
The Dick Cheney Problem

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The former vice president got his comeuppance on Fox News last Wednesday, producing a minor news story.

Dick Cheney and his daughter Liz had published an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal advocating renewed U.S. military involvement in Iraq to prevent a seizure of power by the al-Qaeda spin-off ISIS (or ISIL) and opining, “Rarely has a U.S. president been so wrong about so much at the expense of so many,”

Citing this comment, Fox anchor Megyn Kelly unexpectedly snapped, “But time and time again, history has proven that you got it wrong as well sir.” She referred specifically to the false accusation about weapons of mass destruction used to sell the Iraq War. A flustered Cheney fumbled his interrogator’s name (“Reagan, um, Megyn”) before declaring, “You’ve got to go back and look at the track record.” (As though Megyn were doing something other than precisely that.) “We inherited a situation where there was no doubt in anybody’s mind about the extent of Saddam’s involvement in weapons of mass destruction ... Saddam Hussein had a track record that nearly everybody agreed to.”

In other words, the unfortunately mistaken but universal belief in Saddam’s WMD preceded the Bush-Cheney administration, was part of its heritage but in no way its invention. Everybody was honestly mistaken. Thus he utterly rejects personal responsibility for crediting, promoting it, and using it to justify a war he badly wanted.

He is lying, of course. There had been much skepticism towards the Bush-Cheney claims. I for one was convinced by a talk I attended by former weapons inspector Scott Ritter that it was unlikely Saddam retained any usable WMDs. And by the embarrassing episode in January 2003, when George W. Bush falsely asserted that Iraq had sought to buy uranium from Niger (only to be refuted by the IAEA almost immediately, when the documents Bush had cited were revealed as crude forgeries).

By the fall of 2003, Cheney’s response to the embarrassing absence of WMDs was clear. There had been intelligence flaws. The CIA had messed up. Ok, fine, let’s move on and focus on rebuilding Iraq.

Cheney did not mention how the administration he was steering created the Office of Special Plans to disseminate

disinformation, procured from such con-artists as “Curveball,” Ahmad Chalabi and Ayad Allawi, about Saddam’s WMDs and al-Qaeda ties. He didn’t mention his own visits, along with his aide Scooter Libby, to the Pentagon to demand changes in intelligence assessments made by the CIA. He didn’t mention his office’s unprecedented secrecy and his refusal to comply with the law in turning over documents to the GAO.

The intelligence was not flawed; it was fixed. Hadn’t the head of British intelligence concluded as of July 2002 that in Washington “the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy”?

Kelly, perhaps best known for her convictions about the whiteness of Jesus and Santa, is not the most astute reporter. But the exchange suggests that a media seeded with neocons—who ought to be behind bars not bully pulpits—may become less comfortable for them in the future.

Kelly might have asked Cheney something like this:

“Isn’t it true that Saddam Hussein was a sworn enemy of al-Qaeda, and that the group had no presence in Iraq before the U.S. invasion? A congressional investigation concluded that. And isn’t this group ISIS there now because of the power vacuum and chaos created by your invasion, sir? They say 1700 Iraqi soldiers were executed by ISIS. Don’t you think some of that blood is on your hands, sir? You remember when Colin Powell told Bush, ‘If you break it, you bought it.’ Are you in any position to demand that Obama fix what you broke?”
