

CHAPTER 14

Fear Mongering

Chickenhawk Lies, Lies and More Lies

It is part of the general pattern of misguided policy that our country is now geared to an arms economy which was bred in an artificially induced psychosis of war hysteria and nurtured upon an incessant propaganda of fear.

—General Douglas MacArthur (speech on May 15, 1951)

In the face of adversity, Bush and the Republican Party chose to promote fear, rather than inspire courage. They appealed to xenophobia. In every election cycle since 9/11 they mongered fear in order to intimidate and attract the most gullible and timid of America's electorate. The Cons count on frightened people to be more accepting of lies and whatever mischief and skulduggery their bellicose leaders concoct. They created millions of *bedwetting conservatives*.

Under GOP rule, the Land of the Free became the Land of the Afraid.

The Cons are not interested in educating America about world affairs, since the more Americans know, the more likely they are to reject the Con agenda. According to a Roper poll of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 conducted in December 2005 and January 2006 for *National Geographic*:

- six in 10 could not locate Iraq on a map of the Middle East, even though America had been at war there for almost three years;
- 75% could not locate Israel on a map of the Middle East;
- fewer than 30% believe it is important to know the locations of nations in the news; and
- only 14% believe learning a foreign language is a necessary skill.

The Cons recognize that fear and ignorance are partners, their partners.

When it comes to fear mongering, Bush is the exact opposite of courageous American leaders such as President Franklin Roosevelt. Facing real dangers, including the GOP Great Depression and World War II, Roosevelt declared, "We have nothing to fear, but fear itself." America and its allies—united and led by Roosevelt—faced far greater evil than a gang of criminals armed with box cutters. But Chickenhawk Bush and his GOP chose fear in order to divide—and loot America.

Roosevelt strived to unite America and its allies, to acknowledge and face the challenges head on, and to not be dispirited or weakened by fear. Unlike Bush,

Roosevelt was a world leader, widely respected for integrity and courage in the face of evil—and, unlike Bush, feared by America's enemies.

Bush's principal fear, immediately following 9/11, might well have been that an angry nation was going to rightfully pin the tail of responsibility on him for not preventing 9/11. He probably thought, "Oh, no! They're going to find out we ignored all the terrorist warnings and advice from our intelligence agencies and the Clinton administration. I hope there's a Bush Family Pass big enough to cover my tail on this! I shouldn't have taken all those vacations. Dang, I was AWOL again!"

It was profoundly disappointing that Bush after 9/11 did not immediately challenge all Americans to show their bravery and patriotism by continuing their normal activities, including flying on U.S. airlines. Bush's timidity in the aftermath of 9/11 cost the nation's psyche and economy dearly, giving the 9/11 criminals a bigger victory than they ever could have imagined.

Yes, thanks to Bush's weak knees, America's suffering was magnified. Many Americans stopped flying, and U.S. carriers, already experiencing a slowdown in air travel, were sent reeling. The United States later paid the carriers billions and billions of dollars with the goal of keeping them operating. Boeing also felt the pain, and over a period of about two years reduced the number of employees in its commercial aircraft unit from 90,000 to 45,000. Highly skilled manufacturing and engineering workers at Boeing lost their jobs, taking whatever employment they could find, including checking luggage in airport security at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

Contrast the fear of Bush and bedwetting conservatives with the courage of Israel and its citizens in the face of deadly suicide bombings. What happens when a Palestinian suicide bomber kills several Israeli civilians in a restaurant? Do Israeli restaurants shut down? No. The Israeli people rally and, in an awesome display of gritty courage and patriotism, continue their daily activities as before without compromise. All bodies and body parts at the bombing site are handled with religious respect, the restaurant is restored and reopened as soon as possible, usually within 24 hours, and Israeli families return immediately to the restaurant to dine.

Bush had the opportunity to lead America along such a path of courage, but he didn't. He could have said something like, "Do not surrender to fear. Yes, be vigilant, but continue to live your lives as before. In particular, don't cancel any travel plans for yourself or your family." But he didn't. Israelis in a similar situation would not expect or need such reassurances.

Bush could have cited statistics showing that flying is much safer than alternative forms of transportation. For example, Boeing calculations show that it is *22 times* safer to fly in a commercial aircraft than it is to drive, on a per-mile-traveled basis. As for total numbers, more people are killed in automobile accidents in the United States in an average three-month period than have been killed in U.S. commercial aircraft accidents in the last 40 years. Bush could have pointed out that the 276 crew and passengers killed on 9/11 do not appreciably change these numbers. Bush then

could have told Americans that it was their patriotic duty to fly *even if* it were more risky to fly than to drive, which it isn't.¹²¹

Notwithstanding years of GOP propaganda to the contrary, Bush is a coward, and the GOP is a party that promotes cowardice. As Bush sat in that Florida classroom on 9/11, he looked like a frightened deer in the headlights. When he flew to Baghdad on Thanksgiving Day in 2003 for a surprise, in-a-protective-bubble, photo-op visit for a few hours with our troops, he not only insulted all Iraqis by not meeting with them or their leaders, but he also presented a cowardly image of the American presidency.

He showed similar weakness and bad judgment regarding a brief surprise trip he made to Baghdad on June 13, 2006. By arriving totally unannounced in a nation that supposedly is sovereign, Bush insulted and weakened Iraq's newly named prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki. The secrecy and extraordinary security surrounding his visit, together with the shortness of his visit, only five hours, spoke volumes about the real security situation on the ground in Iraq. Most of Bush's cabinet did not even have advance notice of the trip.

Bush oozed fear when he refused to testify alone before the 9/11 Commission in 2004, even though—as he demanded—the hearing was closed to the public and no recording was made. He insisted that Cheney attend with him.

Almost all of Bush's campaign stops and other so-called public appearances are in fact private appearances. They are staged, invitation-only, in-the-bubble events limited to supporters and cheerleaders, and any questions asked of him are friendly softball questions.

He prefers to receive questions in advance before he gives one of his rare interviews. He is America's fearful "Bubble President," a joke to the world, and a black mark on American courage. On those rare occasions when he faces tough unscripted questions, his gaffes are legendary.

Bush fearfully saw a terrorist behind every bush, and terrorists in return saw fear behind Bush every day.

Ironically, strategic diplomatic and military blunders by Bush, as well as further terrorist attacks he caused, perversely helped the GOP's campaign to cultivate fear. So when there's another bombing, say in Madrid or Dallas, the GOP Dixie Chickenhawks can say, "See, we told you the world is a dangerous place. We need to stick with our tough president in these tough times." Bush is like cocaine to his fear-addicted supporters—the more Bush screws up and misuses them, the more they think they need him.

Clever new slogans are important tools to increase the fear level. Just throw some focus group nonsense on the wall and see if it sticks. The epithet "Islamofascism" was one that stuck for a while. Many rightwing politicians and talk show hosts seized upon the term to describe any Islamic group they wanted to disparage, but they might

¹²¹ The media help create a fearful perspective regarding air travel. Arnold Barnett, an MIT professor and expert in aviation safety, determined that the front pages stories of *The New York Times* for a two-year period (1988-89) ran 0.02 cancer stories for each 1,000 cancer deaths, 1.7 homicide stories for each 1,000 homicides, and 138 airplane crash stories for each 1,000 aircraft crash deaths.

just as well have called them Islamocommunists or Islamotexans. If these rightwing name callers want to be more accurate with their fascist lingo, they could look in the mirror and consider the words of the world's number two fascist, Benito Mussolini, who said, "Fascism should more appropriately be called corporatism because it is the merger of state and corporate power." Welcome to GOP America.

Bush and the GOP perform a balancing act when it comes to manipulating fear. On one hand, they strive to keep the fear level high, and, on the other, they duplicitously try to take credit for making America safer. For example, in February 2004, then CIA director George Tenet stated that the world is at least as "fraught with danger for American interests" as it was a year earlier, notwithstanding the "major successes" claimed by the Bush administration, such as overthrowing and capturing Saddam Hussein and picking off numerous Saddam henchmen in the famous "deck of cards."

That goofy color-coded, terror-alert system was confusing from the beginning and never provided specific information that Americans could act upon. However, it was a clever political tool to manipulate fear. Big Media helped stoke the fires of fear by blindly passing along the useless information generated by the Bush administration. The alerts always sound like useless vague weather reports: "There are threats of terrorist thunderstorms somewhere in the world in the next 90 days." All considered, it was "mission accomplished" for rightwing propaganda, since the American public *did* develop a heightened level of numb dumb fear. If Americans really wanted to use a *color-coded* system that does in fact reduce death and destruction, they would do better by simply paying more attention to the red, yellow and green colors of ordinary traffic lights when they drive.

In another exercise of simplistic black-and-white thinking, the Bush administration overuses and misuses the word "terrorist" to refer to just about anyone who opposes its unilateralist military policies. The sentiment that "you're either with us or against us" is just one of many famous examples of Bush's defective thinking. It never occurred to the Bushies, for example, that Iraqis who wanted to see Saddam removed would also want to kick out American troops.

Surprisingly, the Bush administration's use of the word "terrorist" even extends to American teachers. When addressing a closed-door meeting with the nation's governors, Bush's mean-spirited Education Secretary Rod Paige compared America's three million teachers to terrorists when he referred to the National Education Association as a terrorist organization.

In 2004 the Senate Intelligence Committee reported that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and it promised to report later—in the so-called "second phase" of its report—on whether the Bush administration pressured America's intelligence agencies to distort and cherry pick the evidence, or whether Bush and his cronies flat out lied to Congress and America. However, GOP Senator Pat Roberts of Kansas, who chaired the intelligence committee, successfully stalled and killed the second phase through the congressional midterm elections of 2006. The deceptive campaign to promote fear for political gain still begs to be investigated.

Colin Powell enjoyed a stellar military and diplomatic reputation in the international community before he joined Bush's administration as Secretary of State. Many friends and allies were embarrassed for him and regretted his subsequent fall. Espe-

cially shameful was Powell’s fear-mongering presentation to the Security Council on February 5, 2003, during which he played the good soldier, doing the best he could with flimsy and bogus evidence—bobbing and weaving, lying and misleading, doing anything he could to make the case for war. In doing so, he acted like a defense attorney for a guilty criminal, not like America’s Secretary of State.

However, defense attorneys operate in an adversarial system where they have the legal duty to be the best advocate for their clients, no matter how guilty. Powell, on the other hand, had a duty to be truthful. At some point, the *good soldier* has to recognize a higher duty than blind allegiance to a lying president. It will be interesting to read Powell’s memoirs some day, should he find the backbone to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He should have resigned in indignation rather than being a lying patsy for his *commander in mischief*.

The Bush administration and the GOP-controlled Congress established a culture of lying that is unprecedented in American history. They lie because they know Americans would oppose their actions if the cold truth were on the table. Their ends always justify the means, one of which is chronic lying. When you decide to exploit 9/11 to wage war on a nation with zero responsibility for 9/11, you need to lie. Lies are a valued currency in the Bush administration. Never admit to a lie, and keep circulating the same counterfeit Confederate currency.

The rules that apply to regular mortals, including the truth, do not apply to right-wing fundamentalists, whether they are Muslims or Christians. As for the donor class that supports Bush and his propaganda machine—the Super Rich and Big Business—they may not like the lies, but they love their tax cuts and corporate welfare.

When it comes to Iraq, virtually the entire world, with the exception of Bush’s dwindling loyal base in the United States, knows Bush to be the most dangerous liar of our times. Bush’s Iraq war, based on lies, has caused far more deaths than Saddam would have caused in this period, and far more deaths than bin Laden and all the other Islamic fundamentalists have caused during the same period. More important, Bush’s invasion of Iraq, coupled with his inept planning and execution of the war, set the stage for greatly increased death and destruction in the future.

Many of the Bush administration’s lies regarding Iraq have been well documented, notwithstanding the GOP’s efforts at every juncture to conceal the facts and obfuscate the truth. In spite of the stonewalling, the truth is slowly emerging, some of it coming from former members of Bush’s inner circle who decided to put patriotism and truth above rightwing lies and secrecy.

The Five Biggest Lies Bush Told Us About Iraq, a 2003 book by Christopher Scheer, Robert Scheer and Lakshmi Chaudhry, describes in persuasive detail the following five biggest lies of Bush:

- First Lie: Al Qaeda’s Ties to Iraq
- Second Lie: Iraq’s Chemical and Biological Weapons
- Third Lie: Iraq’s Nuclear Weapons
- Fourth Lie: The War Will Be a “Cakewalk”
- Fifth Lie: Iraq As a Democratic Model

The book appeared in 2003 and thus does not include: (1) subsequently uncovered piles of evidence of lies; (2) piles of evidence still uncovered, and (3) the myriad of *new* Bush lies since 2003, including especially his lies about his unconstitu-

tional actions and other impeachable offences, including the unlawful surveillance of American citizens without probable cause and without a court order.

When Bush and Cheney became fixated on that imagined grand prize—the invasion and control of Iraq—they were willing to say anything, and permit all those under them to say anything, to seize the prize.

SIDEBAR: The Party That's Strong on National Defense

Over many years the GOP Cons have created out of thin air several favorite myths about themselves. One of these myths—that the Republican Party is fiscally responsible—is debunked in Chapter 12, “The GOP’s Bankruptcy of America,” where it is shown that the Democratic Party is the one party of fiscal responsibility. We turn now to another favorite rightwing myth, namely that it is the Cons, but not Democrats, who are strong on national defense. But “that dog don’t hunt.” It doesn’t now, and it never did.

The most charitable thing you can say about Bush and his Cons is that they are incompetent on national defense.

Just for fun, let’s look at some facts. Before doing so, however, we note that Democrats are naturally inclusive and love to debate issues in an inclusive, respectful, problem-solving manner, with the goal of setting the best policy for America, all of America. This is due to their DNA and also because they read the Bible, the whole Bible, not the *holey* Bible of the Cons.

Democratic leaders prefer not to question the patriotism of other Americans or the testosterone levels of weak-kneed rightwing American males. However, *if* Democrats did, they could point out the following facts regarding the major wars that America has fought in the last century:

- Under the leadership of the Democratic Party and Democratic President Woodrow Wilson, America and its allies won World War I.
- Under the leadership of the Democratic Party and Democratic President Franklin Roosevelt, America and its allies won World War II. It is noteworthy that under that same Democratic Party and that same Democratic president, America also won the war against the GOP Great Depression, which was inaugurated by President Hoover—a Republican, of course.
- Under the leadership of the Democratic Party and Democratic President Harry Truman, America successfully resisted the communist attack that started the Korean War. Beginning with the decisive invasion known as the Battle of Inchon, they rolled back the commies. The Republican Party, under Republican Dwight Eisenhower, later threw in the towel by agreeing to a draw, and as a result North Korea has been enslaved ever since by one of the world’s most repressive regimes.

- Ditto in Vietnam. America under the leadership of the Democratic Party had the guts to fight the Vietnamese commies, but Republican Nixon—who campaigned for election in 1968 with a bogus claim that he had a “secret plan” to end the war and win the peace—carried on the war for several more years without a plan for victory, during which time countless more lives were lost. Nixon finally raised the white flag in a peace treaty signed with North Vietnam in January 1973; Saigon fell to the communists on April 30, 1975, during the GOP’s watch; and America had lost its first war.¹²² Yes, America and France each lost a war in Vietnam, but the French, unlike Bush and the Cons, study history to learn from it.
- Consider Afghanistan. Bush and the do-nothing-good GOP put America on the road to losing another war.
- Ditto in Iraq, only worse. Does anyone believe Bush and the Cons have, or ever had, a “plan” to win in Iraq?

Well, you see the truth. When it comes to war and national defense, the Democratic Party is tough and smart, and the Republican Party is weak and dumb—and deceitful. Democratic leadership is willing and able to assemble strong coalitions to fight in just causes. Con leadership is not.

If the above facts were reversed, Bush and the Cons wouldn’t have to lie about their patriotism, bravery and support for America’s military.

Bush and the Cons foolishly put America on the road to losing two more wars—a just war in Afghanistan that has been incompetently waged, and Bush’s unjust war on Iraq, which is the wrong war at the wrong time in the wrong place by the wrong leader, and which is both genocide and a civil war.

If Bush and his neo-Republican Party had been in charge at the time of Pearl Harbor—December 7, 1941—we’d all now be speaking German east of the Mississippi River, and Japanese to the west.

Americans are willing to take and give casualties in war, provided they believe the war is just, and provided they believe their commander in chief is truthful and competent regarding the mission. But Bush and his team in the Bush League White House are neither. They try to *govern by gonads*, but they lost theirs long ago.

An honest strong president would not have lied, or encouraged his advisors to lie, in order to justify preordained policies, but rather would have made decisions on the merits, with full debate, laying out the facts for the American people and explaining why he chose a particular course.

George Tenet’s book, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*, provides additional evidence of the dysfunctional nature of Bush’s inner circle. Regarding the war cabinet meeting on December 21, 2002 (three months before the invasion of Iraq), in which Tenet famously uttered “slam dunk,” he writes that his words applied to the UN presentation being prepared, not to the intelligence. He writes that the

¹²² Between two and four million people died in the Vietnam War (1955-1975), also known as the Second Indochina War. The dead included 58,169 Americans, with an average age of 23.

meeting in the Oval Office was “essentially a marketing meeting.” Bush wanted a better slide show and even suggested that attorneys could help prepare a better pitch for war.

The GOP tactic of creating Big Lies for a huge fearful gullible segment of America’s voters remains surprisingly effective. For example, in a *Newsweek* poll conducted in June 2007—more than four years after the invasion of Iraq—an incredible 41% of Americans polled answered “yes” to the question: “Do you think Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq was directly involved in planning, financing, or carrying out the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001?”

Americans who still believe the various false claims about Iraq—such as Saddam having WMDs in 2003, or Iraq being involved in 9/11, or Saddam being in bed with al Qaeda—have a terminal case of cognitive dissonance. Perhaps wanting to believe they were really right in supporting Bush’s war on Iraq, they are predisposed to believe anything. Rightwing bloggers, the rightwing media and the Bush White House are all too happy to continue to mislead them. None of this bodes well for the future of America’s democracy. A Harris Poll released July 21, 2006, found that an incredible 50% of Americans—74% of Republicans and 29% of Democrats—still believed the long since disproved claim that Saddam had illegal WMDs when Bush invaded Iraq in 2003.

Bush is the most chronic and dangerous liar among all American presidents ever. The previous record holder, Richard Nixon, is a saint compared to Bush, and Nixon resigned in disgrace during impeachment proceedings.

Well, how about Bill Clinton? During every day of his administration, Clinton was labeled a liar and accused of all sorts of fabricated crimes by America’s corporate rightwing Big Media and rightwing politicians, who calculated that if they repeated a lie enough, it could become truth.

The nonstop tsunami of negative press coverage would lead one to conclude that Clinton was the first Washington politician ever to lie about some aspects of his private behavior. Yes, Clinton lied about sex, specifically rotten disgusting sex between consenting adults in the White House. Although the Cons would have waged their immoral vendetta against Clinton no matter what the facts—even if Clinton’s conduct had been as pure as that of Mother Theresa—the vendetta was helpfully fueled by sex, that titillating topic upon which so many old white males in the GOP are psychologically fixated.

By the way, many people disagree with the characterization that it was “sex.” Many people, primarily younger folk, view Clinton’s physical bonding with Monica Lewinsky as not real sex, but simply *pre-sex*, rather more like an intimate handshake between good friends. Well, perhaps your author is too old-fashioned to understand these subtleties, but it certainly sounded like sex. In any case, let’s agree that Clinton lied about sex, and not quibble about whether it was sex or just pre-sex. Who cares?

And what happened? The Cons used their control of both houses of Congress during Clinton’s administration to prosecute numerous politically motivated investigations—witch hunts without boundaries—against Clinton and his family, and ultimately they brought impeachment proceedings against him, all to the GOP’s great shame. Tens of millions of taxpayer dollars were wasted in the smear directed by extreme rightwing Republican Kenneth Starr, who hated Clinton long before he

stepped into his position of trust, and, notwithstanding conflicts of interest, was appointed to the office of independent counsel by a partisan GOP-controlled three-judge panel intent on persecuting Clinton.¹²³ The intense personal hatred for Clinton was especially shameful when it involved Con politicians claiming to be Christians, especially the many adulterers and fornicators among them, including leading GOP candidates for the presidency in 2008.

Setting aside for the moment the big lies of Bush, where is the moral and legal *consistency* of the far right when it comes simply to Bush's *personal* transgressions? Well, for every *personal* criminal violation or moral lapse by Bush during his adult life (including public drunkenness, drunk driving, automobile collisions, use of illegal drugs, foul language, fornication, adultery, illegal campaign donations, impregnation of someone not his wife, and bestiality),¹²⁴ his rightwing supporters and the mainstream rightwing media gave him an inexhaustible supply of *Bush Family Passes*. Any progressive American family in North Dakota or Massachusetts would be ashamed if it had a family member with Bush's rap sheet, and if the neighbors found out, the family would have to move to a red zone of Texas. That's the law.

But who really cares about Bush's *personal* transgressions at this point? Well, in stark contrast with the lies of Clinton regarding pre-sex, the lies of Bush really do matter, since they include lies about: going to war; life and death; not properly equipping and supporting America's troops in harm's way; national security; the reputation and power of the United States in the world; the outing of CIA agents; treason; illegal spying on American citizens; and other abuses of the U.S. Constitution and the very fabric of America's democracy.

Any *one* of Bush's lies about Iraq would lead, slam dunk, to his impeachment if there was a shred of moral and legal consistency on the far right. But there is not. Unfortunately for America's democracy, the Cons controlled all branches of Government, and they gave Bush one pass after another.

Sadly, it is Bush's intellectual detachment and mental deficiencies that may offer him the best chance to escape accountability. His supporters occasionally argue, somewhat delicately, along the line that Bush is so detached that he doesn't really know what's going on. So, for example, if Bush really believes, or suspects, that today is Monday when it's really Saturday, then it's not a lie for him to say today is Monday. In effect, Bush's incompetence, his stupidity, his utter lack of curiosity—call it what you wish—entitles him to a “stay in office” card for whatever he says or does.

Bush applies the same low standard—no standard, really—to his closest advisors. Bush, a chronic distorter and liar, naturally accepts distortion and lies from his closest advisors, without ever holding them personally responsible for anything, provided only that they remain loyal to him. It should be no surprise that this loopy

¹²³ The Office of the Independent Counsel expired in 1999.

¹²⁴ At least 70% of the items on this list are accurate, but it's difficult to be certain because Bush and the media choose not to cover these things. “Bestiality” is just a joke intended to get you to read this footnote. Well, on second thought, even *that* (bestiality that is) may have happened since Bush is a member of Yale's ultra-secret Skull and Bones Society. You know, it *could* have happened. Who knows?

“management style” has caused some of the most lethal blows to his presidency and legacy.

During his entire tenure in the White House, Bush has *never* uttered words like the following: “Mr. Rumsfeld, you said A, B, C and D about Iraq, and none of them turned out to be true—none of them! It is my duty as president to hold you responsible. You’re fired!”

To the contrary, Bush and his GOP rubber stampers focused more on spinning than winning the war on terrorism and the war on Iraq. Rumsfeld and Feith systematically introduced spinning and propaganda—better called treasonous lies—into the Pentagon, with the blessing of Bush and Cheney. In late 2001 the Pentagon covertly created the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI), with the purpose of broadening information warfare into nations *allied* with the United States. In February 2002 *The New York Times* and other major U.S. media reported the existence of the OSI, and it was only after intense public discussion of the OSI’s role and impact—including the undermining of the credibility of the Pentagon and other U.S. institutions caused by lying to the public—that Rumsfeld announced the decision to close the OSI. However, nine months later Rumsfeld bragged that the OSI was shut down in name only and that its activities would continue.

The disclosure in 2007 of Rumsfeld’s “snowflake” messages to his staff and others further revealed and reinforced his manipulative nature. Rumsfeld sought to rally American support for the GOP’s failed war through the development of “bumper sticker statements.” He wrote of the need to “link Iraq to Iran” and to “keep elevating the threat.” He also made disparaging comments about Muslims.

Let’s return for a moment to that embarrassing presentation by Colin Powell before the UN Security Council in February 2003 in which he presented the case for war against Iraq. Let’s not forget that then CIA Director George Tenet, who was on occasion a lackey to Bush’s inner circle and ultimately its scapegoat, also played a supporting role in that tragic UN farce. In order to provide reassuring visual support to those being duped, Tenet sat right behind Powell during Powell’s Security Council song and dance. Tenet apparently had trained himself to go along with the war party line. In his 2007 book, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*, in which Tenet downplays his own shortcomings, he writes about Powell’s UN speech: “It was a great presentation, but unfortunately the substance didn’t hold up. One by one, the various pillars of the speech, particularly on Iraq’s biological and chemical weapons programs, began to buckle. The secretary of state was subsequently hung out to dry in front of the world, and our nation’s credibility plummeted.” Although the Bush White House, especially Bush and Cheney, is the major reason for the decline in the CIA’s reputation and capabilities, Tenet must share some of the responsibility. He resigned in June 2004, and Bush rewarded his incompetence with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Tenet is on a long list of senior Bush League incompetents—including Rice and Wolfowitz—who received some of America’s highest civilian awards, or were promoted beyond their level of competence.

As for Bush, his numerous personal weaknesses led him to become a willing occupant of that famous Bush Bubble and a president prone to manipulation by flatterers and liars. Our next chapter is “Puppetry in the White House.”