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SCHOLARLY EXCHANGE

AMERICA'S IRAQ WAR—ON STEPHEN KNOTT'S "*RUSH TO JUDGMENT*"

Stephen Knott writes:

Lawrence Korb argues that *Rush to Judgment* fails to make "an effective defense of the Bush presidency." I am pleased to hear this, for I state repeatedly in my book that I was not attempting to make such a case. Bush's management of Hurricane Katrina, as well as his responsibility for the housing and stock market collapse, was as troubling to me as it was to many Americans. I criticize Bush for his excessive loyalty to incompetent subordinates (i.e., George Tenet and Donald Rumsfeld), for his failures in postinvasion planning for Iraq, and for his inability to make a compelling case for his national security policies. Additionally, I discuss Bush's repeated butchering of the English language, which played into the hands of critics like Korb who believe Bush was "in over his head" (according to Korb, candidate Bush's inability to identify the leader of Pakistan was evidence of his unsuitability for office).

Korb ignores much of my book to focus on the two chapters dealing with the Iraq war, and his account of the run-up to the war is the standard anti-Bush narrative. In other words, Bush lied and people died, or as Korb puts it, Bush "cooked the books." "Captured" by Dick Cheney, the president made a "catastrophic" error based on Cheney's fabricated narrative. This conspiratorial account is credible only if one ignores the historical record of the era, including President Clinton's commitment to regime change and his claim that Saddam possessed WMD. Korb also ignores Madeleine Albright's scheme to have an American warplane shot down over Iraq as a pretext for an invasion and he overlooks the bipartisan support for invading Iraq. Twenty-nine Senate Democrats voted for war, including household names such as Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, Joe Biden, Harry Reid, Tom Daschle, and Jay Rockefeller (the latter, a member of the intelligence committee, claimed that Iraq was likely to have a nuclear weapon by 2007). Eighty-one House Democrats voted for war, including minority leader Richard Gephardt.

The French apparently "cooked the books" as well. Their foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin, claimed in February 2003 that "regarding the

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chemical domain, we have evidence of [Iraq's] capacity to produce VX and yperite [mustard gas]; in the biological domain, the evidence suggests the possible possession of significant stocks of anthrax and botulism toxin." Germany's intelligence chief August Hanning estimated in March 2002 that "Iraq will have an atomic bomb in three years." The chief UN weapons inspector, Richard Butler, testified in July 2002 that "it is essential to recognize that the claim made by Saddam's representatives, that Iraq has no WMD, is false." Colin Powell, it should also be noted, was either an accomplice to book cooking or one of history's greatest dupes.

Korb takes exception to the fact that *Rush to Judgment* assigns equal blame to Clinton and Bush for the September 11th attacks. Both administrations were "derelict," as I note, to the extent that they failed to sufficiently educate the American public and fully mobilize the American government to the dangers posed by al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden declared war on the United States in 1996—the Khobar Towers were attacked; two American embassies were bombed and hundreds killed; and the USS *Cole* was attacked. An ineffectual cruise missile strike in the wake of the embassy bombings is apparently enough for Korb to exonerate the Clinton administration for its lethargy. Five years of dereliction coupled with eight months of neglect—both presidents were negligent.

The point of my book is not that George W. Bush was a great or even an effective president, but that in their rush to judgment against President Bush far too many scholars breached their professional obligations by failing to do what all scholars are trained to do, which is to take a breath, bide their time, and offer perspective as the evidence emerges and the passions of the day have cooled. These scholars, primarily historians and law professors (many of whom served in the Obama administration), condemned the Bush presidency as a threat to the Constitution. These same people celebrate John Kennedy (whose administration plotted assassination) and Franklin Roosevelt (whose military tribunal executed an American citizen in the United States, among other actions). They are remarkably silent regarding President Obama's drone attacks on American citizens, his reauthorization of the Patriot Act, his use of signing statements, his use of Guantanamo as a detainee facility, his use of rendition, his use of force in Libya without congressional authorization (a tactic Korb approves), and his record-setting number of prosecutions against leakers.

Scholarship should be different from partisanship. Cool and deliberate reflection on the Bush presidency remains a challenge for far too many scholars, apparently including Lawrence Korb.

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Lawrence Korb responds:

Professor Knott claims that I have fallen victim to the standard anti-Bush narrative that Bush cooked the books to justify his mindless, needless, senseless invasion of Iraq.

But his response, just like in his book, fails to support Cheney's claim in August 2002 that there is "no doubt" that Saddam possesses WMDs and that of Bush that we cannot wait until the "smoking gun becomes a mushroom cloud." Let me give but a few examples.

First, the French and German sources never said that Saddam had nuclear weapons, the real justification for the invasion. Moreover, their claims about chemical and biological weapons do not contend he had them but talk only about the capacity and possible possession.

Second, the German intelligence chief and Senator Rockefeller did not claim that Saddam had a bomb but that he could have had one in three to five years. (I could win the lottery in three to five years.)

Third, while twenty-nine Democrats voted for the war, Knott does not tell us how many read the classified NIE (most, including Hillary Clinton, did not). Nor does he refute the argument of Senator Bob Graham (D-FL) who, after reading the classified NIE, said that it demonstrated that there was no case for war.

Fourth, while he cites Richard Butler's testimony, he fails to note that Butler had left Iraq in 1998 and that the UN weapons inspectors, who went back into Iraq in late 2002, could not find any WMDs.

Fifth, in citing Colin Powell's speech to the UN, Knott fails to note that immediately after his presentation, Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the IAEA, demonstrated convincingly that the aluminum tubes were not for spinning centrifuges (as did our Department of Energy).

Sixth, Bush himself undermines Knott's case because he never said Saddam was an immediate threat and admitted in December 2005 that even though there were no WMDs, the invasion was still justified. As Richard Haas, Powell's director of policy planning, notes, the reason the Bush administration attacked Iraq was not preempting the use of WMDs but to demonstrate to the world that the US was not a pitiful helpless giant.

Bush has been condemned by scholars not because he is a Republican but because, like Democratic president Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, he manipulated the facts to justify an unnecessary and disastrous war to deal with a threat that was neither existential nor immediate.

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