

CHAPTER 15

Puppetry in the White House

A Blind Man in a Roomful of Deaf People

I think I may need a bathroom break. Is this possible?

—George W. Bush, in a handwritten note to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during a UN world summit meeting, September 14, 2005

In April 2004, after many months of stonewalling and flip flopping, Bush and Cheney finally agreed to testify—or rather, chat—before the commission investigating 9/11, but only if the proceedings were subject to certain conditions. One truly bizarre condition was that Bush would appear only if he and Cheney appeared together.

Can you imagine Richard Nixon refusing to testify before a commission unless his vice president, Spiro Agnew, appeared with him? Or consider Bush’s father, George H. W. Bush—certainly not the shiniest penny in the jar—can you imagine him refusing to appear unless Dan Quayle was there to hold his hand? Or consider Ronald Reagan. Or Bill Clinton—well, you get the idea.

SIDEBAR: Spiro Agnew

Note to younger readers: If you don’t recognize the name of Spiro Agnew, you should Google him and spend a few minutes learning about his infamous place in American history. This Republican vice president famously had a way with words, frequently using alliteration, such as describing the media as “nattering nabobs of negativism.” He also had a way with money, including taking cash bribes while in public office, which led to his resignation in disgrace.

If you need a good topic for a paper for an American history class, you could consider writing about the parallels and differences between the Nixon/Agnew team and the Bush/Cheney duo. One obvious difference is that the Bush/Cheney financial schemes for their cronies are much bigger.

However, Bush and Cheney are a different duo, and they simply had to appear together. Some wags offered the explanation that a dummy cannot talk without his ventriloquist present. Some even suggested that Bush and Cheney are physically joined at that place on Bush's body where ventriloquist Cheney inserts his hand.

The other conditions demanded by Bush and Cheney were: (1) they would not answer questions about 9/11 under oath, (2) the proceedings would not be recorded, and (3) the proceedings would be private. This meant that the families of the more than 3,000 victims of 9/11 would never know what Bush said or didn't say, and they would have no right to ask him a few questions.

When it comes to standing up for traditional American values and working for all Americans, not just the privileged and the Super Rich, Bush lacks a backbone. He is the perfect puppet for Cheney and his band of neocons.

Although Reagan eventually found the common sense and backbone to ignore the lunatic advice he was getting from the same neocons who recently ran America and its military into the ground, Bush continues to fall for their fairy tales hook line and sinker. Perhaps he is afraid to fire them, knowing they are likely to write embarrassing tell-all books about him and his fiasco of a presidency.

It is instructive to consider how Cheney became vice president. Bush asked him to head the efforts to pick his vice presidential running mate. After fondling this task for several weeks, Cheney decided he would take the VP job himself, and Bush passively went along. It would be amusing to see the vetting sheet that Cheney prepared for candidate Cheney.

Bush has numerous personal shortcomings that make him an ideal participant in puppetry. In the following pages, we will discuss just a few of these shortcomings:¹²⁵

- intellectual laziness;
- a lack of curiosity about the world;
- a weak work ethic (also known as laziness);
- inability to empathize with anyone less fortunate;
- an AWOL backbone when it comes to personal sacrifice;
- poor judgment;
- inability to form public policy through a fact-based analytical framework;
- allergy to personal responsibility; and
- a warped set of personal values that place ideology over truth, and fealty over competence.

America's friends and allies are amazed that a person of Bush's BB-gun caliber could garner 50% of the vote in an American presidential election. They are especially bewildered by that peculiar rightwing American notion that even the village idiots from time to time should have a village idiot in the White House representing them.

¹²⁵ Numerous books have been written about Bush's character defects and sordid life history, but that is not the purpose of this book. An encyclopedia set would be needed to do the subject justice.

Intellectual Laziness and Lack of Curiosity About the World

Bush's legendary intellectual laziness is a major reason his foreign policy slate was blank when he walked into the White House. He had, and still has, a stunningly low level of curiosity about the world. When a leader cannot locate most nations on a map, his probability of success in a complex world is about equal to that of a monkey randomly flipping coins and randomly going about his monkey business.

Diplomats around the world have been astonished by Bush's ignorance, intellectual laziness and lack of curiosity regarding foreign affairs. Shocked that America has such a shallow man to lead it, they want America's president to be better informed, to be willing to listen and learn, to be street smart and world wise, and to be an effective world leader. They are tired of Bush League name calling and juvenile taunting. They want an honest American leader who believes in diplomacy and has the backbone to meet America's worst enemies face to face.

According to Bob Woodward's *State of Denial*, Bush's father called his old buddy Prince Bandar bin Sultan, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to America, in 1997 to tell him that his son needed a tutor because he was thinking about running for president. The younger Bush, then Governor of Texas, later told Bandar: "I don't have the foggiest idea about what I think about international, foreign policy."

Paul O'Neill, a Republican conservative hand-picked by Cheney and Bush to serve in Bush's cabinet as Secretary of the Treasury, was stunned by Bush's disinterest and lack of knowledge regarding policy issues. In his 2004 book, *The Price of Loyalty*, O'Neill said that "President Bush showed little interest in policy discussions in his first two years in the White House, leading Cabinet meetings 'like a blind man in a roomful of deaf people.'"

These comments are not those of a Bush hater, but are those of a conservative Republican who worked directly for Bush and was the most competent executive ever in Bush's cabinet. O'Neill notes that Bush was so inscrutable that his closest advisors had to devise White House policy on "little more than hunches about what the president might think."

Bush's inability to think deeply about any issue made him putty in the hands of Cheney and the other neocons, who kept him in the dark like a mushroom and steered him at will in virtually any direction. In a cover story entitled, "Bush in the Bubble," *Newsweek* described him as perhaps "the most isolated president in modern history."

When interviewed on *60 Minutes*, O'Neill described his first working meeting with Bush: "I went in with a long list of things to talk about and, I thought, to engage [Bush] on. And as the book said, I was surprised that it turned out to be me talking and the president just listening ... As I recall it was mostly a monologue."

Bush's speeches are prepared almost entirely by others with little or no input from America's "Decider." With practice he began to read his speeches better after 9/11. He has had a surprisingly small number of press conferences (a record low for recent administrations) because he does not think well on his feet, or at all. He prefers that questions be submitted in advance, which gives his handlers time to prepare answers for him.

As for his "public meetings" on the road across America, with rare exception the audiences are handpicked to be friendly and supportive. This allows the president to

avoid hard questions, hard thinking and hard answers. Americans with dissenting views are excluded from these meetings, even though American taxpayers pay for the trips. In a systematic unconstitutional program that suppresses free speech, the Secret Service at taxpayer expense visits locations in advance and instructs local police to establish *free speech zones*—another Orwellian phrase—where people opposed to Bush and his policies are rounded up like cattle and quarantined away from the event. Keeping dissenters out of sight helps America’s media participate in rosy dissenter-free photo ops for Bush.

A Weak Work Ethic

Especially during the early months of his administration, Bush prided himself on not working hard. He took a record number of days of presidential vacation in the several months from his inauguration until 9/11—he vacationed more than 40% of the time before 9/11—and frequently demonstrated to reporters his various ranch vacation activities, principally brush clearing and weed whacking. Yes, “W” stands for “weed whacking” (not to be confused with his avocation of “women whacking,” which he does in Washington.)

Karl Rove thought he could create a regular workingman image for Bush if Bush had his own ranch. So in 1999 Bush bought his so-called “ranch” in Crawford, Texas, and had a big new house built, like a movie set for a media phony. At best the ranch is a mini-ranch or ranchette, but it is more accurately described as a farm. Bush and Rove use the word “ranch” because they believe ranchers are manlier than farmers.

Of course, Bush is neither a rancher nor a farmer. As for being a rancher, the cattle you see on his ranch are not even his. Someone else owns them, pays for grazing rights, and actually knows how to take care of cattle. Bush himself wouldn’t dare get near either end of a bull or cow, unless he was wasted.¹²⁶ Regrettably, Bush does not know how to ride a horse—or, presumably, even a cow, but who knows with certainty.

You won’t find any of these facts in Karl Rove’s media guide for Bush, that popular work of fiction for gullible voters also known as *Dummies for Bush*. This revelation that Bush doesn’t know how to ride a horse could inspire Rove to claim that Bush really is a rodeo champion from way back. If so, America’s media would happily ride along.

As for Bush perhaps being a farmer, that really stretches the imagination. Anyone from a farming state, such as your author, knows that farming takes far too much knowledge, risk, and hard work for people like Bush. Also, it’s a safe bet that Bush couldn’t tell the difference between wheat and a weed, unless the weed was marijuana. Yes, “W” also stands for “weed.”

Lacking in Empathy

If Bush’s DNA had included even the tiniest bit of empathy for the people of Iraq, he would have realized that a reconstruction and development plan—a “plan to win the

¹²⁶ Yes, “W” also stands for “wasted.”

peace”—was necessary, and that the neocon “bomb-em and fire-em” madness was, well, mad, in addition to being mean, unchristian and incredibly counterproductive.

Unfortunately, Bush, like his father, has no ability to create good jobs—whether in America or Iraq—although he does know how to enrich the Super Rich, with whom he shares loads of DNA.

A president with an ability to empathize with average workers in America and Iraq would not have become such a passive puppeteer for policies that have significantly harmed the vast majority of people in both countries. But Bush’s elitist upbringing and country club DNA prevent him from having any sympathy for either Joe Lunchpail in Baltimore or Mohammed Lunchpail in Baghdad.

Here’s a revelation for President Bush. Americans and Iraqis want the same things: good honest jobs that allow them to support their families; medical care; safe vibrant communities in which to live and raise their children; education; a fair society that is not run by and for the privileged few; and the hope that the future will be better for their children.

An AWOL Backbone regarding Personal Sacrifice

If Bush had had a distinguished career in America’s active military, or even an undistinguished career in the active military, he would not have been so easily manipulated by his neocon puppeteers, who themselves had no active military service. Bush did not realize or care how insular and incompetent his *warrior wannabes* were. Yes, “W” stands for “warrior wannabe.”

With no appreciation for the complexities of war, Bush didn’t know what questions to ask, and he chose not to seek advice from military experts outside his tight clique of true believers. For example, when told that the case for WMD in Iraq was a “slam dunk,” Bush didn’t even have the intelligence to say, “OK, so within 24 hours show me a bunch of the compelling evidence. If it’s a slam dunk, that should be easy to do.”

President Truman—and any other president—would have said, “Show me.” Bush didn’t. Bush had heard what he wanted to believe, and facts might get in the way if he asked questions, especially if he knew what questions to ask.

The Bush family, like many other privileged Con families in America who supported the war on Iraq, believes that young men and women of other families should fight it. In practice, this means the war is being fought almost entirely by middle- and low-income American soldiers in the military and National Guard, all of whom deserve our prayers and greatest respect. Many of them enlisted due to economic need, but all of them share a sense of patriotism and shared sacrifice missing from America’s privileged class.

During World War II the privileged class understood that a special responsibility came with their special privileged status. All four of President Franklin Roosevelt’s sons enlisted in America’s armed services after the outbreak of World War II and were decorated for bravery. Bush’s father served with honor and distinction during that same war. Unfortunately, the linkage between privilege and responsibility has been broken in America, and this is especially true with Bush’s extended family.

Bush and Cheney were draft evaders, and Bush also apparently went AWOL from the National Guard. Today no member of their extended families is in military service in Afghanistan or Iraq or anywhere else.

Only a handful of America's leaders in Congress have sons or daughters in the military. As of the start of Bush's second term, the only son or daughter of the 535 members of Congress who had served in Afghanistan or Iraq was Brooks Johnson, the eldest son of Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD), who suffered a stroke in December 2006. While on active duty in the U.S. Army, Brooks Johnson served in Bosnia, Kosovo, South Korea, Afghanistan and Iraq. Nevertheless, GOP slime balls attacked Senator Johnson's patriotism during his 2002 reelection campaign in South Dakota.

It's troublesome that *none* of the senior policy setters in Bush's administration, including the Defense Department, have any immediate family members who served in Iraq or Afghanistan. With the exception of Colin Powell, none of the Bush policy makers were ever in the active armed services, and Powell himself, long before he was booted out of the White House, was neutered and isolated by Bush's armchair civilians who willfully ignore the advice of America's best military minds.

Poor Judgment / Lack of Analytical Framework

Poor judgment has been a consistent hallmark of Bush's personal and public life. A major contributing factor is that he apparently is devoid of any analytical framework for making rational decisions and optimal public policies.

Although the extent to which Tony Blair voluntarily drank the neocon Kool-Aid on Iraq can be debated, it was reasonable for Blair to expect any American president, even Bush, to be reasonably competent and serious in setting about the serious business of war. In this assessment Blair was bitterly disappointed. His poodle-like stickiness to Bush cost him dearly with the British people, who from day one broadly opposed the Bush League war on Iraq. By the time Blair was forced into early retirement, his legacy had dropped to Grade W.

The headline on the cover of the May 13-19, 2006, issue of *The Economist* summed it up nicely: "Axis of feeble: The closing of the Bush-Blair Era."

Until Bush, all American presidents in the last 50 years willingly sought information and advice from a broad array of experts and sources. Especially in critical policy areas where the president has little experience, the president needs to solicit the perspective of people with contrary views, including leaders of the other major political party, as well as foreign leaders.

Bush does not have the smarts or emotional makeup to do this. He chose to remain "bubbled-in," receiving ideologically driven direction from a stunningly small group of advisors who do not value critical thinking and who share a similar narrow worldview. They manipulate him and the agenda as they promote their preconceived, extreme rightwing, neocon ideology. They promote the agenda of the few, not what is best for America and the world.

The decision making process in the Bush White House is run in reverse. The Bushies start with the answer and then conveniently plug in the "facts" and the "problem" later.

When it comes to war, Bush does not even understand the difference between strategy and tactics. As late as 2006, when asked about such niceties regarding Iraq, his public responses were borderline gibberish.

The Bush regime determines and sells its war policies like a marketing firm promotes cigarettes. Regarding Iraq, it rejected the best minds, the best intelligence, and the best critical thinking.

Bush's handlers, especially Cheney, keep dissenting voices outside Bush's Bubble. The lunatics are in charge of the asylum. Fortunately, disclosures by courageous whistle blowers, the ferreting out of the truth by both American and foreign patriots, and the growing list of revealing books written by Bush's *own people*, expose the administration's incompetence, arrogance, corruption and disregard for human life and the rule of law.

The narrow *groupthink* in the White House results in a host of evils. In addition to misleading America and the world about Iraq, the Bush team began to believe many of its own lies. Bush, a weak leader surrounded by people who think and say the same things, mistakes this conformity for correctness, with catastrophic consequences for America and the world.

Denial of Responsibility—Denial is Not a River in Egypt

The Bush administration is the first administration to run America without making any mistakes—at least they never take responsibility for any. Whatever the disaster, such as the quagmire and civil war they created in Iraq, they pretend all is as they foresaw. If mistakes were made, someone else must have made them. Senior White House officials are fortunate to have a boss who applies to them the same Teflon standard that he applies to himself: “The Buck Does Not Stop Here.”

In return, Bush's handlers continuously tell him how strong he is and how well everything is going. Of course, when you don't have a plan with specific measurable objectives, anything and everything can be said to be “on plan.”

Denial of responsibility is a necessary weapon for politicians who run on ideology and blind faith, rather than reason and reality. Living in a house of cards, these political hacks face the perpetual fear that acknowledging a mistake will expose their actions to the sunlight of fact-based analysis, leading to a collapse of support for their fraudulent schemes.

Bush's Teflon policy sends a horrible message to both friend and foe. Whether or not Bush was personally involved in some wrongdoing—say, for example, torture at the Abu Ghraib prison—it would help America if he said, “I take full responsibility on behalf of America and apologize for the mistakes made. They won't happen again.” This would affirm American values and perhaps win some Muslim hearts and minds.

Such acceptance of responsibility is helpful even when it has no legal significance. Consider the style of Pope John Paul II, who on several occasions apologized for horrendous sins of the Catholic Church over the years. On November 22, 2001, he even made his first “virtual” email apology when he apologized to victims of sexual abuse committed by Catholic priests. Observers may have thought: “Wow, the Pope is going to do hard time when he's sentenced ... thousands of years in prison.” Of course, it doesn't work that way. Nevertheless, John Paul II's apologies did help

change the church's positions, in addition to perhaps giving some comfort to the church's countless victims.

It is odd that the Pope—God's infallible representative on Earth—apologizes, but Bush—a regular mortal—does not. Perhaps Bush believes he alone is the infallible Super Pope with an exclusive channel to God.

Bush's hardcore supporters, especially rightwing Christians, are like a mother who refuses to see shortcomings in the child she wants to love and trust. She gives unconditional love, without responsibility and consequences. But love without responsibility and consequences is not love at all. Slowly but surely, more and more "Bush mothers" are awakening to the fact that this modern day Judas exploited them as he betrayed Christ and his message.

SIDEBAR: A Real Christian Would Repent

What is the single most important *deeply personal* action that Bush could take to help America in the so-called war on terrorism and to restore American respect and credibility among its allies and friends? It is for Bush to *repent* for his illegal and immoral war on Iraq.

Christian theology and the Bible compel this repentance by Bush. A real Christian would do so. Unfortunately, pigs will fly before Bush takes even the first baby step on the road to Christian repentance, which is for him to admit his mistakes and say he's sorry.

But Bush simply saying "I'm sorry" would not be enough. True Christian repentance is much more than feeling remorseful about something. Rather, the Bible requires that a sinner who seeks repentance and the forgiveness of those wronged must make sincere efforts *to turn his life around*. Repentance requires appropriate efforts to right the wrong, to compensate those who have been wronged. It contemplates a radical change of attitudes and direction, with a sincere vow not to repeat the offenses.

Bush the Infallible is not even to first base when it comes to repentance. During the televised 2004 presidential debates, a woman in Missouri asked Bush to identify just three mistakes he had made while president, and he famously could not think of even one. Not one.

Do not expect Bush to repent. After all, he is protected by the *Bush Family Pass*, which exempts him from consequences. Sadly, Bush will never receive on Earth even a tiny fraction of the punishment he deserves. But one can dream. Wouldn't it be heroic for Bush to turn himself over to the Iraqi people for trial regarding his war crimes? Heaven and Earth would rejoice. Even a modest personal sacrifice—say a public tarring and feathering in Baghdad—would do much to help restore America's credibility.

So would his impeachment.

In blaming others for its own mistakes in Iraq, the Bush regime even blames America's troops. While speaking about Iraq in Blackburn, England, on March 31, 2006, Condoleezza Rice would not admit to any strategic mistakes by America's leaders, as she said, "I know we have made tactical errors, thousands of them I am sure." She spun it this way because she knows strategic decisions are made at the top, while tactical decisions are generally made down the chain of command. But the sad reality is that *all* of the key mistakes regarding Iraq were *strategic* mistakes, not *tactical* mistakes, and America's civilian leadership—primarily Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld—made them.¹²⁷ Once again, Rice had it exactly backwards.

Iraq is Bush's and the GOP's *Five Wrong War*—the wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time, by the wrong leader, against the wrong enemy. Yes, "W" stands for "Wrong, Wrong, Wrong, Wrong, Wrong."

Bush's instinct to "blame it on the troops" was on display during a joint news conference with Tony Blair on May 25, 2006, at the White House. Regarding missteps and mistakes in Iraq, Bush and Blair were each asked "which missteps and mistakes of *your own* you most regret?" [Emphasis added]. After saying he had learned "some lessons about expressing" himself, Bush went on to say that the biggest mistake so far was Abu Ghraib. However, he then placed *all* the blame for Abu Ghraib on America's troops, and *none* on himself or Cheney or Rumsfeld or any neocon in Washington—even though the question was about *his* mistakes. Bush then lied, "the people who committed those acts were brought to justice. They've been given a fair trial and tried and convicted."

That's it? Incredible! Bush was asked about *his* own missteps and mistakes, and he goes out of his way to raise Abu Ghraib as the "biggest mistake" and then blame it *only* on low-level scapegoats. If Bush really wanted to identify those responsible for Abu Ghraib, he could look in the mirror, and he could also look at the lying faces of war criminals Rumsfeld and Cheney. When it comes to responsibility and supporting America's troops, Bush has not a shred of personal integrity or decency. Blame the troops—incredible!

On the other hand, America's military personnel carried to success every tactical mission they were assigned in Iraq, no matter how difficult, and they prevailed in every single firefight. They took seriously their various oaths of service. Among the several military oaths is the following, which is taken by all personnel inducted into the U.S. armed forces:

The Military Oath

I, (name), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God.

¹²⁷ The Bush regime's habit of blaming others brings to mind a classic line from *Casablanca*. In the airport scene at the end of the movie, Captain Louis Renault proclaims: "Major Strasser has been shot. Round up the usual suspects."

Unlike Bush—who violated his oath of office—America’s finest with rare exception honorably fulfilled their oaths of military service.

Ideology Over Truth—Fealty Over Competence

Bush and his neocons are quite loyal to those who faithfully stick with the Con program and mouth the party line, and they savage truth tellers who deviate from the neocon scripture. They place no value on differing viewpoints and conflicting facts. Incompetent ass kissers and yes men have job security.

Dissenters, especially the most competent and honest, are weeded out because they are “disloyal.” Axing dissenters is a favorite weapon of politicians driven by ideology and blind faith. Whether it’s Bush’s Washington or Saddam’s Baghdad, only the “loyal” can be counted on to safeguard fascist policies. Cult leaders eliminate members who question the cult’s Kool-Aid.

Saddam surrounded himself with a circle of fearful suck-ups. They learned to tell him what he wanted to hear. In early 2003, just before the U.S. invasion, they told him the United States would not invade, because that is what he wanted to hear. During that same period, Bush’s key neocon advisors told him that the war would be a “cakewalk,” which is what he wanted to hear. Like Saddam, Bush rewards those who “loyally” tell him the lies he wants to hear, and the rest are toast.

Bush’s top economic advisor, Lawrence Lindsey, was fired in 2002, before the Iraq war, because he was an intelligent independent thinker who refused to docilely support the neocon fable regarding the projected cost of the war. He made the mistake of honestly giving his best analysis, which was that the war would cost between \$100 billion and \$200 billion. (Lindsey had apparently forgotten to take his GOP hallucinatory medication that morning.) Since the Bush neocons did not want to hear a number higher than their low-ball figure of \$60 billion,¹²⁸ Lindsey was fired.

Paul O’Neill, one of those rare individuals in the Bush administration who successfully and honestly ran a public company, was fired for giving his candid views as Bush’s Secretary of the Treasury. One “mistake” O’Neill made was truthfully telling Cheney that America was headed towards a financial crisis and that the huge deficits and tax cuts threatened the U.S. economy. Cheney told him, “Reagan proved that deficits don’t matter,” and fired him in December 2002.

SIDEBAR: The GOP Needs a Real French Guillotine

Bush rewards and promotes incompetent cronies, provided they remain loyal. Fortunately, there is a growing conga line of former Bush loyalists who have repented and told their truth after leaving Bush’s sinking ship.

¹²⁸ Surprise! The Bush neocons were low on their estimate. The direct costs alone will exceed \$1 trillion dollars before the United States leaves the mess behind. The indirect cost—including especially the toll of human lives—will be a multiple of that. Priceless.

Competent truth tellers who stray from the party line are routinely and figuratively “guillotined.” Bush and his henchmen need to purchase the official French model of the guillotine, the one that actually severs the head from the body, thus preventing the victim from telling the truth.

Since Bush treats his own people like this, it is not surprising that he mistreats foreigners. Enemies such as North Korea and longtime allies such as France are all targets for Bush’s infamous petulance and snide comments.

Kill the messenger of good news and truth. If Christ returned tomorrow morning to deliver his message of peace and compassion, the Bush regime by sundown would award Halliburton a profitable no-competitive-bid contract for a cross and nails.

Drop old cronies and supporters like hot potatoes if they become an embarrassment. Bush becomes touchy and defensive when asked about such relationships, rather than taking the high road and truthfully giving his perspective, which might help restore his shattered credibility. After all, he couldn’t possibly have personal knowledge of all the nefarious activities of his regime and his friends. But truth telling is as foreign to Bush as French, and thus bad.

SIDEBAR: Chalabi Who?

Iraqi leader Ahmed Chalabi sat in a photo-op seat of honor behind first lady Laura Bush during Bush’s State of the Union speech to Congress in January 2004. Unfortunately for Bush, the neocons’ long-term romance and bribery of Chalabi soon hit a rocky stretch.

When a reporter a few months later started to ask Bush a general question that was not even directed at Bush’s personal role in Chalabi-gate, Bush became unnecessarily defensive. Rather than taking the opportunity to clarify Chalabi’s disastrous fraudulent relationship with his regime, Bush sought cover for *himself* by assuming his familiar “What do I know?” posture.

Q: *“Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. Chalabi is an Iraqi leader that’s fallen out of favor within your administration. I’m wondering if you feel that he provided any false information, or are you particularly ...”*

A: *“Chalabi?”*

Q: *“Yes, with Chalabi.”*

A: *“My meetings with him were very brief. I mean, I think I met with him at the State of the Union and just kind of working through the rope line, and he might have come with a group of leaders. But I haven’t had any extensive conversations with him.”*

(This exchange occurred on June 1, 2004, when Bush spoke in the Rose Garden regarding Iraq’s interim government.)

Chalabi was the darling of the neocons, who marketed him as the “George Washington of Iraq” and groomed him to be the America-pliant leader of Iraq, even though he had not lived in Iraq for decades and had virtually no support within Iraq. The United States paid him tens of millions of dollars over several years to provide made-as-instructed “intelligence” to support the case for the invasion of Iraq. According to the Government Accountability Office, the United States paid Chalabi’s Iraqi National Congress more than \$33 million from March 2000 to May 2004.

In a February 2004 interview with London’s *Daily Telegraph*, Chalabi, then a member of the Iraqi Governing Council, bragged about the impact of the false WMD information his organization provided. “We are heroes in error,” he said during his Baghdad interview. “As far as we’re concerned, we’ve been entirely successful. That tyrant Saddam is gone and the Americans are in Baghdad. What was said before is not important. The Bush administration is looking for a scapegoat.”

The Bush neocons turned against Chalabi later in 2004 only after he started criticizing Bush’s Iraq strategy.

Among the most disturbing allegations regarding Chalabi is that he sent classified U.S. information to Iran, including disclosure that U.S. intelligence had broken Iran’s secret codes, thus compromising the ability of America’s intelligence agencies to decipher intercepted Iranian communications. Since Chalabi was not cleared to receive classified information, the obvious question was whether someone in the Bush administration betrayed the United States by unlawfully passing the classified information to Chalabi.

According to a June 2004 report by Jim Stewart of CBS News, counter-intelligence agents in the FBI focused on the highest levels of the Pentagon in trying to determine who leaked the information. Lie detector tests were given to a small number of civilian Pentagon employees, according to *The New York Times*. The fact that Iran’s code had been broken was known only to a small number of key officials. Incredibly, this is just one more investigation that the Bush administration is not interested in pursuing, and the self-neutered U.S. press quickly lost interest.

At that time—June 2004—Condoleezza Rice, then Bush’s National Security Adviser, promised a thorough FBI investigation of the Iranian leak. However, neither the FBI nor any other counter-intelligence agency has even bothered to interview Chalabi.

Instead, 17 months later, in November 2005—in another flip flop—the Bush administration invited prime suspect Chalabi to visit the White House and meet with several senior officials, including Vice President Cheney and five cabinet members, including Rumsfeld and Rice. While in Washington for this royal treatment, Chalabi also gave a triumphant speech to the American Enterprise Institute, that infamous neocon-infested White House partner in warmongering.

In the next chapter we turn our attention to America’s corporate media and their shameful role regarding the Iraq war and the GOP’s assault on America’s democracy.