And now we have documentary proof, thanks to a State Department Inspector General investigation, the results of which were shared with a congressional subcommittee. In sum, when Bolton realized that the Iraq-Niger report itself left most analysts holding their noses (even before it was established that it was based on crude forgeries), his office inserted the bogus story into the official State Department "Fact Sheet" without clearing it with the department's own intelligence analysts. Easy.

This strongly suggests that it was also no accident that a month later the

yellowcake fable found its way into the president's State of the Union address. Bolton's rogue operation ensured the subsequent embarrassment of one and all when the head of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohammed ElBaradei, declared the reports "not authentic," forcing both White House officials and George Tenet to apologize.

Bolton kept his head down during all this, doing all he could to disguise his involvement in the "Fact Sheet" misadventure. Indeed, the House Committee on Government Reform's Subcommittee on National Security found that "the State Department deliberately concealed unclassified information about the role of John Bolton, undersecretary of state for arms control, in the creation of a fact sheet that falsely claimed that Iraq sought uranium from Niger."

In a letter of Sept. 25, 2003, State told the subcommittee that "Bolton did not play a role in the creation of this document." However, subcommittee investigators subsequently obtained access to a State Department inspector general report that showed that Bolton not only ordered that the fact sheet be created, but also received updates on its development.

Later, Bolton fell back on his default modus operandi: the by-now-familiar

attempts to fire for their insolence analysts, managers, senior UN officials – it doesn't matter. Late last year, Bolton led a one-man, one-country vendetta aimed at preventing the well-respected ElBaradei from getting another term as director of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency. That quixotic campaign was unprecedented in its vindictiveness and won the U.S. no friends.

And this is the president's nominee for ambassador to the United Nations. Remarkable.

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