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Book Reviews

Hoodwinked: The Documents That Reveal How Bush Sold Us a War
by John Prados. New York, London, The New Press, 2004. 375 pp.
\$17.95.

A Pretext for War: 9/11, Iraq, and the Abuse of America's Intelligence Agencies by James Bamford. New York, Doubleday, 2004. 432 pp.
\$26.95.

To everyone other than its hard-core supporters, the question for the George W. Bush administration is whether it was a knave or a fool in regard to Iraq's links to al Qaeda and its programs to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Although much remains unknown both about what Iraq was doing and what the United States perceived, the question is so important that it has already generated not only media and congressional reports, but also semischolarly books such as those reviewed here. Both James Bamford and John Prados are well-respected, independent scholars of security and intelligence issues, but the former's study seems rushed and will have a short half-life, while the latter's will retain value for quite some time, despite the fact that it does not fully come to grips with some of the central questions.

A strength and a weakness of *Hoodwinked* is its combining—or fitting between—journalism and scholarship. It is more thorough and analytical than the former, but does not draw on relevant theories or test competing hypotheses, as does the latter. It also lacks footnotes, a serious deficiency. But the advantages are that the story flows so smoothly (and is written so well) that it can have a wide audience and that the material is so carefully handled that scholars can read it with benefit.

In Prados's account, once the Bush administration decided to overthrow Saddam Hussein (sometime in early 2002), it had to convince allies, Congress, and the public to go along. The obvious reasons to give were that Saddam was closely tied to terrorism and that his robust WMD programs meant that he could either intimidate his neighbors or transfer WMD to terrorists. At first, it appeared that relevant audiences would be easily persuaded. But as opposition developed in the summer of 2002, the Bush administration had to launch an all-out public relations campaign involving numerous speeches and the release of declassified intelligence estimates and culminating in Colin Powell's UN speech in February 2003.

The heart of the book is an analysis of these documents and a paragraph-by-paragraph annotation of where and how they are misleading, if not mendacious. I do not think it is only because I agree with him that I find Prados's analysis almost wholly convincing and not at all polemical. He shows that official statements consistently went far beyond the existing evidence, relied on suspect sources (most infamously, defectors who came through Ahmad Chalabi's network), buried dissent, and ignored alternative explanations. Prados's analysis of Dick Cheney's postwar justification (pp. 322–328) is shooting fish in a barrel, but perhaps best is the dissection of Powell's UN speech (Chapter 6), which alone is worth the price of the book. Prados finds no fewer than thirty-five instances in which Powell was misleading, and this following the Secretary's strenuous efforts to examine the supporting evidence and present only that which he was confident was well-grounded.

It is clear from Prados's analysis that although some of the flaws could not have been detected by the media at the time, many others, such as the claim that the infamous aluminum tubes were well-designed for uranium separation, could have been. Because the Democrats raised few questions, however, the media found few controversies to report. One cannot read this book without feeling shame over the performance of the American political and public information system, nor can one avoid admiration for the great skill with which the Bush administration pursued its aims. The obvious policy question for the general public is how this foundation of intelligence and leadership can support a policy of preventive war in the future.

But should the book have been called *Fiasco* rather than *Hoodwinked*? That is, did the members of the Bush administration hoodwink us or themselves? Did they believe what they were saying? Obviously, different people may have believed different things, and without (I hope) sounding Clintonesque, I think the answer may turn on exactly what "believed" means. People have a great capacity for making themselves believe what is necessary for their political and psychological health and ignoring what is inconvenient. Prados generally implies, rather than argues, that the deception was conscious (occasionally [p. 327], he seems to think that officials were simply in error). Indeed, he rarely notes the alternatives. So as a work of scholarship, this book remains unsatisfying. But as a meticulous analysis of the flaws in the arguments the administration made to pull the country into war, it is of lasting value. It also raises, but does not answer, the central question of why Bush and his colleagues sought war if they did not believe that Saddam had serious WMD programs.

Like Prados, James Bamford sees Bush and his colleagues as knaves, although occasionally he, too, implies that they were merely ill-informed (p. 322). His treatment is broader, covering both the terrorist attacks of September 11 as well as the run-up to the war in Iraq. The book is also unfocused and repetitive, and indeed shares many of the analytical errors that he argues characterized the Bush administration. Although the subtitle of the book refers to "the abuse of America's intelligence agencies," Bamford is unclear about the extent to which he believes they were abusers themselves as well as having been abused.

He does come closer than does Prados to answering the question of why the United States invaded Iraq, although he does not tackle it head on. The claim seems to be twofold. First, Bush came into office seeking to overthrow Saddam (chapter 10 and pp. 318–319). Although the reason for this obsession is not made clear, Bamford implies that it stemmed in large part from Saddam's attempt to assassinate the President's father (pp. 255–260). But the primary villain for Bamford is Israel and that country's ardent neoconservative supporters in the administration. This position is familiar, and although Bamford adds detail and color, his account is no more convincing than are others along these lines. He provides no evidence for his assertion that removing Saddam was "among the highest" Israeli objectives (p. 264), and, in fact, it is far from clear whether regime change in Iraq has made Israel more secure. Furthermore, the neoconservative supporters of the Israeli right wing, although certainly not without power in the U.S. government, were not at the highest levels, and Bamford does not explain how they converted Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, and the President.

If Bamford's account, then, fails to convince us that September 11 was "a pretext for war," let alone one that was grounded in the desire to support the objectives of Ariel Sharon, the book still has virtues. The first hundred pages give a fast-paced, if somewhat choppy, account of the attacks of September 11 and what preceded them, although it has been largely superseded by the publication of the 9/11 Commission's report. More interesting is his critique of the culture of the intelligence community. Drawing on his earlier accounts of the National Security Agency, his discussion of the problems it faces in a world of new, digitized communications traveling through fiber-optic cables in multiple languages is hard to dispute. He does not spare the CIA either, arguing that its Directorate of Operations (DO) has grown excessively timid and bureaucratized and not only had failed to penetrate al Qaeda, but did not even make the attempt (pp. 156, 189, 191, 234). This argument is both important and plausible, but of necessity relies on interviews with disaffected DO operatives. They may well be right, but Bamford has to take their word for it.

Along the way, and especially in the first section, Bamford incorporates some marvelous tidbits: on the morning of 11 September, both incoming Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Richard Myers, and Senator Thomas Daschle proceeded with their meetings despite having learned that an attack was underway (pp. 38–39, 56); during the Cold War, the government established a special unit whose sole job was to extract the president and vice president from the rubble of the White House after a nuclear attack (p. 64); and on the morning of 11 September, Air Force One lacked reliable TV reception, which meant that the President knew less than did the general public (p. 83).

Overall, however, Bamford says little that is new and adopts a style of argument that is quite similar to the one employed by the Bush administration. Rather than presenting evidence on both—or all—sides and weighing alternative interpretations, he gives a brief for the prosecution. He cherry-picks the anecdotes that support his case (and there are many of them), and even those

who agree with his conclusions will find his treatment of issues (such as the purposes of the aluminum tubes and the claim that Saddam tried to procure uranium from Africa) one-sided and without nuance, just as the Bush administration's treatment of them was. Similarly, much of his critique of the intelligence community parallels that of the neoconservatives he scorns (pp. 289, 292, 294). On the frontispiece, Bamford quotes Feodor Dostoyevsky as saying "While nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer, nothing is more difficult than to understand him." Unfortunately, the book bears witness to the validity of this insight.

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Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics by Joseph S. Nye.
New York, Public Affairs, 2004. 208 pp. \$25.00.

Joseph Nye has done his usual masterful job in this elegant monograph, describing the many sources of influence in international relations and reminding readers that excessive reliance on military or economic instruments of policy can often trigger backlashes that harm the nation's interests in the longer term. Nye points out that rather than either coercing others to share our objectives or buying their agreement with economic incentives, it is better for the United States to get what it wants because others share our goals. Soft power, he says, is more than influence or persuasion, "it is also the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence" (p. 6).

Much of the book is devoted to descriptions of the sources of soft power in the United States and other countries, including the nation's values and the styles of individual behavior expressed in the dominant culture and transmitted through both commercial activities (Hollywood movies, for example) and personal contacts, and the nation's policies, particularly when they reflect values that are widely shared around the world. Thus, Nye argues, the United States won the Cold War in part because of the attractiveness of the American form of government and economy, and because American values, or American soft power, eventually came to dominate global perceptions of the two superpowers and induced others to want to share in our vision of the world.

Although Nye makes a persuasive case, in the end, the book is unsatisfying because of inherent limitations in the concept of soft power. It is a form of power, yes, but not an instrument of power that can be deployed in specific situations or even one that can be shaped in a meaningful way by the government. Soft power exists, and may be influenced by governmental choices, but it is more an existential factor in the policy environment than something policy makers can utilize to their advantage.

A nation's "attractiveness" to others is not a factor that can be exploited in any coherent way. Indeed, the chapter "Wielding Soft Power" is devoted solely to public diplomacy—the various means available to the government to communicate the nation's policies and values. But in our interdependent and