

Support for PBS.org provided by:

What's this?



APRIL 25, 2007: "Buying the War"

BILL MOYERS: FOUR YEARS AGO THIS SPRING THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION TOOK LEAVE OF REALITY AND PLUNGED OUR COUNTRY INTO A WAR SO POORLY PLANNED IT SOON TURNED INTO A DISASTER. THE STORY OF HOW HIGH OFFICIALS MISLED THE COUNTRY HAS BEEN TOLD. BUT THEY COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT ON THEIR OWN; THEY NEEDED A COMPLIANT PRESS, TO PASS ON THEIR PROPAGANDA AS NEWS AND CHEER THEM ON.

SINCE THEN THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE HAVE DIED, AND MANY ARE DYING TO THIS DAY. YET THE STORY OF HOW THE MEDIA BOUGHT WHAT THE WHITE HOUSE WAS SELLING HAS NOT BEEN TOLD IN DEPTH ON TELEVISION. AS THE WAR RAGES INTO ITS FIFTH YEAR, WE LOOK BACK AT THOSE MONTHS LEADING UP TO THE INVASION, WHEN OUR PRESS LARGELY SURRENDERED ITS INDEPENDENCE AND SKEPTICISM TO JOIN WITH OUR GOVERNMENT IN MARCHING TO WAR.

OUR REPORT WAS PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY KATHLEEN HUGHES AND EDITED BY ALISON AMRON.

ANNOUNCER (March 6, 2003): Ladies and Gentlemen: the President of the United States

PRESIDENT BUSH: Good evening, I'm pleased to take your questions tonight.

BILL MOYERS: TWO WEEKS BEFORE HE WILL ORDER AMERICA TO WAR, PRESIDENT BUSH CALLS A PRESS CONFERENCE TO MAKE THE CASE FOR DISARMING SADDAM HUSSEIN.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Iraq is a part of the war on terror. It's a country that trains terrorists; it's a country that could arm terrorists. Saddam Hussein and his weapons are a direct threat to this country.

BILL MOYERS: FOR MONTHS NOW, HIS ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN DETERMINED TO LINK IRAQ TO 9/11.

PRESIDENT BUSH: September the 11th should say to the American people that we're now a battle field.

BILL MOYERS: AT LEAST A DOZEN TIMES DURING THIS PRESS CONFERENCE HE WILL INVOKE 9/11 AND AL QAEDA TO JUSTIFY A PREEMPTIVE ATTACK ON A COUNTRY THAT HAS NOT ATTACKED AMERICA.

REPORTER: Mr. President, if you decide...

BILL MOYERS: BUT THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS CORPS WILL ASK NO HARD QUESTIONS TONIGHT ABOUT THOSE CLAIMS. LISTEN TO WHAT THE PRESIDENT SAYS:

PRESIDENT BUSH: This is a scripted...(laughter) **REPORTER:** Thank you Mr. President--

BILL MOYERS: SCRIPTED. SURE ENOUGH, THE PRESIDENT'S STAFF HAS GIVEN HIM A

LIST OF REPORTERS TO CALL ON.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Let's see here... Elizabeth... Gregory... April...Did you have a question or did I call upon you cold?

APRIL: No, I have a question. (laughter)

PRESIDENT BUSH: Okay. I'm sure you do have a question.

ERIC BOEHLERT: He sort of giggled and laughed. And, the reporters sort of laughed. And, I don't know if it was out of embarrassment for him or embarrassment for them because they still continued to play along after his question was done. They all shot up their hands and pretended they had a chance of being called on.

APRIL: How is your faith guiding you?

PRESIDENT BUSH: My faith sustains me because I pray daily. I pray for guidance.

ERIC BOEHLERT: I think it just crystallized what was wrong with the press coverage during the run up to the war. I think they felt like the war was gonna happen and the best thing for them to do was to get out of the way.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Thank you for your questions.

BILL MOYERS: OUR STORY BEGINS WITH THE HORROR OF 9/11....

CHARLES GIBSON: (ABC NEWS 9/11/01) Oh my God.

DIANE SAWYER: Oh my God. Oh my God.

CHARLES GIBSON: That looks like a second plane.

BILL MOYERS: LIKE EVERYONE ELSE JOURNALISTS WERE STUNNED BY THE DEATH AND DEVASTATION.

REPORTER (ABC NEWS 9/11/01): This is as close as we can get to the base of the World Trade Center. You can see the firemen assembled here. The police officers, FBI agents. And you can see the two towers - a huge explosion now raining debris on all of us. We better get out of the way!

AARON BROWN: (CNN LIVE 9/11/01): And there as you can see, perhaps the second tower, the front tower, the top portion of which is collapsing. Good Lord.

PAT DAWSON (NBC NEWS 9/11/01): If there is a war, it's a war against terrorism that started, rather ongoing right now, it started here at about quarter to nine this morning.

DAN RATHER: There are no words that can describe this.

DAN RATHER: I was deeply moved by 9/11. I don't know of any American who wasn't. I think we all bought into that the world had changed.

BOB SIMON: I think the atmosphere in the United States after September 11th was so overwhelmingly patriotic. And overwhelmingly: "We must do something about this."

PRESIDENT BUSH (9/14/01 at ground zero): And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon.

CROWD CHANTING: USA! USA!

DAN RATHER (on LATE NIGHT WITH DAVID LETTERMAN, 9/17/01): George Bush is the President, he makes the decisions and you know, as just one American wherever he wants me to line up, just tell me where.

DAN RATHER: I didn't mean it in a journalistic sense; I know it may have come across that way. I meant it in a sense as an individual citizen. Mr. President if you need me, if you need me to go to hell and back for my country, I will do it.

DAN RATHER (on LATE NIGHT WITH DAVID LETTERMAN, 9/17/01): But I'll tell you this, if they could go down to ground zero here in lower Manhattan-and you referred to it earlier-and see the following, see those fireman....

DAVID LETTERMAN: OK. I'll tell you what...

DAN RATHER: I can finish it.

DAVID LETTERMAN: No, no. Dan, take care of yourself. We'll be right back here with Dan Rather

BILL MOYERS: What I was wrestling with that night listening to you is; once we let our emotions out as journalists on the air, once we say, "We'll line up with the President," can we ever really say to the country, "The President's out of line"?

DAN RATHER: Yes. Of course you can. Of course you can. No journalist should try to be a robot and say, "They've attacked my country, they've killed thousands of people but I don't feel it." But what you can do and what should have been done in the wake of that is suck it up and say, okay, that's the way I feel. That's the way I feel as a citizen, and I can serve my country best by being the best journalist I can be. That's the way I can be patriotic. By the way, Bill, this is not an excuse. I don't think there is any excuse for, you know, my performance and the performance of the press in general in the roll up to the war. There were exceptions. There were some people, who, I think, did a better job than others. But overall and in the main, there's no question that we didn't do a good job.

BILL MOYERS: AS AMERICANS REACTED TO THE ATROCITIES OF A SNEAK ATTACK, A POWERFUL SURGE OF SOLIDARITY SWEEPED ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

AARON BROWN (CNN Live 9/14/01): One of the things that seems to be binding all Americans these days no matter their backgrounds, in the aftermath of this tragedy, is a renewed sense of patriotism.

BRENT BOZELL: (Fox News Channel, HANNITY AND COLMES 9/28/01) ... To see so many reporters just wearing a little American flag on the lapels, to see Tim Russert on MEET THE PRESS.

SEAN HANNITY: Yeah

BRENT BOZELL: With the red, white and blue ribbons. I think it's a human emotion there.

BILL MOYERS: AND AS THE ADMINISTRATION ORGANIZED TO STRIKE BACK AT THE TERRORISTS, THERE WAS LITTLE TOLERANCE FOR CRITICAL SCRUTINY FROM JOURNALISTS.

WALTER ISAACSON: There was a patriotic fervor and the Administration used it so that if you challenged anything you were made to feel that there was something wrong with that.

BILL MOYERS: Walter Isaacson was then Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of CNN.

WALTER ISAACSON: And there was even almost a patriotism police which, you know, they'd be up there on the internet sort of picking anything a Christiane Amanpour, or somebody else would say as if it were disloyal....

BILL MOYERS: We interviewed a former reporter at CNN who had been there through that period. And this reporter said this quote, "Everybody on staff just sort of knew not to push too hard to do stories critical of the Bush Administration."

WALTER ISAACSON: Especially right after 9/11. Especially when the war in Afghanistan is going on. There was a real sense that you don't get that critical of a government that's leading us in war time. SOLDIER: Move out!

BILL MOYERS: WHEN AMERICAN FORCES WENT AFTER THE TERRORIST BASES IN AFGHANISTAN, NETWORK AND CABLE NEWS REPORTED THE CIVILIAN CASUALTIES. THE PATRIOT POLICE CAME KNOCKING.

WALTER ISAACSON: We'd put it on the air and by nature of a 24-hour TV network, it was replaying over and over again. So, you would get phone calls. You would get advertisers. You would get the Administration.

BILL MOYERS: You said pressure from advertisers?

WALTER ISAACSON: Not direct pressure from advertisers, but big people in corporations were calling up and saying, "You're being anti-American here."

BILL MOYERS: SO ISAACSON SENT HIS STAFF A MEMO, LEAKED TO THE WASHINGTON POST: "IT SEEMS PERVERSE" HE SAID, "TO FOCUS TOO MUCH ON THE CASUALTIES OR HARDSHIP IN AFGHANISTAN."

REPORTER: There's a body up here.

BILL MOYERS: AND HE ORDERED HIS REPORTERS AND ANCHORS TO BALANCE THE IMAGES OF CIVILIAN DEVASTATION WITH REMINDERS OF SEPTEMBER 11TH.

WALTER ISAACSON: I felt if we put into context, we could alleviate the pressure of people saying, "Don't even show what's happening in Afghanistan."

BILL MOYERS: NEWSPAPERS WERE SQUEEZED, TOO. THIS ONE IN FLORIDA TOLD ITS EDITORS, "DO NOT USE PHOTOS ON PAGE 1A SHOWING CIVILIAN CASUALTIES... OUR SISTER PAPER ... HAS DONE SO AND RECEIVED HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF THREATENING E-MAILS ..."

AND THEN THERE WAS FOX NEWS: WHOSE CHIEF EXECUTIVE - THE VETERAN REPUBLICAN OPERATIVE AND MEDIA STRATEGIST ROGER AILES - HAD PRIVATELY URGED THE WHITE HOUSE TO USE THE HARSHTEST MEASURES POSSIBLE AFTER 9/11...

WALTER ISAACSON: ... so we were caught between this patriotic fervor and a competitor who was using that to their advantage; they were pushing the fact that CNN was too liberal that we were sort of vaguely anti-American.

BILL MOYERS: EVEN AS AMERICAN TROOPS WERE STILL CHASING OSAMA BIN LADEN THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS OF AFGHANISTAN, WASHINGTON WAS MOVING TOWARD A WIDER WAR. WITHIN HOURS AFTER THE ATTACKS ON 9/11, DEFENSE SECRETARY RUMSFIELD PUT SADDAM HUSSEIN ON THE HIT LIST. AN AIDE TOOK NOTES.

DAN RATHER: I knew before 9/11 that many of the people who came into the Administration were committed to toppling Saddam Hussein. And doing it with military force if necessary.

BILL MOYERS: DAN RATHER IS TALKING ABOUT PROMINENT WASHINGTON FIGURES IN AND OUTSIDE OF GOVERNMENT... KNOWN AS NEOCONSERVATIVES. THEY HAD LONG WANTED TO TRANSFORM THE MIDDLE EAST, BEGINNING WITH THE REMOVAL OF SADDAM HUSSEIN. THE TERRORIST ATTACKS GAVE THEM THE CHANCE THEY WANTED. AND THE MEDIA GAVE THEM A PLATFORM.

JOHN KING (WAR ROOM WITH WOLF BLITZER, CNN 11/19/01): Richard Perle? Next phase Saddam Hussein?

RICHARD PERLE: Absolutely.

WILLIAM KRISTOL (FOX NEWS 11/24/01): One person close to the debate said to me this week that it's no longer a question of if, it's a question of how we go after Saddam Hussein.

BILL MOYERS: IN THE WEEKS AFTER 9/11 THEY SEEMED TO BE ON EVERY CHANNEL, GUNNING FOR HUSSEIN.

TED KOPPEL (NIGHTLINE 11/28/01): You are probably the hawkiest of the hawks on this. Why?

JAMES WOOLSEY: Well, I don't know that I accept that characterization but it's probably not too far off. I think that the Baghdad regime is a serious danger to world peace.

RICHARD PERLE (ABC THIS WEEK, 11/18/01): Weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Saddam Hussein, plus his known contact with terrorists, including Al Qaeda terrorists, is simply a threat too large to continue to tolerate.

BILL MOYERS: AMONG THEIR LEADING SPOKESMEN WERE RICHARD PERLE AND JAMES WOOLSEY. BOTH SAT ON THE DEFENSE POLICY BOARD ADVISING DONALD RUMSFELD. AND THEY USED THEIR INSIDE STATUS TO ASSURE THE PRESS THAT OVERTHROWING HUSSEIN WOULD BE EASY.

RICHARD PERLE (CNN 11/19/01): We would be seen as liberators in Iraq.

BILL MOYERS: MAJOR NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES GAVE THEM PRIME SPACE TO MAKE THEIR CASE, INCLUDING THE POSSIBILITY THAT 9/11 HAD BEEN "SPONSORED, SUPPORTED AND PERHAPS EVEN ORDERED BY SADDAM HUSSEIN." THE PRESIDENT, THEY SAID, SHOULD TAKE 'PREEMPTIVE ACTION.'

WILLIAM KRISTOL (MEET THE PRESS, NBC, 10/7/01): The biggest mistake we have made - it's our mistake, it's not the mistake of the Arabs - was not finishing off Saddam Hussein in 1991.

BILL MOYERS: NO ONE GOT MORE AIR TIME FROM AN ARM CHAIR THAN BILL KRISTOL, EDITOR OF THE WEEKLY STANDARD AND A MEDIA SAVVY REPUBLICAN STRATEGIST.

IN THE 1990S KRISTOL ORGANIZED A CAMPAIGN FOR INCREASED MILITARY SPENDING AND A MUSCULAR FOREIGN POLICY. IN 1998 HE AND HIS ALLIES WROTE PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON URGING HIM TO REMOVE SADDAM HUSSEIN FROM POWER.

AND NOW, JUST DAYS AFTER 9/11 WITH MANY OF THEIR ALLIES SERVING IN THE ADMINISTRATION, THEY WROTE AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT BUSH CALLING FOR REGIME CHANGE IN BAGDAD. OVER THE COMING MONTHS KRISTOL'S WEEKLY STANDARD KEPT UP THE DRUM BEAT.

FRED BARNES (BELTWAY BOYS, Fox 11/24/01): What are the consequences if the US does not finish off this Saddam Hussein as a second step in the war on terrorism? WILLIAM KRISTOL: It would mean that the President having declared a global war on terrorism didn't follow through, didn't take out the most threatening terrorist state in the world.

BILL MOYERS: THE EDITORIAL PAGE OF THE WALL STREET JOURNAL SIGNED ON. AND SO DID HIGH PROFILE PUNDITS LIKE THE NEW YORK TIMES' WILLIAM SAFIRE.

TIM RUSSERT (MEET THE PRESS, NBC 12/30/01): Safire will you wager Ms. Wright, right now, that Saddam will be out of power by the end of 2002.

WILLIAM SAFIRE: Absolutely. I'll see you here a year from now.

CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER: (FOX NEWS 9/22/01) If you go after Iraq you're gonna lose a lot of allies, but who cares...

BILL MOYERS: CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER AND OTHER TOP COLUMNISTS AT THE WASHINGTON POST ALSO SAW THE HAND OF SADDAM HUSSEIN IN THE TERRORIST ATTACKS...

JIM HOAGLAND IMPLICATED HUSSEIN WITHIN HOURS AFTER THE SUICIDE BOMBERS STRUCK ON 9/11....

...AND THE POST'S GEORGE WILL FIRED AWAY ON THE TALK SHOWS.

GEORGE WILL (ABC 10/28/01): The administration knows he's vowed, Hussein has vowed revenge, he has anthrax, he loves biological weapons, he has terrorist training

camps, including 747's to practice on...

BILL MOYERS: IT WAS PROVING DIFFICULT TO DISTINGUISH THE OPINION OF THE PUNDITS FROM THE POLICIES OF THE ADMINISTRATION...BUT AS THE HULLABALOO OVER SADDAM GREW IN WASHINGTON, BOB SIMON OF CBS NEWS 60 MINUTES WAS DUMBFOUNDED. HE IS BASED IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

BOB SIMON: From overseas we had a clearer view. I mean we knew things or suspected things that perhaps the Washington press corps could not suspect. For example, the absurdity of putting up a connection between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda.

BILL MOYERS: Absurdity. The Washington press corps cannot question an absurdity?

BOB SIMON: Well maybe the Washington press corps based inside the belt wasn't as aware as those of us who are based in the Middle East and who spend a lot of time in Iraq. I mean when the Washington press corps travels, it travels with the president or with the Secretary of State.

BILL MOYERS: In a bubble.

BOB SIMON: Yeah in a bubble. Where as we who've spent weeks just walking the streets of Baghdad and in other situations in Baghdad just were scratching our heads. In ways that perhaps that the Washington press corps could not.

BILL MOYERS: SIMON WAS UNDER NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT SADDAM HUSSEIN. DURING THE FIRST GULF WAR HE AND HIS CAMERA CREW WERE ARRESTED BY IRAQI FORCES, AND BRUTALIZED FOR 40 DAYS BEFORE BEING RELEASED.

BOB SIMON (3/3/1991): We're going home, which is the, the place you go to after a war, if you've been as lucky as we've been.

BILL MOYERS: IT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE TO SIMON THAT THE DICTATOR WOULD TRUST ISLAMIC TERRORISTS.

BOB SIMON: Saddam as most tyrants, was a total control freak. He wanted total control of his regime. Total control of the country. And to introduce a wild card like Al Qaeda in any sense was just something he would not do. So I just didn't believe it for an instant.

JOHN WALCOTT: And some of the things that were said, many of the things that were said about Iraq didn't make sense. And that really prompts you to ask, "Wait a minute. Is this true? Does everyone agree that this is true? Does anyone think this is not true?"

JOHN WALCOTT: This is what we're going to do, this is plan A now...

BILL MOYERS: JOHN WALCOTT WASN'T BUYING THE OFFICIAL LINE, EITHER. THE BUREAU CHIEF OF KNIGHT RIDDER NEWS SERVICE, HE AND HIS REPORTERS COVERED WASHINGTON FOR 32 NEWSPAPERS SPREAD ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

JOHN WALCOTT: Our readers aren't here in Washington. They aren't up in New York. They aren't the people who send other people's kids to war. They're the people who get sent to war and we felt an obligation to them, to explain why that might happen. We were determined to scrutinize the Administration's case for war as closely as we possibly could. And that's what we set out to do.

BILL MOYERS: SO AS HE LISTENED TO PUNDITS AND OFFICIALS TALKING ABOUT SADDAM HUSSEIN'S SUPPOSED CONNECTIONS TO 9/11 WALCOTT WAS SKEPTICAL.

JOHN WALCOTT: It was not clear to us why anyone was asking questions about Iraq in the wake of an attack that had Al Qaeda written all over it.

BILL MOYERS: HE ASSIGNED HIS TWO TOP REPORTERS TO INVESTIGATE THE CLAIMS. BETWEEN THEM, WARREN STROBEL AND JONATHAN LANDAY, HAD MORE THAN 40 YEARS EXPERIENCE REPORTING ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND NATIONAL SECURITY. THEY HAD LOTS OF SOURCES TO CALL ON.

WARREN STROBEL: We were basically, I think, hearing two different messages from-- there's a message, the public message the Administration was giving out about Iraq - it's WMD, the fact there was an immediate threat, grave threat, gathering threat - but the was so different from what we were hearing from people on the inside, people we had known in many cases for years and trusted.

BILL MOYERS: THEY WENT ABOUT THEIR REPORTING THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY - WITH SHOE LEATHER - TRACKING DOWN AND MEETING WITH SOURCES DEEP INSIDE THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY.

WARREN STROBEL: When you're talking to the working grunts, you know, uniform military officers, intelligence professionals, professional diplomats, those people are more likely than not - not always, of course, but more likely than not - to tell you some version of the truth, and to be knowledgeable about what they're talking about when it comes to terrorism or the Middle East, things like that.

BILL MOYERS: STROBEL LEARNED THAT WITHIN TWO WEEKS AFTER 9/11, SENIOR INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS WERE GROWING CONCERNED THAT THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION WAS STRETCHING "LITTLE BITS AND PIECES OF INFORMATION...." TO CONNECT SADDAM HUSSEIN TO AL QAEDA "WITH NO HARD EVIDENCE. "

WARREN STROBEL: There was a lot of skepticism among our editors because what we were writing was so at odds with what most of the rest of the Washington press corps was reporting and some of our papers frankly, just didn't run the stories. They had access to the NEW YORK TIMES wire and the WASHINGTON POST wire and they chose those stories instead.

BILL MOYERS: WITHIN THE MONTH STROBEL FOUND OUT THE PENTAGON HAD ALREADY DISPATCHED JAMES WOOLSEY TO EUROPE LOOKING FOR ANY SHRED OF EVIDENCE TO INCRIMINATE HUSSEIN....

WARREN STROBEL: He did this even knowing that the CIA had already analyzed this carefully and found no such links. So, the more I thought about that, the more it just didn't seem to make sense.

BILL MOYERS: KNIGHT RIDDER'S EARLY SKEPTICISM WAS A RARITY INSIDE THE BELTWAY BUBBLE.....

JOHN WALCOTT: A decision to go to war, even against an eighth-rate power such as Iraq, is the most serious decision that a government can ever make. And it deserves the most serious kind of scrutiny that we in the media can give it. Is this really necessary? Is it necessary to send our young men and women to go kill somebody else's young men and women?

BILL MOYERS: THAT MEANT ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SOURCES OF INFORMATION THE PRESS AND GOVERNMENT WERE RELYING ON, INCLUDING, NOTABLY, THIS MAN, AHMED CHALABI. AFTER THE FIRST GULF WAR AMERICANS HAD INSTALLED CCHALABI AS THE LEADER OF IRAQI EXILES SEEKING REGIME CHANGE IN BAGHDAD. NOW HE WAS ALL OVER WASHINGTON, AS THE ADMINISTRATION'S AND THE NEO-CONSERVATIVES' STAR WITNESS AGAINST SADDAM.

AHMED CHALABI: Hello... Yes, very well.

JOHN WALCOTT: Chalabi's motives were always perfectly clear in this and understandable. He was an Iraqi. He didn't want his country run by a thug and a murderer, a mass murderer, and a crook. And everything he said had to be looked at in that light, and scrutinized in that light. And why anyone would give him a free pass, or anyone else a free pass for that matter, on a matter as important as going to war, is beyond me.

JAMES BAMFORD: Chalabi was a creature of American propaganda to a large degree. It was an American company, the Rendon Group, that - working secretly with the CIA - basically created his organization, the Iraqi National Congress. And put Chalabi in charge basically.

BILL MOYERS: JAMES BAMFORD IS AN INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST WHOSE SPECIALTY IS THE INTELLIGENCE WORLD.

JAMES BAMFORD: From the very beginning Chalabi was paid a lot of money from the US taxpayers. The CIA paid him originally about 350,000 dollars a month, to Chalabi and his organization. The CIA finally caught on in the mid-90s that Chalabi was a conman basically. And, they dropped him.

BILL MOYERS: CHALABI'S HANDLERS IN WASHINGTON WERE NOT DETERRED BY THAT STAIN ON HIS CREDIBILITY. HE CHARMED CONGRESS OUT OF MILLIONS MORE DOLLARS FOR HIS CAUSE, AND HAD THE PRESS EATING OUT OF HIS HAND.

JAMES BAMFORD: He made a lot of friends in the media. And, he convinced a lot of people that he was legitimate even though the CIA had dropped him.

BILL MOYERS: WHEN CHALABI MADE SELECTED IRAQI DEFACTORS AVAILABLE TO THE PRESS IT WAS A WIN-WIN GAME: THE DEFACTORS GOT A PLATFORM. JOURNALISTS GOT BIG SCOOPS.

MICHAEL MASSING: There was a big effort, in fact, to find people who seemed to have credible evidence about what was going on inside Iraq. Because, in fact, if you could find somebody who was credible talking about a nuclear program in Iraq or chemical weapons, that would be a big story.

BILL MOYERS: AND IT WORKED. THE NEW YORKER. USA TODAY. THE WASHINGTON POST. THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS. THE NEW YORK TIMES. AND ON PBS JUST TWO MONTHS AFTER 9/11, FRONTLINE AND THE NEW YORK TIMES TEAMED UP FOR A DOCUMENTARY ON THE DEFACTORS.

FRONTLINE NARRATOR (FRONTLINE, PBS, 11/8/01): Captain Sabah Khodada is a former army officer who defected from Iraq. He made a crude drawing of what he says is a terrorist training camp on the outskirts of Baghdad.

BILL MOYERS: THERE WERE CAVEATS...

FRONTLINE NARRATOR: And a further caution: these defectors have been brought to FRONTLINE's attention by one group of Iraqi dissidents, the INC, The Iraqi National Congress.

BILL MOYERS: BUT THE CAVEATS COULDN'T COMPETE WITH THE SPECTACULAR TALES TOLD BY DEFACTORS. BEFORE THE INVASION THE NEW YORK TIME'S JUDITH MILLER WOULD WRITE SIX PROMINENT STORIES BASED ON THEIR TESTIMONY. JUDITH MILLER: Ahmed Chalabi is a controversial leader of the Iraqi opposition...

BILL MOYERS: AND STILL ON THE WEB, A REPORT ABOUT THE DEFACTORS, NARRATED BY JUDITH MILLER AND PRODUCED BY NEW YORK TIMES TELEVISION FOR THE NEWSHOUR ON PBS...

JAMES BAMFORD: Well, Judy Miller had been an old friend of Chalabi. Did a lot of the stories on Chalabi. Was very favorable to Chalabi.

BILL MOYERS: JAMES BAMFORD FOUND OUT THAT IN 2001 CHALABI HAD ARRANGED FOR MILLER TO MEET IN THAILAND WITH A DEFECTOR FROM IRAQ NAMED AL-HAIDERI.

JAMES BAMFORD: So, Al-Haideri was in Bangkok. Judy Miller flew there to interview him.

JAMES BAMFORD: The NEW YORK TIMES ran a front page story basically confirming everything the administration had been saying about Iraq.

BILL MOYERS: AL-HAIDERI SAID HE WAS A KURD FROM NORTHERN IRAQ. HE TOLD MILLER THE IRAQIS HAD HIDDEN CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS.... SOME, MILLER REPORTED, RIGHT UNDER SADDAM'S PRESIDENTIAL SITES. THE STORY SPREAD FAR AND WIDE.

MICHAEL MASSING: THE NEW YORK TIMES remains immensely influential. People in the TV world read it every morning, and it's amazing how often you'll see a story go from the front page of the day's paper in the morning to the evening news cast at night. People in government, of course, read it, think tanks, and so on.

JONATHAN LANDAY: There were some red flags that the NEW YORK TIMES story threw out immediately, which caught our eye, immediately. The first was the idea that a Kurd - the enemy of Saddam - had been allowed into his most top secret military facilities. I don't think so. That was, for me, the biggest red flag. And there were others, like the idea that Saddam Hussein would put a biological weapons facility under his residence. I mean, would you put a biological weapons lab under your living room? I don't think so.

WARREN STROBEL: The first rule of being an intelligence agent, or a journalist, and they're really not that different, is you're skeptical of defectors, because they have a reason to exaggerate. They want to increase their value to you. They probably want something from you. Doesn't mean they're lying, but you should be -- journalists are supposed to be skeptical, right? And I'm afraid the NEW YORK TIMES reporter in that case and a lot of other reporters were just not skeptical of what these defectors were saying. Nor was the Administration...

FOX NEWS ANCHOR (8/1/02): A former top Iraqi nuclear scientist tells congress Iraq could build three nuclear bombs by 2005.

CNN NEWS ANCHOR (12/21/01): Well, now another defector. A senior Iraqi intelligence official tells VANITY FAIR in an exclusive interview that Saddam Hussein has trained an elite fighting force in sabotage, urban warfare, hijacking and murder. David Rose wrote the story; he joins us now from London.

BILL MOYERS: IN VANITY FAIR'S DAVID ROSE, DEFACTORS FOUND ANOTHER EAGER BEAVER FOR THEIR CLAIMS. THE GLOSSY MAGAZINE, A FAVORITE OF MEDIA ELITES, GAVE HIM FOUR BIG SPREADS TO TELL DEFECTOR STORIES. THE TALK SHOWS LAPPED IT UP.

DAVID ROSE: (MSNBC 12/21/01) What the defector Al-Qurairy, a former brigadier general in the Iraqi intelligence service, told me is that these guys, there are twelve hundred in all and they've been trained to hijack trains, buses, ships and so forth...

JONATHAN LANDAY: As you track their stories, they become ever more fantastic, and they're the same people who are telling these stories, until you get to the most fantastic tales of all, which appeared in VANITY FAIR Magazine.

DAVID ROSE: The last training exercise was to blow up a full size mock up of a US destroyer in a lake in central Iraq.

JONATHAN LANDAY: Or, jumping into pits of fouled water and having to kill a dog with your bare teeth. I mean, and this was coming from people, who are appearing in all of these stories, and sometimes their rank would change.

LESLIE STAHL (60 MINUTES, CBS 3/3/02): Musawi told us that he has verified that this man was an officer in Iraq's ruthless intelligence service the Mukhabarat .

JONATHAN LANDAY: And, you're saying, "Wait a minute. There's something wrong here, because in this story he was a major, but in this story the guy's a colonel. And, in this story this was his function, but now he says in this story he was doing something else.

LESLIE STAHL: The defector is telling Musawi that in order to evade the UN inspectors Saddam Hussein put his biological weapons laboratories in trucks that the defector told us he personally bought from Renault.

LESLIE STAHL: Refrigerator trucks?

DEFECTOR: Yeah, yeah.

LESLIE STAHL: And how many?

DEFECTOR: Seven.

BILL MOYERS: LESLIE STAHL AND CBS RETRACTED THEIR STORY A YEAR AFTER THE INVASION WHEN NEARLY ALL THE EVIDENCE PRESENTED BY DEFECTORS PROVED TO BE FALSE.

VANITY FAIR'S ROSE LATER SAID HIGH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAD CONFIRMED HIS STORIES. BUT THESE WERE THE VERY OFFICIALS WHO HAD BET ON CHALABI AS THEIR FAVORITE MAN O'WAR. TO THE KNIGHT RIDDER TEAM IT ALL SMELLED OF A CON GAME.

JOHN WALCOTT: What he did was reasonably clever but fairly obvious, which is he gave the same stuff to some reporters that, for one reason or another, he felt would simply report it. And then he gave the same stuff to people in the Vice President's office and in the Secretary of Defense's office. And so, if the reporter called the Department of Defense or the Vice President's office to check, they would've said, "Oh, I think that's... you can go with that. We have that, too." So, you create the appearance, or Chalabi created the appearance, that there were two sources, and that the information had been independently confirmed, when, in fact, there was only one source. And it hadn't been confirmed by anybody.

JONATHAN LANDAY: And let's not forget how close these people were to this Administration, which raises the question, was there coordination? I can't tell you that there was, but it sure looked like it.

BILL MOYERS: THE ADMINISTRATION WAS NOW STEPPING UP EFFORTS TO NAIL DOWN A TANGIBLE LINK BETWEEN SADDAM AND 9/11. JOURNALISTS WERE TIPPED TO A MEETING THAT SUPPOSEDLY TOOK PLACE IN PRAGUE BETWEEN IRAQI AGENTS AND THE 9/11 RINGLEADER MOHAMMED ATTA. PUNDITS HAD A FIELD DAY.

GEORGE WILL: (THIS WEEK, ABC 10/28/01) He has contacts outside in Sudan and Afghanistan with terrorists. He met... They did indeed have a contact between Atta and an Iraqi diplomat.

BILL MOYERS: IN THE NEW YORK TIMES WILLIAM SAFIRE CALLED THE PRAGUE MEETING AN "UNDISPUTED FACT." HE WOULD WRITE ABOUT THE ATTA CONNECTION TEN TIMES IN HIS OP-ED COLUMN.

JUST WEEKS AFTER 9/11, SAFIRE HAD PREDICTED A "QUICK WAR" ... "WITH IRAQIS CHEERING THEIR LIBERATORS AND LEADING 'THE ARAB WORLD TOWARD DEMOCRACY.'"

BETWEEN MARCH 2002 AND THE INVASION A YEAR LATER SAFIRE WOULD WRITE A TOTAL OF 27 OPINION PIECES FANNING THE SPARKS OF WAR.

AND ON TIM RUSSERT'S MEET THE PRESS SAFIRE KEPT IT UP.

TIM RUSSERT (MEET THE PRESS, NBC7/28/02): Bill Safire, the difference between sufficient provocation and a preemptive strike?

WILLIAM SAFIRE: I don't think we need any more provocation than we've had by 10 years of breaking his agreement at the cease fire. He has been building weapons of mass destruction.

BILL MOYERS: IN OCTOBER HIS OWN PAPER RAN A FRONT PAGE STORY BY JAMES RISEN QUESTIONING THE EVIDENCE. THEN CAME THIS REPORT FROM BOB SIMON:

BOB SIMON (60 MINUTES 12/8/02): The Administration has been trying to make the link to implicate Saddam Hussein in the attacks of September 11th and they've been pointing to an alleged meeting between Mohammed Atta, the lead hijacker, and an Iraqi intelligence officer in the Czech capital of Prague.

BOB SIMON: If we had combed Prague and found out that there was absolutely no evidence for a meeting between Mohammad Atta and the Iraqi intelligence figure. If we knew that, you had to figure that the Administration knew it. And yet they were selling the connection between Al Qaeda and Saddam.

BOB SIMON (60 MINUTES): Bob Baer spent 16 years as an undercover agent for the CIA in the Middle East.

BILL MOYERS: How did you get to Bob Baer, the former CIA official who was such an important source for you?

BOB SIMON: We. (laughter) We called him.

BILL MOYERS: How did you find him? Did you know him?

BOB SIMON: I knew some friends of his. It wasn't a problem getting his phone number. I mean any reporter could get his phone number.

BILL MOYERS: Who was he? And why was he important?

BOB SIMON: He was one of the guys who was sent to Prague to find that link. He was sent to find the link between Al Qaeda and Saddam

BILL MOYERS: He would have been a hero if he'd found the link.

BOB SIMON: Oh my heavens yes. I mean this was what everyone was looking for.

BILL MOYERS: BUT THERE WAS LITTLE APPETITE INSIDE THE NETWORKS FOR TAKING ON A POPULAR, WAR-TIME PRESIDENT. SO SIMON DECIDED TO WRAP HIS STORY INSIDE A MORE BENIGN ACCOUNT OF HOW THE WHITE HOUSE WAS MARKETING THE WAR.

BOB SIMON (60 MINUTES 12/8/02): It's not the first time a president has mounted a sales campaign to sell a war.

BOB SIMON: And, I think we all felt from the beginning that to deal with a subject as explosive as this, we should keep it in a way almost light. If that doesn't seem ridiculous.

BILL MOYERS: GOING TO WAR, ALMOST LIGHT.

BOB SIMON: Not to present it as a frontal attack on the Administration's claims. Which would have been not only premature, but we didn't have the ammunition to do it at the time. We did not know then that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

We only knew that the connection the Administration was making between Saddam and Al Qaeda was very tenuous at best and that the argument it was making over the aluminum tubes seemed highly dubious. We knew these things. And therefore we could present the Madison Avenue campaign on these things, which was a sort of softer, less confrontational way of doing it.

BILL MOYERS: Did you go to any of the brass at CBS, even at 60 MINUTES, and say, "Look, we gotta dig deeper. We gotta connect the dots. This isn't right."

BOB SIMON: No in all honesty, with a thousand mea culpas, I've done a few stories in Iraq. But, nope I don't think we followed up on this.

ARI FLEISHER (9/18/02): Iraq is in possession of weapons of mass destruction contrary to their promises...

BILL MOYERS: WHAT THE WHITE HOUSE WAS NOW MARKETING AS FACT WOULD GO VIRTUALLY UNCHALLENGED.

DONALD RUMSFELD (Department of Defense Press Briefing, 9/26/02): We know they have weapons of mass destruction, we know they have active programs.

BILL MOYERS: AS THE WASHINGTON POST'S VETERAN REPORTER WALTER PINCUS WOULD LATER REPORT, THE PROPAGANDA MACHINE WAS RUN BY THE PRESIDENT'S INNER CIRCLE - OFFICIALS WHO CALLED THEMSELVES THE WHITE HOUSE IRAQ GROUP, OR WHIG.

BILL MOYERS: You wrote that WHIG included Karl Rove, the chief of staff, Andrew Card, Mary Matalin, Condi Rice, Steven Hadley, Lewis Libby and they were in charge of selling the war.

WALTER PINCUS: Selling the war. Yeah.

PRESIDENT BUSH (9/11/02): Good evening. A long year has passed since enemies attacked our country.

BILL MOYERS: THEIR CHIEF SALESMAN HAD THE BEST PROPS AT HIS DISPOSAL.

PRESIDENT BUSH (9/11/02): ...and we will not allow any terrorist or tyrant to threaten civilization with weapons of mass murder.

WALTER PINCUS: They created that link.

BILL MOYERS: The marketing group?

WALTER PINCUS: The marketing group. And the link was a two-fold link. One, he had weapons of mass destruction. And two, he supported terrorists. And they repeated it everyday. Anybody who watches television these days knows you sell a product, not just by saying it once, by saying it over and over again with new spokesmen two, three times a day and it sinks into the public.

BILL MOYERS: But is there anything unusual about an Administration marketing its policy?

WALTER PINCUS: It's, I think each Administration has learned from the other, and with this group is just the cleverest I've ever seen, and took it to new heights.

NORM SOLOMAN The TV, radio, print, other media outlets are as crucial to going to war as the bombs and the bullets and the planes. They're part of the arsenal, the propaganda weaponry, if you will. And that's totally understood across the board, at the Pentagon, the White House, the State Department.

COLIN POWELL (9/26/02): A proven menace like Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction.

PRESIDENT BUSH (Discussion with Congressional Leaders, 9/26/02): The Iraqi regime possesses biological and chemical weapons.

DONALD RUMSFELD (DOD Press Briefing 9/26/02): We do have solid evidence of the presence in Iraq of Al Qaeda members.

PRESIDENT BUSH: The regime has long standing and continuing ties to terrorist organizations.

BOB SIMON: Just repeat it and repeat it and repeat it. Repeat Al Qaeda, Iraq. Al Qaeda, Iraq. Al Qaeda, Iraq. Just keep it going. Keep that drum beat going. And it was effective because long after it was well established that there was no link between Al Qaeda and the government of Iraq and the Saddam regime, the polls showed that an overwhelming majority of Americans believed that Al Qaeda... that Iraq was responsible for September 11th.

JONATHAN LANDAY: Most people actually believed and accepted that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. I have to admit that until we really started burrowing into the story, that I believed it, too.

Is this something that they could go along with...

BILL MOYERS: LANDAY FOUND PLENTY OF EVIDENCE TO CONTRADICT THE OFFICIAL PROPAGANDA, AND THE FACTS QUICKLY CHANGED HIS MIND.

JONATHAN LANDAY: I simply spent basically a month familiarizing myself, with what Saddam's weapons of mass destruction programs had been and what had happened to them. And, there was tons of material available on that from the UN weapons inspectors. I mean, they got into virtually everything, and their reports were online.

If you go down here the Iraq Nuclear Verification Office, they put up regular, here you go, key findings, what they found out about Iraq's nuclear weapons programs. It's all here in the open for anybody who wants to read it.

BILL MOYERS: INTERNATIONAL INSPECTORS HAD GONE INTO IRAQ AFTER THE FIRST GULF WAR TO SEARCH FOR AND TO DESTROY SADDAM HUSSEIN'S WEAPONS SYSTEMS.

LATE IN 1998, THE INSPECTIONS CAME TO AN ABRUPT HALT AFTER THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT REFUSED TO COOPERATE. BUT, THAT HARDLY MEANT NO ONE WAS WATCHING.

JONATHAN LANDAY: During the period of time between when the inspectors left Iraq, which was in 1998 - the end of 1998 and then, the United States had covered the place with spy satellites, and U2 over flights, and, you know, other intelligence services had their eyeballs on this place.

DICK CHENEY: (Speech to the VFW 8/26/02) There is a great danger that...

BILL MOYERS: THAT'S WHY LANDAY WAS SURPRISED BY WHAT VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY TOLD A GROUP OF VETERANS IN LATE AUGUST 2002.

DICK CHENEY: (Speech to the VFW 8/26/02) Many of us are convinced that Saddam Hussein will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon.

JONATHAN LANDAY: I looked at that and I said, "What is he talking about?" Because, to develop a nuclear weapon you need specific infrastructure and in particular the way the Iraqi's were trying to produce a nuclear weapon was through enrichment of uranium.

Now, you need tens of thousands of machines called centrifuges to produce highly enriched uranium for a nuclear weapon. You've gotta house those in a fairly big place, and you've gotta provide a huge amount of power to this facility. Could he really have done it with all of these eyes on his country?

DICK CHENEY: (Speech to the VFW 8/26/02) But we now know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons.

JONATHAN LANDAY: So, when Cheney said that, I got on the phone to people, and one person said to me - somebody who watched proliferation as their job - said, "The Vice President is lying."

BILL MOYERS: ON THE BASIS OF HIS INTELLIGENCE SOURCES LANDAY WROTE THERE WAS LITTLE EVIDENCE TO BACK UP THE VICE PRESIDENT'S CLAIMS.

BILL MOYERS: BUT THE STORY LANDAY WROTE DIDN'T RUN IN NEW YORK OR WASHINGTON - KNIGHT RIDDER, REMEMBER, HAS NO OUTLET IN EITHER CITY. SO IT COULDN'T COMPETE WITH A BLOCKBUSTER THAT APPEARED TWO DAYS LATER ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE NATION'S PAPER OF RECORD, WITH A FAMILIAR BY-LINE.... QUOTING ANONYMOUS ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS, THE TIMES REPORTED THAT SADDAM HUSSEIN HAD LAUNCHED A WORLDWIDE HUNT FOR MATERIALS TO MAKE AN ATOMIC BOMB USING SPECIALLY DESIGNED ALUMINUM TUBES.

AND THERE ON MEET THE PRESS THAT SAME MORNING WAS VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY.

DICK CHENEY (MEET THE PRESS NBC 9/8/02): ... Tubes. There's a story in the NEW YORK TIMES this morning, this is-- and I want to attribute this to the TIMES. I don't want to talk about obviously specific intelligence sources, but--

JONATHAN LANDAY: Now, ordinarily information like the aluminum tubes wouldn't appear. It was top secret intelligence, and the Vice President and the National Security Advisor would not be allowed to talk about this on the Sunday talk shows. But, it appeared that morning in the NEW YORK TIMES and, therefore, they were able to talk about it.

DICK CHENEY (MEET THE PRESS NBC 9/8/02): It's now public that, in fact, he has been seeking to acquire and we have been able to intercept to prevent him from acquiring through this particular channel the kinds of tubes that are necessary to build a centrifuge and the centrifuge is required to take low-grade uranium and enhance it into highly-enriched uranium which is what you have to have in order to build a bomb."

BILL MOYERS: Did you see that performance?

BOB SIMON: I did.

BILL MOYERS: What did you think?

BOB SIMON: I thought it was remarkable.

BILL MOYERS: Why?

BOB SIMON: Remarkable. You leak a story, and then you quote the story. I mean, that's a remarkable thing to do.

BILL MOYERS: AND THAT'S ONLY PART OF IT. USING THE IDENTICAL LANGUAGE OF THE ANONYMOUS SOURCES QUOTED IN THE TIMES, TOP OFFICIALS WERE NOW INVOKING THE ULTIMATE SPECTRE OF NUCLEAR WAR - THE SMOKING GUN AS MUSHROOM CLOUD.

CONDOLEEZA RICE (CNN 9/8/02): There will always be some uncertainty about how quickly he can acquire a nuclear weapon. But we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.

ERIC BOEHLERT: Those sorts of stories when they appear on the front page of the so called liberal NEW YORK TIMES, it absolutely comes with a stamp of approval. I mean if the NEW YORK TIMES thinks Saddam is on the precipice of mushroom clouds, then, there's really no debate.

BOB SCHEIFFER: (FACE THE NATION, CBS 9/8/02) We read in the NEW YORK TIMES today a story that says that Saddam Hussein is closer to acquiring nuclear weapons... Does he have nuclear weapons, is there a smoking gun here?

DONALD RUMSFELD: Smoking gun is an interesting phrase.

COLIN POWELL: Then as we saw in reporting just this morning...

TIM RUSSERT: What specifically has he obtained that you believe will enhance his nuclear development program.

BILL MOYERS: Was it just a coincidence in your mind that Cheney came on your show and others went on the other Sunday shows, the very morning that that story appeared?

TIM RUSSERT: I don't know. The NEW YORK TIMES is a better judge of that than I am.

BILL MOYERS: No one tipped you that it was going to happen?

TIM RUSSERT: No, no. I mean-

BILL MOYERS: The Cheney office didn't leak to you that there's gonna be a big story?

TIM RUSSERT: No. No. I mean, I don't have the-- This is, you know-- on MEET THE PRESS, people come on and there are no ground rules. We can ask any question we want. I did not know about the aluminum tubes story until I read it in the NEW YORK TIMES.

BILL MOYERS: Critics point to September eight, 2002 and to your show in particular, as the classic case of how the press and the government became inseparable. Someone in the Administration plants a dramatic story in the NEW YORK TIMES And then the Vice President comes on your show and points to the NEW YORK TIMES. It's a circular, self-confirming leak.

TIM RUSSERT: I don't know how Judith Miller and Michael Gordon reported that story, who their sources were. It was a front-page story of the NEW YORK TIMES. When Secretary Rice and Vice President Cheney and others came up that Sunday morning on all the Sunday shows, they did exactly that.

My concern was, is that there were concerns expressed by other government officials. And to this day, I wish my phone had rung, or I had access to them.

BILL MOYERS: BOB SIMON DIDN'T WAIT FOR THE PHONE TO RING.

BILL MOYERS: You said a moment ago when we started talking to people who knew about aluminum tubes. What people-who were you talking to?

BOB SIMON: We were talking to people - to scientists - to scientists and to researchers, and to people who had been investigating Iraq from the start.

BILL MOYERS: Would these people have been available to any reporter who called or were they exclusive sources for 60 MINUTES?

BOB SIMON: No, I think that many of them would have been available to any reporter who called.

BILL MOYERS: And you just picked up the phone?

BOB SIMON: Just picked up the phone.

BILL MOYERS: Talked to them?

BOB SIMON: Talked to them and then went down with the cameras.

BILL MOYERS: FEW JOURNALISTS FOLLOWED SUIT. AND THROUGHOUT THE FALL OF 2002 HIGH OFFICIALS WERE REPEATING APOCALYPTIC WARNINGS WITH VIRTUALLY NO DEMAND FROM THE ESTABLISHMENT PRESS FOR EVIDENCE.

PRESIDENT BUSH (Cincinnati Speech, 10/7/02): Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof-the smoking gun -that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.

BILL MOYERS: Could members of the press have known at that point that the Administration was exaggerating?

WALTER PINCUS: Individuals did it. There were specialists who were raising questions. And one of our reporters, Joby Warrick wrote a very tough piece about not just the disagreement, but how doubtful it was that these tubes were for nuclear weapons. It was a one-day piece in our paper. And it wasn't picked up.

BILL MOYERS: BUT WARRICK'S STORY APPEARED ON PAGE 18, NOT PAGE 1.

HOWARD KURTZ: The front page of THE WASHINGTON POST or any newspaper is a billboard of what the editors are telling you, these are the most important stories of the day. And stories that don't run on the front page, the reader sort of gets that, well, these are of secondary importance.

BILL MOYERS: HOWARD KURTZ IS THE WASHINGTON POST MEDIA CRITIC.

HOWARD KURTZ: I went back and did the math. From August 2002 until the war was launched in March of 2003 there were about 140 front page pieces in THE WASHINGTON POST making the Administration's case for war.

It was, "The President said yesterday." "The Vice President said yesterday." The Pentagon said yesterday." Well, that's part of our job. Those people want to speak. We have to provide them a platform. I don't have anything wrong with that. But there was only a handful - a handful - of stories that ran on the front page. Some more that ran inside the pages of the paper that made the opposite case. Or, if not making the opposite case, raised questions.

Was this really true? What was the level of proof? Did the CIA really know? What were those aluminum tubes? Those stories, and some reporters worked hard on them, had a harder time getting on the front page. Why because they weren't definitive.

BILL MOYERS: BUT WHO DEFINES DEFINITIVE? REPORTER WALTER PINCUS' SOURCES DEEP INSIDE THE GOVERNMENT QUESTIONED HOW THE INTELLIGENCE WAS BEING USED. BUT HIS STORIES WERE MOSTLY RELEGATED TO THE BACK PAGES. ACROSS THE MEDIA WORLD, THE BELLICOSE BUT UNCONFIRMED CLAIMS MADE THE BIG HEADLINES. THE CAUTIONARY STORIES DID NOT.

WALTER PINCUS: And I believe honestly, people don't have a fear of irritating the White House, certainly not at the WASHINGTON POST. But, they do worry about sort of getting

out ahead of something.

BILL MOYERS: Isn't that supposed to be scoop journalism?

WALTER PINCUS: Well, but you could be wrong.

NORM SOLOMEN: It's a truism that individual journalists, and in fact the top rank media outlets they work for, really want to be ahead of the curve but not out on a limb. And, if you took seriously the warning flags that were profuse before the invasion of Iraq, that the Administration's story was a bunch of nonsense about WMDs, you would not just be ahead of the curve a little, you would have been way out on a limb.

WALTER ISAACSON: I don't think there was enough skepticism because I think most of us kind of believed that Saddam Hussein was building biological, chemical, and perhaps even, nuclear weapons.

BILL MOYERS: Isn't it the role of the fourth estate, though, to be critical of group think?

WALTER ISAACSON: It definitely is, and I think we in the press, we're not critical enough. We didn't question our sources enough.

DAN RATHER: We weren't smart enough, we were alert enough, we didn't dig enough, and, we shouldn't have been fooled in this way.

BILL MOYERS: EVEN OPRAH GOT IN ON THE ACT, FEATURING IN OCTOBER 2002 NEW YORK TIMES REPORTER JUDITH MILLER.

JUDITH MILLER: (OPRAH 10/9/02) The US intelligence community believes that Saddam Hussein has deadly stocks of anthrax, of botulinum toxin, which is one of the most virulent poisons known to man.

BILL MOYERS: LIBERAL HAWK KENNETH POLLAK.

KENNETH POLLAK: And what we know for a fact from a number of defectors who've come out of Iraq over the years is that Saddam Hussein is absolutely determined to acquire nuclear weapons and is building them as fast as he can.

BILL MOYERS: AND THE RIGHT HAND MAN TO AHMED CHALABI.

OPRAH: And so do the Iraqi people want the American people to liberate them?

QUANBAR: Absolutely. In 1991 the Iraqi people were....

WOMAN: I hope it doesn't offend you...

BILL MOYERS: WHEN ONE GUEST DARED TO EXPRESS DOUBT OPRAH WOULD HAVE NONE OF IT

WOMAN: I just don't know what to believe with the media and..

OPRAH: Oh, we're not trying to propoganda-- show you propoganda. ..We're just showing you what is.

WOMAN: I understand that, I understand that.

OPRAH: OK, but Ok. You have a right to your opinion.

BILL MOYERS: CONTRARY OPINIONS WEREN'T VERY POPULAR IN WASHINGTON EITHER, AS AMBITIOUS DEMOCRATS EMBRACED THE NOW CONVENTIONAL BUT UNCONFIRMED WISDOM.

JOHN KERRY (Senate Floor 10/09/02): In the wake of September 11, who among us can say with any certainty to anybody that the weapons might not be used against our troops or against allies in the region.

HILLARY CLINTON (Senate Floor 10/10/02): It is clear, however, that if left unchecked, Saddam Hussein will continue to increase his capacity to wage biological and chemical warfare, and will keep trying to develop nuclear weapons.

BILL MOYERS: WHEN DEMOCRATS DID GO AGAINST THE GRAIN, THEY WERE DENOUNCED BY THE PARTISAN PRESS AND LARGELY IGNORED BY THE MAINSTREAM PRESS.

ROBERT BYRD (Senate Floor 10/10/02): And before we put this great nation on the track to war I want to see more evidence, hard evidence, not more Presidential rhetoric...

SENATOR TED KENNEDY (9/27/02): I have heard no persuasive evidence that Saddam is on the threshold of acquiring the nuclear weapons he has sought for more than 20 years. And the Administration has offered no persuasive evidence that Saddam would transfer chemical or biological weapons of mass destruction to Al Qaeda.

ERIC BOEHLERT: Ted Kennedy gave a passionate speech in 2002 raising all sorts of questions about the war. And what the aftermath would be.

SENATOR TED KENNEDY (9/27/02): War with Iraq before a genuine attempt at inspection and disarmament, without genuine international support, could swell the ranks of Al Qaeda with sympathizers and trigger an escalation in terrorist acts.

ERIC BOEHLERT: WASHINGTON POST gave that speech one sentence. 36 words. I calculated in 2002, the WASHINGTON POST probably published 1,000 articles and columns about Iraq. Probably one million words, in excess of one million words. And one of the most famous democrats in the country raised questions about the war, the WASHINGTON POST set aside 36 words.

BILL MOYERS: IT HAD NOW BECOME UNFASHIONABLE TO DISSENT FROM THE OFFICIAL LINE - UNFASHIONABLE AND RISKY.

BILL O'REILLY: (Fox 2/26/03) Anyone who hurts this country in a time like this. Well let's just say you will be spotlighted.

NORM SOLOMAN If you're a journalist or a politician, and you're swimming upstream, so to speak, you're gonna encounter a lot of piranha, and they are voracious. There's a notion that this is the person that we go after this week.

ERIC BOEHLERT: Fox news and talk radio and the conservative bloggers, I mean, they were bangin' those drums very loud. And, everyone in the press could hear it. Not only was it just liberal bias, it was an anti-American bias, an unpatriotic bias and that these journalists were really not part of America.

DAN RATHER: And every journalist knew it. They had and they have a very effective slam machine. The way it works is you either report the news the way we want it reported or we're going to hang a sign around your neck.

BILL O'REILLY (2/27/03): I will call those who publicly criticize their country in a time of military crisis, which this is, bad Americans.

MICHAEL MASSING: There's a level of vitriol, and vindictiveness that is very scary to listen to. And, you think the millions of people listening to them. The media have become sort of like the whipping boy, because they know that the press can provide information that runs counter to what the government is claiming, to what the Bush Administration is claiming.

ANNOUNCER: (MSNBC 12/16/02) Now, Donahue.

BILL MOYERS: ON HIS NEW MSNBC TALK SHOW PHIL DONAHUE, DISCOVERED JUST WHAT COULD HAPPEN WHEN YOU STEPPED OUT OF LINE.

PHIL DONAHUE (MSNBC, 1/13/03): Tonight: Anti-war protestors taking on the government, is there a place for them in this post 9/11 world or are they just downright unpatriotic.

PHIL DONOHUE: And I just felt, you know, what would be wrong with having one show a night, you know, say, "Hold it. Wait a minute. Can we afford this? Do we have enough troops? And what about General Shinseki? And where are all-- you know, what is Guantanamo?" I mean, "What's wrong with this?"

I thought people who didn't like my message would watch me. Because no one else was doing it. That's why, I couldn't get over the unanimity of opinion on cable. The drum was beating. Everybody wanted to bomb somebody. And I'm thinking, "Wait a minute." So here I go, I mean fool that I am, I rushed in.

PHIL DONOHUE: Scott Ritter is here and so is Ambassador...

BILL MOYERS: You had Scott Ritter, former weapons inspector. Who was saying that if we invade, it will be a historic blunder.

PHIL DONOHUE: You didn't have him alone. He had to be there with someone else who supported the war. In other words, you couldn't have Scott Ritter alone. You could have Richard Perle alone.

BILL MOYERS: You could have the conservative.

PHIL DONOHUE: You could have the supporters of the President alone. And they would say why this war is important. You couldn't have a dissenter alone. Our producers were instructed to feature two conservatives for every liberal.

BILL MOYERS: You're kidding.

PHIL DONOHUE: No this is absolutely true.

BILL MOYERS: Instructed from above?

PHIL DONOHUE: Yes. I was counted as two liberals.

BILL MOYERS: They're under-selling you. (laughter)

PHIL DONOHUE: I had to have two... there's just a terrible fear. And I think that's the right word.

BILL MOYERS: Eric Sorenson, who was the president of MSNBC, told the NEW YORK TIMES quote: "Any misstep and you can get into trouble with these guys and have the patriotism police hunt you down."

PHIL DONOHUE: He's the management guy. So his phone would ring. Nobody's going to call Donahue and tell him to shut up and support the war. Nobody's that foolish. It's a lot more subtle than that.

MICHAEL MASSING: I think that what happened in the months leading up to the war is that there was a sort of acceptable mainstream opinion that got set. And I think that people who were seen as outside, that mainstream were viewed as sort of fringe, and they were marginalized.

MICHAEL MASSING: You saw that in the demonstrators.

DEMONSTRATORS: (chanting) One, two, three, four, we don't want no Iraq war

MICHAEL MASSING: How people demonstrating did not get much play.

DEMONSTRATORS: (chanting) Five, six, seven, eight, stop the bombing, stop the hate.

DEMONSTRATORS: (drum beat) We don't want no Iraq war; throw Dick Cheney through the door.

ERIC BOEHLERT: So in October of 2002, 100,000 people in Washington, one of the largest, you know, peace demonstrations in years in the United States. And the press just,

you know, the WASHINGTON POST put a photo on its Metro page.

BILL MOYERS: PHOTOGRAPHS RAN WITH AN ARTICLE BUT THE PAPER'S OMBUDSMAN LATER CRITICIZED THE POST FOR NOT GIVING THE STORY MORE PROMINENCE.

MEANWHILE, IN THE SIX MONTHS LEADING UP TO THE INVASION THE WASHINGTON POST WOULD EDITORIALIZE IN FAVOR OF THE WAR AT LEAST 27 TIMES.

WHAT GOT EVEN LESS INK THAN THE PROTESTORS, WAS THE RELEASE OF SOMETHING CALLED THE NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE. BEFORE VOTING TO GIVE THE PRESIDENT WAR POWERS, CONGRESS ASKED THE ADMINISTRATION TO DETAIL ALL THE TOP S

ECRET EVIDENCE IT WAS USING TO JUSTIFY AN INVASION. THE PRESS GOT A DECLASSIFIED VERSION. MOST OF THE MEDIA GAVE IT A CURSORY READING, BUT JONATHAN LANDAY EXAMINED THE TEXT CLOSELY.

JONATHAN LANDAY: I got my copy, and I opened it up and I came to the part that talked about the aluminum tubes. Now, it said that the majority of analysts believed that those tubes were for the nuclear weapons program. It turns out, though, that that majority of intelligence analysts had no background in nuclear weapons.

BILL MOYERS: KNIGHT RIDDER WAS ON TOP OF THE MOST IMPORTANT STORY OF THE RUN-UP TO THE INVASION - THE MANIPULATION OF INTELLIGENCE TO MAKE THE CASE FOR WAR. ON OCTOBER 4TH LANDAY WROTE THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE PENTAGON ARE PRESSURING INTELLIGENCE ANALYSTS TO SUPPRESS INFORMATION THAT MIGHT UNDERCUT SUPPORT FOR THE WAR

JONATHAN LANDAY: So, here was yet another building block in this chain of building blocks that we had collected over these months about what they were saying to the public, and what the intelligence was actually telling them. And, there were differences. Some of them were nuanced. Some of them were quite large. But, it became quite apparent that they were grabbing just about anything they could to make the case for going to war in Iraq.

BILL MOYERS: OVER A DOZEN SOURCES TOLD KNIGHT RIDDER THAT THE PENTAGON WAS PRESSURING ANALYSTS TO "COOK THE INTELLIGENCE BOOKS." DEEP THROATS WERE TALKING.... BUT FEW IN THE PRESS WERE LISTENING.

JONATHAN LANDAY: There are people within the U.S. government who object when they perceive that their government isn't being straight with the people. And when they perceive that an administration is veering away from the principles on which this country was built, they become more ready to talk about things that perhaps they ordinarily shouldn't.

HOUSE SPEAKER (Congressional Vote 10/10/02): Aye's are 296. The nays are 133. The Joint Resolution is passed.

BILL MOYERS: IGNORING THE REPORTS OF FLAWED INTELLIGENCE, CONGRESS GAVE THE PRESIDENT THE GO-AHEAD FOR USE OF FORCE. KNIGHT RIDDER'S TEAM JUST KEPT ON DIGGING. BY THE END OF THE MONTH, THEIR REPORTING HAD COME FULL CIRCLE. SOURCES CONFIRMED THAT THE PENTAGON WAS PREPARING FOR WAR BASED ON INFORMATION FROM AHMED CHALABI AND THE IRAQI NATIONAL CONGRESS, DESPITE OBJECTIONS FROM EXPERTS INSIDE THE CIA.

WALTER PINCUS: The administration can withstand the Knight Ridder critique because it wasn't reverberating inside Washington. And therefore people weren't picking it up.

JOHN WALCOTT: We were under the radar most of the time at Knight Ridder. We were not a company that, I think, Karl Rove and others cared deeply about, even though in terms of readers, we're much bigger than the NEW YORK TIMES and THE WASHINGTON POST. We're less influential. There's no way around that.

WARREN STROBEL: But there was a period when we were sittin' out there and I had a lot of late night gut checks where I was just like, "Are we totally off on some loop here?"

JONATHAN LANDAY: Yeah.

WARREN STROBEL: "Are we wrong? Are we gonna be embarrassed?"

JONATHAN LANDAY: Everyday we would look at each other and say - literally one of us would find something out - and I'd look at him and say, "What's going on here?"

ERIC BOEHLERT: But I think it's telling that they didn't really operate by that beltway game the way the networks, the cable channels, NEWSWEEK, TIME, NEW YORK TIMES, WASHINGTON POST. They seem to sort of operate outside that bubble. And look at what the benefits were when they operated outside that bubble. They actually got the story right.

What's important is it's proof positive that that story was there. And it could have been gotten. And some people did get it. But the vast majority chose to ignore or not even try.

WARREN STROBEL: How many times did I get invited on the talk show? How many times did you get invited on a talk show?

JONATHAN LANDAY: I think maybe on-

WARREN STROBEL: Yeah, not the big talk shows.

JONATHAN LANDAY: Actually-

WARREN STROBEL: Not the big Sunday shows-

JONATHAN LANDAY: You know what? I'll tell you who invited me on a talk show. C-SPAN.

HOWARD KURTZ: Television, especially cable television, has a sort of CROSSFIRE mentality. You put on the pro-Bush cast and the anti-Bush cast and they go at it. You put on the let's go into Iraq and let's not go into Iraq and they go at it.

Well, that's what they do. They're pundits. But that's not a debate that's particularly well-suited to shedding light on whether or not the Bush administration's case for war rested on some kind of factual basis. That's not what pundits do.

PETER BEINART: (CNN 4/29/02) I mean, I really think the reason the United States has a bad reputation in the Arab world is that we have been on the side of dictatorships. We've been on the side of very corrupt, very backward governments...

BILL MOYERS: PETER BEINART BECAME EDITOR OF THE NEW REPUBLIC AT AGE 28. DURING THE RUN-UP TO THE INVASION HE WAS ONE OF THE HOTTEST YOUNG PUNDITS IN TOWN, A LIBERAL HAWK, ACCUSING OPPONENTS OF THE WAR OF BEING "INTELLECTUALLY INCOHERENT AND ECHOING THE OFFICIAL LINE THAT HUSSEIN WOULD SOON POSSESS A NUCLEAR WEAPON.

PETER BEINART: (CNN 4/29/02) We need a little bit of logistical support, but we don't need the moral support of anyone, because we're on the side of the angels in this.

BILL MOYERS: Had you been to Iraq?

PETER BEINART: No.

BILL MOYERS: So what made you present yourself, if you did, as a Middle East expert?

PETER BEINART: I don't think that I presented myself as a Middle East expert per se. I was a political journalist. I was a columnist writing about all kinds of things. Someone in my position is not a Middle East expert in the way that somebody who studies this at a university is, or even at a think tank. But I consumed that stuff. I was relying on people who did that kind of reporting and people who had been in the government who had access to classified material for their assessment.

BILL MOYERS: And you would talk to them and they would, in effect, brief you, the background on what they knew?

PETER BEINART: Sometimes, but--

BILL MOYERS: I'm trying to help the audience understand. How does-- you described yourself as a political-- a reporter of political opinion, or a journalist political opinion.

PETER BEINART: Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: How do you get the information that enables you to reach the conclusion that you draw as a political journalist?

PETER BEINART: Well, I was doing mostly, for a large part it was reading, reading the statements and the things that people said. I was not a beat reporter. I was editing a magazine and writing a column. So I was not doing a lot of primary reporting. But what I was doing was a lot of reading of other people's reporting and reading of what officials were saying.

BILL MOYERS: If we journalists get it wrong on the facts what is there to be right about?

PETER BEINART: Well I think that's a good point, but the argument in the fall of 2002 was not mostly about the facts it was about a whole series of ideas about what would happen if we invaded.

BILL MOYERS: What I'm trying to get at is how does the public sort all of this out from out there beyond the beltway. Far more people saw you, see Bill Kristol on television, than will ever read the Associated Press reports or the Knight Ridder reporters. Isn't there an imbalance then on what the public is going to perceive about a critical issue of life and death like, like war.

PETER BEINART: I think it's important for people, look, would it be better if television were not the primary medium through which people got their news? Yes. That's why I'm not, I do television, but I'm primarily in the business of writing and editing because I believe ultimately that words can convey more, richer information than television. Wouldn't we be a better society if people got most of their news from print rather than television? Yes, I think we would.

WALTER ISAACSON: One of the great pressures we're facing in journalism now is it's a lot cheaper to hire thumb suckers and pundits and have talk shows on the air than actually have bureaus and reporters. And in the age of the internet when everybody's a pundit, we're still gonna need somebody there to go talk to the colonels, to be on the ground in Baghdad and stuff and that's very expensive.

DAN RATHER: Reporting is hard. The substitute for reporting far too often has become let's just ring up an expert. Let's see. These are experts on international armaments. And I'll just go down the list here and check Richard Perle.

RICHARD PERLE (HARDBALL MSNBC 2/25/03): Once it begins to look as though he is relinquishing his grip on power I think he's toast.

WILLIAM KRISTOL (INSIDE POLITICS, CNN 2/14/03): The choice is disarming him by war or letting him have his weapons of mass destruction.

DAN RATHER: This is journalism on the cheap if it's journalism at all. Just pick up the phone, call an expert, bring an expert into the studio. Easy. Not time consuming. Doesn't take resources. And if you're lucky and good with your list of people, you get an articulate person who will kind of spark up the broadcast.

WALTER ISAACSON: The people at Knight Ridder were calling the colonels and the lieutenants and the people in the CIA and finding out, ya know, that intelligence is not very good. We should've all been doing that.

BILL MOYERS: How do you explain that the further you get away from official Washington, the closer you get to reality?

WALTER ISAACSON: That's one of the hazards in this business is when you rely on top-level sources too much, you can lose out on getting the real information.

REPORTER (CNN "Line in the Sand: Tough Talk on Iraq" 1/19/03): The President's top national security advisors fanned out on the talk shows with a coordinated message.

DONALD RUMSFELD (1/19/03): The test here is not whether they can find something. The test is whether or not Iraq is going to cooperate.

CONDOLEEZA RICE (1/19/03): This is about the disarmament of Iraq, not about weapons inspectors hunting and pecking all over the country.

COLIN POWELL (1/19/03): Time is running out and we just can't keep hunting and pecking and looking and...

JOHN WALCOTT: The people at the top generally are political rather than professional. And their first loyalty is to a political party or to a person, not to a bureaucracy, not to a job. And so, what you get from them is spin.

TIM RUSSERT: Look, I'm a blue-collar guy from Buffalo. I know who my sources are. I work 'em very hard. It's the mid-level people that tell you the truth.

BILL MOYERS: They're the ones who know the story?

TIM RUSSERT: Well, they're working on the problem. And they understand the detail much better than a lotta the so-called policy makers and political officials.

BILL MOYERS: But they don't get on the Sunday talk shows.

TIM RUSSERT: No. I mean, they don't want to be, trust me. I mean, they can lose their jobs, and they know it. But they can provide information which can help in me challenging or trying to draw out sometimes their bosses and other public officials.

BILL MOYERS: What do you make of the fact that of the 414 Iraq stories broadcast on NBC, ABC and CBS nightly news, from September 2002 until February 2003, almost all the stories could be traced back to sources from the White House, the Pentagon, and the State Department?

TIM RUSSERT: It's important that you have an opposition party. That's our system of government.

BILL MOYERS: So, it's not news unless there's somebody...

TIM RUSSERT: No, no, no. I didn't say that. But it's important to have an opposition party, your opposing views.

WALTER PINCUS: More and more, in the media, become, I think, common carriers of Administration statements, and critics of the Administration. And we've sort of given up being independent on our own.

ANNOUNCER (3/6/1981): Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States.

WALTER PINCUS: We used to do at the Post something called truth squading. President would make a speech. We used to do it with Ronald Reagan the first five or six months because he would make so many factual errors, particularly in his press conference.

PRESIDENT REAGAN (3/6/1981): From 10 thousand to 60 thousand dollars a year...

WALTER PINCUS: And after two or three weeks of it, the public at large, would say, "Why don't you leave the man alone? He's trying to be honest. He makes mistakes. So what?" and we stopped doing it.

BILL MOYERS: You stopped being the truth squad.

WALTER PINCUS: We stopped truth-squading every sort of press conference, or truth squading. And we left it then to the Democrats. In other words, it's up to the Democrats to catch people, not us.

BILL MOYERS: So if the democrats challenged a statement from the President, you could quote both sides.

WALTER PINCUS: We then quote both sides. Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: Now, that's called objectivity by many standards isn't it?

WALTER PINCUS: Well, that's objectivity if you think there are only two sides. And if you're not interested in the facts. And the facts are separate from, you know, what one side says about the other.

BILL MOYERS: BY LATE NOVEMBER 2002 THE PRESS HAD YET ANOTHER CHANCE TO GET THE FACTS RIGHT. FACING INTENSE INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE, THE WHITE HOUSE AGREED TO HOLD OFF MILITARY ACTION UNTIL SADDAM HUSSEIN PERMITTED A TEAM OF UN INSPECTORS TO RETURN TO IRAQ AND TAKE A CLOSER LOOK. THE FIRST INSPECTIONS BEGAN ON NOVEMBER 27TH CHARLES HANLEY, A PRIZE-WINNING REPORTER FOR THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, WITH MORE THAN 30 YEARS EXPERIENCE REPORTING ON WEAPONS ISSUES, WENT ALONG TO COVER THEIR WORK.

CHARLES HANLEY: What we did was go out everyday with the inspectors. These guys would roar out on these motorcades at very high speed and roar through towns and do sudden U-turns and drive over land and do all of these things to confuse the Iraqis about where they were going so that there wouldn't be a call ahead telling them to put away all the bad stuff.

The inspectors then would issue a daily report. And as it turned out, of course, inspection after inspection, it turned out to be clean. They had nothing to report, no violations to report.

BILL MOYERS: IN JANUARY OF '03 HANLEY WROTE ABOUT THE SUSPICIOUS SITES THAT THE US AND BRITISH GOVERNMENTS HAD EARLIER IDENTIFIED AS MAJOR CONCERNS. "NO SMOKING GUNS IN...ALMOST 400 INSPECTIONS," HE REPORTED. IT OUGHT TO HAVE CAST SERIOUS DOUBT ON THE WHITE HOUSE'S ENTIRE EVALUATION OF THE IRAQI THREAT. BUT REPORTING LIKE THIS WAS OVERSHADOWED BY THE DRUMBEAT FROM WASHINGTON WHICH IS WHY, HANLEY SAYS, SOMETIMES HIS EDITORS BALKED WHEN HE WROTE THAT THE WHITE HOUSE LACKED FIRM EVIDENCE ON WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION.

CHARLES HANLEY: And that would be stricken from my copy because it would strike some editors as tendentious. As sort of an attack or some sort of allegation rather than a fact. You know and we don't want our reporters alleging things. We, you know, we just report the facts. Well it was a fact. It was a very important fact that seemed to be lost on an awful lot of journalists unfortunately.

BILL MOYERS: SIX WEEKS BEFORE THE INVASION, WITH THE FACTS STILL IN SHORT SUPPLY, THE AMERICAN SECRETARY OF STATE WENT BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS.

COLIN POWELL (UN Security Council 2/5/03): I cannot tell you everything that we know. But what I can share with you, when combined with what all of us have learned over the years, is deeply troubling.

CHARLES HANLEY: One major problem was that Secretary Powell barely acknowledged that there were inspections going on. It got to ridiculous points such as his complaining about the fact that they'd put a roof over this open air shed where they were testing missiles.

COLIN POWELL (Security Council 2/5/03): This photograph was taken in April of 2002. Since then, the test stand has been finished and a roof has been put over it so it will be harder for satellites to see what's going on underneath the test stand.

CHARLES HANLEY: What he neglected to mention was that the inspectors were underneath, watching what was going on.

COLIN POWELL (Security Council 2/5/03): A single drop of VX on the skin will kill in minutes Four tons.

CHARLES HANLEY: he didn't point out that most of that had already been destroyed.

And, on point after point he failed to point out that these facilities about which he was raising such alarm were under repeated inspections good, expert people with very good equipment, and who were leaving behind cameras and other monitoring equipment to keep us a continuing eye on it.

COLIN POWELL (Security Council 2/5/03): Leaving Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction for a few more months or years is not an option, not in a post-September 11th world.

ERIC BOEHLERT: The holes in his presentation became immediate within days if not hours.

COLIN POWELL: But what I want to bring to your attention today is the potentially much more sinister nexus between Iraq and the Al Qaeda terrorist network, a nexus that combines classic terrorist organizations and modern methods of murder.

ERIC BOEHLERT: One of the first big embarrassments was Powell had talked about this British intelligence report.

COLIN POWELL: I would call my colleagues attention to the fine paper that United Kingdom distributed yesterday, which describes in exquisite detail Iraqi deception activities.

BILL MOYERS: SUPPOSEDLY THAT 'EXQUISITE DETAIL' FROM BRITISH INTELLIGENCE CAME FROM A TOP SECRET DOSSIER.

ERIC BOEHLERT: Literally within a day or two it was proven in the British press that that had simply been downloaded off the Internet. And was plagiarized. And it actually contains the typos that were in the original.

BRITISH REPORTER: (2/7/03): The British government dossier is supposed to be about Iraqi deception and concealment. It says it draws upon a number of sources including intelligence material. Well, actually what it largely draws on is a thesis written by a Californian post graduate student...

ERIC BOEHLERT: That was just the first of many embarrassments that were to come. But within days the British press was going crazy over this revelation. **BRITISH REPORTER:** As for the student himself, he's accused the government of plagiarism.

BRITISH REPORTER: If the government is reduced to trawling academic journals then how good is the rest of its case for war against Iraq?

BILL MOYERS: Few prominent American broadcasters would ask such pointed questions:

FOX NEWS: The Secretary of State Colin Powell has made the case against Iraq.

TOM BROKAW (NBC "Making the Case" 2/5/03): Secretary of State Colin Powell has given a lot of important speeches in his lifetime to a lot of large audiences but no speech was more important than the one he gave today.

PETER JENNINGS (ABC 2/5/03): In the United Nation Security Council this morning, the secretary of state Colin Powell took almost an hour and a half to make the Bush Administration's case against Saddam Hussein.

CBS EVENING NEWS (2/5/03): Making the case for war, Secretary Powell shows the world what he calls "Undeniable Proof."

DAN RATHER: Colin Powell was trusted. Is trusted, I'd put it-in a sense. He, unlike many of the people who made the decisions to go to war, Colin Powell has seen war. He knows what a green jungle hell Vietnam was. He knows what the battlefield looks like. And when Colin Powell says to you, "I, Colin Powell, am putting my personal stamp on this information. It's my name, my face, and I'm putting it out there," that did make a difference.

BILL MOYERS: And you were impressed.

DAN RATHER: I was impressed. And who wouldn't be?

NORM SOLOMAN And you look at the response from - forget about the right-wing media - from the so-called liberal press the next morning. You pick up the WASHINGTON POST, on the op-ed page, there's Jim Hoagland saying, obviously from what Powell said, there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. You go a few inches away to Richard Cohen, a vowed liberal, he says, obviously there are weapons of mass destruction. I mean it's a fair paraphrase to say, these pundits and many others were asserting, if you don't think there are WMDs in Iraq, you are an idiot.

BILL MOYERS: ACROSS THE COUNTRY EDITORIAL WRITERS BOUGHT WHAT POWELL WAS SELLING. "A MASTERFUL LEGAL SUMMARY." "A STRONG, CREDIBLE AND PERSUASIVE CASE." "A POWERFUL CASE." "AN IRONCLAD CASE...SUCCINCT AND DAMNING EVIDENCE." "A DETAILED AND CONVINCING ARGUMENT." "AN OVERWHELMING CASE." "A COMPELLING CASE." "A PERSUASIVE, DETAILED ACCUMULATION OF INFORMATION."

NORM SOLOMAN These were supposed to be the most discerning, sophisticated journalists in the country writing this stuff, and they were totally bamboozled.

MICHAEL MASSING: And, sure enough, in the newspapers, if you look very hard inside in the next few days in the coverage, you could find really serious questions that were raised about this. But, they were very much pushed aside.

BILL MOYERS: This gets us right to the heart of the debate that's going on now in our craft. We lean heavily in reporting on what they say.

DAN RATHER: That's right.

BILL MOYERS: We want no wider war. I'm not a crook. Mushroom cloud. Weapons of mass destruction. We really give heavy weight to what public officials say.

DAN RATHER: Well, that's true. And we need to address that. In the end, it was, look, the President himself says these things are so. He stands before the Congress with the question of war and peace hanging in the balance and says these things. And there was a feeling, not just with myself, given all that, who am I to say; you know what, I think it's all a Machiavellian scheme to take us into Iraq.

ALAN COLMES (HANNITY AND COLMES, FOX NEWS 2/25/03): Big news today in the cable world Ellen, Phil Donahue, cancelled, by that other network.

BILL MOYERS: Twenty two days before the invasion, your show was canceled.

PHIL DONOHUE: It should be said that we did fairly well in the ratings. We did not burn the town down. Nobody on MSNBC did. But we were certainly as good as anybody else on the network. And often we led the network.

BILL MOYERS: IN DUMPING DONAHUE, NBC CITED RATINGS. BUT A BLOGGER GOT HIS HANDS ON AN INTERNAL MEMO AND THE PRESS PICKED IT UP.

BILL MOYERS: Now that memo said, "Donohue presents a difficult public face for NBC in a time of war. At the same time our competitors are waving the flag at every opportunity." Did you know about that memo at the time?

PHIL DONOHUE: No. No. I didn't know about that till I read about it in The NEW YORK TIMES.

BILL MOYERS: What did you think? What does that say to you? That dissent is unpatriotic?

PHIL DONOHUE: Well, not only unpatriotic, but it's not good for business.

ANNOUNCER (MSNBC): Tonight, the case for war!

ANNOUNCER: Showdown Iraq with Wolf Blitzer.

NORM SOLOMAN I think these executives were terrified of being called soft on terrorism. They absolutely knew that the winds were blowing at hurricane force politically and socially in the United States. And rather than stand up for journalism, they just blew with the wind. And Dan Rather and others who say, yeah, you know. I was carried away back then. Well, sure. That's when it matters. When it matters most is when you can make a difference as a journalist.

DAN RATHER: Fear is in every newsroom in the country. And fear of what? Well, it's the fear it's a combination of: if you don't go along to get along, you're going to get the reputation of being a troublemaker. There's also the fear that, you know, particularly in networks, they've become huge, international conglomerates. They have big needs, legislative needs, repertory needs in Washington. Nobody has to send you a memo to tell you that that's the case.

You know. And that puts a seed in your mind; of well, if you stick your neck out, if you take the risk of going against the grain with your reporting, is anybody going to back you up?

CHARLES HANLEY: The media just continued on this path of reporting, "Well, the Bush administration alleges that there are WMD," and never really stopped and said "It doesn't look like there are. There's no evidence." That should have been the second sentence in any story about the allegations of WMD. The second sentence should have been, "But they did not present any evidence to back this up."

JOHN WALCOTT: You know, we're sending young men and women, and nowadays not so young men and women, to risk their lives. And everyone wants to be behind them. And everyone should be behind them. The question for us in journalism is, are we really behind them when we fail to do our jobs? Is that really the kinda support that they deserve? Or are we really, in the long run, serving them better by asking these hard questions about what we've asked them to do?

ANNOUNCER ("Target Iraq Today," NBC 3/22/03): Good Morning. Shock and Awe.

ANNOUNCER (NIGHTLY NEWS, NBC 3/20/03): Operation Iraqi freedom reports of secret surrender talks as US bombs hit Baghdad.

ANNOUNCER (CBS 3/20/03): This CBS news special report is part of our continuing coverage of America at War.

BILL MOYERS: FOUR YEARS AFTER SHOCK AND AWE, THE PRESS HAS YET TO COME TO TERMS WITH ITS ROLE IN ENABLING THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION TO GO TO WAR ON FALSE PRETENSES. PETER BEINERT IS ALMOST ALONE IN ADMITTING HE WAS MISTAKEN.

PETER BEINERT: Where I think I was tragically wrong was not to see in February, March 2003 after we got the inspectors back in on the ground and we began to learn much more about what had been going on in Iraq than we had known in 2002 when we had no one on the ground that that assumption was being proven wrong.

BILL MOYERS: You say tragically wrong.

PETER BEINART: Because I think the war has been a tragic disaster. I mean, the Americans killed, the Iraqis killed. It's true, life under Saddam was hell. But can one really say that life for Iraqis is better today?

BILL MOYERS: WE WANTED TO TALK TO SOME OTHERS IN THE MEDIA ABOUT THEIR ROLE IN THE RUN UP TO WAR.... JUDITH MILLER, WHO LEFT THE TIMES AFTER BECOMING EMBROILED IN A WHITE HOUSE LEAK SCANDAL, DECLINED OUR REQUEST ON LEGAL GROUNDS.

THE TIMES' LIBERAL HAWK THOMAS FRIEDMAN ALSO SAID NO. SO DID BILL SAFIRE, WHO HAD PREDICTED IRAQ WOULD NOW BE LEADING THE ARAB WORLD TO DEMOCRACY. PRESIDENT BUSH RECENTLY AWARDED HIM THE MEDAL OF FREEDOM.

THE WASHINGTON POST'S CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER ALSO TURNED US DOWN. SO DID ROGER AILES THE MAN IN CHARGE OF FOX NEWS.. HE DECLINED BECAUSE, AN ASSISTANT TOLD US, HE'S WRITING A BOOK ON HOW FOX HAS CHANGED THE FACE OF AMERICAN BROADCASTING AND DOESN'T WANT TO SCOOP HIMSELF.

WILLIAM KRISTOL LED THE MARCH TO BAGHDAD BEHIND A BATTERY OF WASHINGTON MICROPHONES. HE HAS NOT RESPONDED TO ANY OF OUR REQUESTS FOR AN INTERVIEW, BUT HE STILL SHOWS UP ON TV AS AN EXPERT, MOST OFTEN ON FOX NEWS.

WILLIAM KRISTOL (Fox 1/10/07): And he's got to begin to show progress in three, four, five months, once the US troops get in.

NORM SOLOMAN Being a pro-war pundit means never having to say you're sorry.

ERIC BOEHLERT: I mean these were people who were laying out the blueprint for the war about how it was gonna unfold. And, it turns out, couldn't have been more wrong every which way.

WILLIAM SAFIRE: You have a president...

ERIC BOEHLERT: And it's astonishing to see them still on TV invited on as experts in the region.

BILL MOYERS: IT'S TRUE, SO MANY OF THE ADVOCATES AND APOLOGISTS FOR THE WAR ARE STILL FLOURISHING IN THE MEDIA...

BILL KRISTOL AND PETER BEINART, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE NOW REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS TO TIME MAGAZINE, WHICH HAS BEEN LAYING OFF DOZENS OF REPORTERS.

BILL MOYERS: And remember this brilliant line?

PRESIDENT BUSH: We cannot wait for the final proof: the smoking gun that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.

BILL MOYERS: THE MAN WHO CAME UP WITH IT WAS MICHAEL GERSON. PRESIDENT BUSH'S TOP SPEECHWRITER. HE HAS LEFT THE WHITE HOUSE AND HAS BEEN HIRED BY THE WASHINGTON POST AS A COLUMNIST.

THE AMERICAN NUMBER OF TROOPS KILLED IN IRAQ NOW EXCEEDS THE NUMBER OF VICTIMS ON 9/11. WE HAVE BEEN FIGHTING THERE LONGER THAN IT TOOK US TO DEFEAT THE NAZIS IN WORLD WAR II. THE COST OF THE WAR ARE RECKONED AT ONE TRILLION DOLLARS AND COUNTING. THE NUMBER OF IRAQIS KILLED - OVER 35,000 LAST YEAR ALONE - IS HARD TO PIN DOWN. THE COUNTRY IS IN CHAOS...

© 2008 Public Affairs Television. All Rights Reserved.