

CIA CHIEF REVEALS

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[A book by the former CIA chief reveals how President Bush's top officials planned to attack Iraq from the start and fooled the world on its alleged motives, while the US Congress passes a bill to bring American troops home.]

More information has emerged on the deceits practised by the United States administration in launching and prosecuting its war on Iraq, even as the US Senate passed a bill requiring that American troops be withdrawn starting in July.

Key leaders were keen to attack Iraq from the very first days of the Bush administration, long before the September 11, 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York.

This is revealed by a new book launched recently by George Tenet, the former head of the Central Intelligence Agency. He resigned in June 2004 after he was made a scapegoat when it was found that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Critics have long suspected that the plan to invade Iraq was made from the beginning when Bush took over the US Presidency. And that this had nothing to do with whether Saddam Hussein's regime was really a threat to American security, or whether it was linked to Al Qaeda or the Twin Towers incident or whether Iraq had WMD.

The book by Tenet, 'At the Centre of the Storm', gives confirmation that officials in the White House and Pentagon, especially Vice-President Dick Cheney, was already plotting to invade Iraq and get rid of the Saddam regime, even before September 11. And that they misused intelligence information to achieve their aims.

Tenet was very much an inside man in the Administration and does not deny he was also to blame for some of the manipulation. However his book shows how he resents being made the scapegoat when it was found that there were no WMD in Iraq.

The alleged existence and threat of such weapons were the main reasons put forward by both Bush and British premier Tony Blair for their joint invasion of Iraq.

The famous television scenes of US Secretary of State Colin Powell showing the United Nations Security Council pictures of instruments and sites that were supposed to be evidence of biological and chemical weapons are now a historical part and symbol of the US attempt to deceive the world.

The UN Security Council was not impressed and did not authorise the US-UK invasion. Powell, after he gave up power, apologised for his role. The then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan subsequently declared that the US-UK invasion of Iraq was illegal, and paid heavily for that statement when the United States tried to implicate him in the oil-for-food financial scandal.

This may all be history that has already flowed under the bridge. But the occupation of Iraq continues, and mounting pressure is being put on Bush to get the American troops out.

The Tenet book thus plays the role not only of contributing to the historical account, but also of strengthening the case of Bush's critics. The leader of the Democrats in the US Senate remarked that Tenet's book confirms the Democrats' charges of deceit by the Administration.

In a report on the book, the *Washington Post* notes that Tenet does not question the threat Saddam Hussein posed, but he recounts many efforts by aides to Cheney and former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to insert 'crap' into public justifications for the war.

There was also never a serious debate within the administration about the imminence of the Iraq threat, according to the former CIA chief.

When CIA officials presented their briefings on security threats to the incoming Bush administration in late 2000, they did not even mention Iraq. This revelation by Tenet shows how little a threat the CIA considered Iraq to be,

But Tenet's book reveals that Cheney asked for an Iraq briefing and requested that the outgoing Clinton administration's defense secretary, William S. Cohen, provide information on Iraq for Bush.

In August 2002, Cheney made a speech that 'went well beyond what our analysis could support,' says Tenet. The speech alleged that Saddam Hussein had restarted his nuclear program and would 'acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon...perhaps within a year.'

Tenet says he was caught off-guard by the Cheney remarks but did not confront the Vice President, although he now feels he should have.

Tenet blames himself for a key October 2002 report that concluded that Iraq possessed chemical and biological weapons, issued just before a Congress vote authorising the war. The report was 'not cautious in key judgments' and used sources who turned out to be wrong.

The book appears just as the battle between the Democrat-led US Congress and Bush over withdrawing troops from Iraq hots up. Last Friday, the Senate approved (by 51 to 46 votes) a US\$124 billion Iraq war spending bill that included withdrawing US troops from July.

Bush immediately announced he would veto the bill. The scene is now set for bargaining between the White House and the two Houses in Congress over amendments to the bill.

The bill contains policy benchmarks for the Iraqi government. If these benchmarks are not met, troop withdrawal is required to begin in July or October. The benchmark policies require Iraq to expand its military, suppress militias and sectarian violence, protect minority rights and manage Iraq's oil reserves.

If Iraq does not make progress, then starting 1 July, US troops would be withdrawn over six months. If there is progress, US troops would anyway be withdrawn, starting 1 October until March 2008.

Though Bush agrees that there be benchmarks, he and most Republican Congress members do not want troop withdrawals in the bill.

Meanwhile, the American top military commander in Iraq, Gen. David Petraeus the last Friday admitted that the overall violence in Iraq has not declined, despite a rise in US troop levels. And he warned that American casualties could increase.

Thus the week has now seen revelations from a top insider how the public was deceived into believing why Iraq should be invaded, an attempt by a majority in Congress to get Bush to start bringing home the troops, and an admittance by the top military commander that the situation in Iraq has deteriorated despite the recent new strategy. □□□

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