

Weapons of Mass Destruction and the U.S. War in Iraq

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by *Asahi Shimbun*

Although a U.S. fact-finding mission sent to Iraq concluded in October 2004 that the country possessed no weapons of mass destruction, why did the United States continue to insist that such weapons existed?

An independent nonpartisan commission established by U.S. President George W. Bush to examine that issue reported last Thursday, after a year-long probe, that the country's intelligence agencies did a terrible job. In fact, they passed on unfounded data to the top levels of the U.S. government.

Whether or not many nations agreed with the idea of invading Iraq, they believed the United States had based its momentous decision to go to war on reliable, credible information. It is simply astounding to hear that the country's intelligence agencies failed so completely in their duty.

The allies who followed the U.S. lead and sent their troops to Iraq must be shocked at the report's conclusions.

There is now serious question about U.S. intelligence capabilities, and the resulting analyses and judgments that were made based on that wrong information.

Now, the international community faces difficult decisions on how to deal with allegations of nuclear development in North

Korea and Iran, but can we trust the intelligence data? The latest report creates great anxiety in Japan and other allies that depend on data from the United States government.

The commission's nearly 700-page report lists numerous outrageous blunders. In addition, it criticizes the Central Intelligence Agency for collecting too little information or data that was meaningless and irrelevant.

Before invading Iraq, Bush received daily intelligence assessments at the White House. However, the recent findings concluded that the reports lacked calm judgment and were disastrously one-sided. Questions also have arisen as to whether government pressure on the CIA resulted in biased assessments. The report, however, didn't even touch that issue, saying it lay beyond its authority.

Nevertheless, as long as the Bush government accepted bad information and made the ultimate decision to go to war, it is responsible and must be held accountable.

To our amazement, Bush praised the report. He stayed on the sidelines and said that the central conclusion was one that he shared, agreeing that the U.S. intelligence agencies needed fundamental reforms. Bush talked as if it was not his responsibility that the decision to go to war was made.

Since the war began about two years ago, about 20,000 Iraqis and more than 1,600 coalition soldiers, mainly from the United States and Britain, have been killed. Many foreign civilians have also been captured and

slain by insurgents.

The commission also studied the credibility of information about countries suspected of developing nuclear weapons, including North Korea and Iran. The sections dealing with those results are classified and were not disclosed, but the report expressed disappointment with the surprisingly limited quality of the information about those nations' weapons programs as well.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction threatens the entire world. It is of course impossible to always gather accurate intelligence, but the world remains too dependent on the United States to gather such information. The report gives the international community much to consider.

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