

## Bush: Pathological liar or idiot-in-chief?

Olbermann: Timeline for Iran's nuclear ambitions was clear, but he kept on

SPECIAL COMMENT

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There are few choices more terrifying than the one Mr. Bush has left us with tonight.

We have either a president who is too dishonest to restrain himself from invoking World War III about Iran at least six weeks after he had to have known that the analogy would be fantastic, irresponsible hyperbole, or we have a president too transcendently stupid not to have asked, at what now appears to have been a series of opportunities to do so, whether the fairy tales he either created or was fed were still even remotely plausible.

A pathological presidential liar, or an idiot-in-chief. It is the nightmare scenario of political science fiction: A critical juncture in our history and, contained in either answer, a president manifestly unfit to serve, and behind him in the vice presidency an unapologetic warmonger who has long been seeing a world visible only to himself.

After spokeswoman Dana Perino's announcement from the White House late last night, the timeline is inescapable and clear.

In August the president was told by his hand-picked major-domo of intelligence, Mike McConnell, a flinty, high-strung-looking, worrying-warrior who will always see more clouds than silver linings, that what "everybody thought" about Iran might be, in essence, crap.

Yet on Oct. 17, the president said of Iran and its President Ahmadinejad:

"I've told people that if you're interested in avoiding World War III, it seems like you ought to be interested in preventing them from have the knowledge to make a nuclear weapon."

And as he said that, Mr. Bush knew that at bare minimum there was a strong chance that his rhetoric was nothing more than words with which to scare the Iranians.

Or was it, Sir, to scare the Americans?

Does Iran not really fit into the equation here? Have you just scribbled it into the fill-in-the-blank on the same template you used to scare us about Iraq?

In August, any commander-in-chief still able-minded or uncorrupted or both, Sir, would have invoked the quality the job most requires: mental flexibility.

A bright man, or an honest man, would have realized no later than the McConnell briefing that the only true danger about Iran was the damage that could be done by an unhinged, irrational Chicken Little of a president shooting his mouth off, backed up by only his own hysteria and his own delusions of omniscience.

Not Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mr. Bush.

The Chicken Little of presidents is the one, Sir, that you see in the mirror.

And the mind reels at the thought of a vice president fully briefed on the revised intel as long as two weeks ago, briefed on the fact that Iran abandoned its pursuit of this imminent threat four years ago, who never bothered to mention it to his boss.

It is nearly forgotten today, but throughout much of Ronald Reagan's presidency it was widely believed that he was little more than a front man for some never-viewed, behind-the-scenes string-puller.

Today, as evidenced by this latest remarkable, historic malfeasance, it is inescapable that Dick Cheney is either this president's evil ventriloquist or he thinks he is.

What servant of any of the 42 previous presidents could possibly withhold information of this urgency and gravity and wind up back at his desk the next morning, instead of winding up before a congressional investigation or a criminal one?

Mr. Bush, if you can still hear us, if you did not previously agree to this scenario in which Dick Cheney is the actual detective and you're Remington Steele, you must disentrall yourself: Mr. Cheney has usurped your constitutional powers, cut you out of the information loop and led you down the path to an unprecedented presidency in which the facts are optional, the intel is valued less than the hunch and the assistant runs the store.

The problem is, Sir, your assistant is robbing you and your country blind.

Not merely in monetary terms, Mr. Bush, but, more important, of the traditions and righteousness for which we have stood, at great risk, for centuries: honesty, law, moral force.

Mr. Cheney has helped, Sir, to make your administration into the kind our ancestors saw in the 1860s and 1870s and 1880s, the ones that abandoned Reconstruction and sent this country marching backward into the pit of American apartheid.

Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland — presidents who will be remembered only in a blur of failure, Mr. Bush.

Presidents who will be remembered only as functions of those who opposed them, the opponents whom history proved right.

Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Cleveland ... Bush.

Would that we could let this president off the hook by seeing him only as marionette or moron.

But a study of the mutation of his language about Iran proves that though he may not be very good at it, he is, himself, still a manipulative, Machiavellian snake-oil salesman.

The Bushian etymology was tracked by Dan Froomkin at the Washington Post's Web site.

It is staggering.

- **March 31:** "Iran is trying to develop a nuclear weapon..."
- **June 5:** Iran's "pursuit of nuclear weapons..."
- **June 19:** "consequences to the Iranian government if they continue to pursue a nuclear weapon..."
- **July 12:** "the same regime in Iran that is pursuing nuclear weapons..."
- **Aug. 6:** "this is a government that has proclaimed its desire to build a nuclear weapon..."

Notice a pattern?

Trying to develop, build or pursue a nuclear weapon.

Then, sometime between Aug. 6 and Aug. 9, those terms are suddenly swapped out, so subtly that only in retrospect can we see that somebody has warned the president, not only that he has gone out too far on the limb of terror but there may not even be a tree there....

McConnell, or someone, must have briefed him then.

- **Aug. 9:** "They have expressed their desire to be able to enrich uranium, which we believe is a step toward having a nuclear weapons program..."
- **Aug. 28:** "Iran's active pursuit of technology that could lead to nuclear weapons..."
- **Oct. 4:** "you should not have the know-how on how to make a (nuclear) weapon..."
- **Oct. 17:** "until they suspend and/or make it clear that they, that their statements aren't real, yeah, I believe they want to have the **\*\*capacity\*\***, the **\*\*knowledge\*\***, in order to make a nuclear weapon."

**Before Aug. 9**, it's: Trying to develop, build or pursue a nuclear weapon.

**After Aug. 9**, it's: Desire, pursuit, want ... knowledge technology know-how to enrich uranium.

And we are to believe, Mr.. Bush, that the National Intelligence Estimate this week talks of the Iranians suspending their nuclear weapons program in 2003....

And you talked of the Iranians suspending their nuclear weapons program on Oct. 17.

And that's just a coincidence?

And we are to believe, Mr. Bush, that nobody told you any of this until last week?

Your insistence that you were not briefed on the NIE until last week might be legally true, something like "what the definition of 'is' is," but with the subject matter being not interns but the threat of nuclear war.

Legally, it might save you from some war crimes trial, but ethically it is a lie.

It is indefensible.

You have been yelling threats into a phone for nearly four months, after the guy on the other end had already hung up.

You, Mr. Bush, are a bald-faced liar.

And moreover, you have just revealed that John Bolton and Norman Podhoretz and the Wall Street Journal editorial board are also bald-faced liars.

We are to believe that the intel community, or maybe the State Department, cooked the raw intelligence about Iran, falsely diminished the Iranian nuclear threat, to make you look bad?

And you proceeded to let them make you look bad?

You not only knew all of this about Iran in early August, but you also knew it was accurate.

And instead of sharing this good news with the people you have obviously forgotten you represent, you merely fine-tuned your terrorizing of those people, to legally cover your own backside.

While you filled the factual gap with sadistic visions of, as you phrased it Aug. 28, "nuclear holocaust," and, as you phrased it Oct. 17, "World War III."

My comments, Mr. Bush, are often dismissed as simple repetitions of the phrase "George Bush has no business being president."

Well, guess what?

Tonight: hanged by your own words, convicted by your own deliberate lies....

You, sir, have no business being president.

