

The Harbour League



BUSH LIED, PEOPLE DIED – BUT DID PRESIDENT BUSH REALLY LIE?

By Herbert I. London

February 19, 2009

For at least five years there has been one consistent *cri de coeur* in the liberal community: "Bush lied." Presumably he justified the invasion of Iraq by suggesting Saddam Hussein was attempting to acquire nuclear weapons. Never mind the fact that the Clinton administration agreed with this Bush assertion; IAEA inspectors concurred and the subsequent Dulfer report indicated Hussein was intent on acquisition of these weapons. But enriched uranium was not found; hence Bush lied.

Conventional wisdom has it as failed intelligence and Bush, willy nilly, is held culpable. Yet on July 5, 2008 the Associated Press (AP) released a story, almost completely unnoticed, that "a secret U.S. mission hauls uranium from Iraq."

The opening paragraph in the story notes: "The last major remnant of Saddam Hussein's nuclear program, a huge stockpile of concentrated natural uranium reached a Canadian port Saturday to complete a secret U.S. operation that included a two week airlift from Baghdad and a ship voyage crossing the oceans." Included in this "haul" was 550 metric tons of yellowcake used for nuclear weapons enrichment, a staggering sum that could have been used to produce dozens of nuclear weapons.

According to recent accounts the uranium was discovered in 2003, but the administration did not reveal the discovery fearing that terrorists would attempt to steal it. It was guarded in a 23,000 acre site with sand beams surrounding the area.

It would seem that this story would vindicate the Bush administration once the AP details were released. In fact, I waited and waited for precisely this result, but it hasn't happened. Could it be that media leaders would be obliged to admit they were wrong about Bush? Might the entire Move On campaign against the Bush presidency be called into question if these facts were revealed to the public? One might well ask at this point, who did the lying?

Since yellowcake did exist in Iraq it might appear that Valerie Plame and her husband Joseph Wilson, who have become darlings of the left by arguing Bush did not tell the truth about Hussein's nuclear ambitions, were lying. Wilson wrote a piece in the *New York Times* slamming Bush, despite the fact President Mayaki of Niger said Hussein did try to buy yellowcake. Now we know the yellowcake did exist and it was held in Iraq, notwithstanding Wilson's claim to the contrary.

It is often argued the truth will set you free. However, this episode suggests that may not be true. Interpretations of recent history by the president's detractors would have to be rewritten. Clearly the Iraq war could still be opposed, but the argument that the president engaged in dissimulation won't fly. That conclusion simply does not sit well with anti-war activists. In the case of these government detractors the bromide silence is golden applies.

In most respects this is a remarkable news story that very few want to touch. It is a demonstration that for many ideology trumps facts. It is evidence that the hatred for President Bush defies rational judgment. And this story indicates that for a segment of the population evidence will not, cannot, change a fixed opinion. Unfortunately the casualty in this tale is not merely George W. Bush and the Republican party, but American history and those students who are obliged to study it.

The past is prologue to the present. And in the present context the issue of nuclear material and the Iraq war was a significant feature of the last presidential campaign. Had the truth been known, had the media exposed the facts, the election might have turned out differently. Yes, there is something to be said for complete transparency, even in politics.

Herbert London is president of Hudson Institute and professor emeritus of New York University. He sits on the Harbour League's board of Trustees. He is the author of **Decade of Denial** (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001) and **America's Secular Challenge: The Rise of a New National Religion** (Encounter Books, 2008). London maintains a website, www.herblondon.org.