

Errata

To: *Recipients of Blinders, Blunders, and Wars: What America and China Can Learn*
(RR-768-RC)

From: The RAND Corporation

Date: December 2014

Re: Correction on page 174

The following sentence on page 174 incorrectly referred to the country of Iran in some print copies; it should be Iraq as follows:

The fifth was impatience on the part of the Bush team to wait for the results of the arms inspectors who were making progress in Iraq, results that could have obviated the need for war.

At a minimum, if such risks had been identified, they might have been mitigated and the terrible costs to the United States and Iraq might have been reduced.

Why It Went Wrong

The strategic environment immediately after September 11, 2001, was filled with a sense of urgency and imminent danger. Bush felt a heavy burden of responsibility for protecting the nation. Even after it was known that Saddam was not complicit in the attacks on America, there was concern that he might provide WMDs to terrorists, who would eagerly use them on America. In this environment different factors conspired to lead Bush to a decision to pursue an optional war that most Americans believe in retrospect did much more harm than good to their interests.

The first factor was an effort by a group of neoconservatives in and out of government to seek opportunity in danger. They saw an opportunity to rid the Middle East of a dangerous dictator and create a new democratic model for the region. They shaped an attractive vision of what might be that turned out to be far from the mark.

The second was an effort by the Policy Counter Terrorism Evaluation Group in the Pentagon to cherry-pick selective intelligence from questionable sources and the subsequent failure of the actual intelligence community to prevent some of that questionable intelligence from making its way into the NIE and the public domain. That selected and dubious intelligence reinforced concerns about the danger posed to the United States by Saddam. Reservations carefully placed in the NIE by the intelligence community were buried in the body of the report.

The third was a sense of prowess and hubris from a string of successes by a transformed high-tech military that created the belief that expeditionary warfare is decisive, quick, easy, and low-cost.

The fourth was a dysfunctional and opaque decisionmaking process that rejected much analysis available in and out of government and that never formally brought the cabinet officers together to discuss the pros and cons of waging war.

The fifth was impatience on the part of the Bush team to wait for the results of the arms inspectors who were making progress in Iraq, results that could have obviated the need for war. That impatience led to lost support from key American allies, such as France and Germany.

The final flaw in the decision chain was the failure to prepare for a postconflict occupation and stabilization program; that failing initially resulted in anarchy and then civil war.

Throughout, those who preconceived the war used information selectively, marginalized dissent, and evaded analysis that could threaten their preconception. They had a compelling model, but it did not reflect reality.