

# Clapper's Credibility

Former DNI James Clapper had his own words read back to him by Ray McGovern, exposing his role in justifying the Iraq invasion based on fraudulent intelligence.

## **Clapper Admits Gross Intelligence Failure on Iraq WMDs But Still Escapes Justice**

By Ray McGovern

*Special to Consortium News*



Former National Intelligence Director James Clapper's key role in helping the Cheney/Bush administration "justify" war on Iraq with fraudulent intelligence was exposed on Tuesday at the Carnegie Endowment in Washington. His own words were quoted back to him from his memoir "Facts and Fears: Hard Truths From a Life in Intelligence." Hard truths, indeed.

Clapper was appointed Director of National Intelligence by President Barack Obama in June 2010, almost certainly at the prompting of Obama's intelligence confidant and Clapper friend John Brennan, later director of the CIA. Despite Clapper's performance on Iraq, he was confirmed unanimously by the Senate. Obama even allowed Clapper to keep his job for three and a half more years after he admitted that he had lied under oath to that same Senate about the extent of eavesdropping on Americans by the National Security Agency

(NSA). He is now a security analyst for CNN.

In his book, Clapper finally places the blame for the consequential fraud (he calls it “the failure”) to find the (non-existent) WMD “where it belongs – squarely on the shoulders of the administration members who were pushing a narrative of a rogue WMD program in Iraq and **on the intelligence officers, including me, who were so eager to help that we found what wasn’t really there.**” (*emphasis added*) .

So at the event on Tuesday I stood up and asked him about that. It was easy, given the background Clapper himself provides in his book, such as:

“The White House aimed to justify why an invasion of and regime change in Iraq were necessary, with a public narrative that condemned its continued development of weapons of mass destruction [and] its support to al-Qaida (for which the Intelligence Community had no evidence).”

What Clapper chokes on – and avoids saying – is that U.S. intelligence had no evidence of WMD either. Indeed, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had put him in charge of the agency responsible for analyzing imagery of all kinds – photographic, radar, infrared, and multispectral – precisely so that the absence of evidence from our multi-billion-dollar intelligence collection satellites could be hidden, in order not to impede the planned attack on Iraq. That’s why, as Clapper now admits, he had to find “what wasn’t really there.”

Members of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

(VIPS) who have employed Clapper under contract, or otherwise known his work, caution that he is not the sharpest knife in the drawer. So, to be fair, there is an outside chance that Rumsfeld persuaded him to be guided by the (in)famous Rumsfeld dictum: "The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."

But the consequences are the same: a war of aggression with millions dead and wounded; continuing bedlam in the area; and no one – high or low – held accountable. Hold your breath and add Joe Biden awarding the "Liberty Medal" to George W. Bush on Veteran's Day.

### **'Shocked'**

Clapper writes:

"... we heard that Vice President Cheney was pushing the Pentagon for intelligence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and then the order came down to NIMA [the National Imagery and Mapping Agency] to *find (emphasis in original)* the WMD sites. We set to work, analyzing imagery to eventually identify, with varying degrees of confidence, more than 950 sites where we assessed there might be WMDs or a WMD connection. We drew on all of NIMA's skill sets ... and it was all wrong."

"To support his [Secretary of State Colin Powell's February 5, 2003] speech, NIMA (*which Clapper headed*) had gone through the difficult process of declassifying satellite images of trucks arriving at WMD sites just ahead of the weapons inspectors to move materials before they could be found, and my team also produced computer-

generated images of trucks fitted out as 'mobile production facilities used to make biological agents.' Those images, possibly more than any other substantiation he presented, carried the day with the international community and Americans alike."

"[For] the invasion of Iraq on March 20, six weeks after Powell's speech, NIMA ... prepared a prioritized list of our suspect [WMD] sites with specific locations. ... Using this information, they [the fourteen-hundred-member international Iraq Survey Group] went from site to site but found almost nothing. We were shocked. ... The trucks we had identified as "mobile production facilities for biological agents" were in fact used to pasteurize and transport milk."

As for those mischievous trucks allegedly used "to move materials before they could be found," as Scott Ritter, former chief UN weapons inspector for Iraq, has pointed out, they were clearly decontamination vehicles. UN inspectors had visited the site in question. It was an ammunition bunker, and the decontamination vehicle was a water truck used to keep the dust levels down because of the sensitive fuses located in the bunker. These were known facts but Clapper chose to ignore them.

Nor did he give up easily, before he could resist no longer and admit, as he writes, that "it was all wrong." In late October 2003, Clapper briefed Washington media on his latest guesses as to what really happened to the (notional) WMD. *The Washington Times's* Bill Getz wrote a long article replete with detailed quotes from Clapper, starting with:

“Iraqi military officers destroyed or hid chemical, biological and nuclear weapons goods in the weeks before the war, the nation’s top satellite spy director said yesterday. Retired Air Force Lt. Gen. James Clapper, head of the National Imagery and Mapping Agency, said vehicle traffic photographed by U.S. spy satellites indicated that material and documents related to the arms programs were shipped to Syria.”

In his book, Clapper refers to that briefing and says he conceded “we’d made some assumptions we shouldn’t have ... “ and admitted that “I was still baffled that no WMD sites had been discovered. I mentioned that in the days before the invasion started, we saw a lot of cars and trucks fleeing the country into Syria. ... I probably should have clarified what a stretch it would be” to suggest the WMD had been transported to Syria.” Well, yes, that would have prevented further embarrassment.

During the Q and A I was sorely tempted to quote Hans Blix, the then head of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, who on June 23, 2003 quipped to the Council on Foreign Relations, “It’s sort of puzzling that you can have 100 percent confidence about WMD existence, but zero certainty about where they are.” But that would have brought loud boos from the docile audience at Carnegie, and gotten me off on the wrong foot.

Instead, I cited to Clapper his most grievous offense against the profession of intelligence analysis – his inordinate eagerness to please whatever superiors he was working for at the time, and give them the information they lusted after to “justify” things like war.

I observed that exactly two years ago, the Obamas and Clintons were desperate to blame Trump's victory on Russian interference. And so, I asked, was this a repeat performance? Had Clapper snapped to and again "found what really wasn't there?" This, I emphasized, was the conclusion of VIPS, including two former Technical Directors at NSA.

### **From 'WMD' to 'Russian Hacking'**

I noted that after Clapper had briefed President Obama on January 5, 2017 on the evidence-impooverished "Intelligence Community Assessment" alleging that Russian President Putin had personally ordered the "Russian hacking," Obama seems not to have been persuaded. I asked Clapper why the President told a press conference on January 18, 2017 that the conclusions of the intelligence community regarding how "Russian hacking" of Democratic National Committee emails had gotten to WikiLeaks were "inconclusive." Clapper said he could not explain why the President said that.

Travel tip for Clapper: do not travel abroad to any country bold enough to invoke the principle of universal jurisdiction which includes the duty to arrest those suspected of war crimes when their home country fails to do so. Your mentor Donald Rumsfeld had a close brush with this international form of Lady Justice in October 2007, when he abruptly fled Paris upon learning that the Paris Prosecutor had been served a formal complaint against him for authorizing torture. The complaint noted that authorities in the U.S. and Iraq had failed to launch any independent investigation into Rumsfeld's responsibility, and also noted that the U.S. had refused to join the International Criminal

Court, which might have had more routine jurisdiction.

Former President George W. Bush, too, had a close call in February 2011. When Bush heard that criminal complaints had been lodged against him in Switzerland, he decided not to take any chances and abruptly nixed longstanding plans to address a Jewish charity dinner in Geneva. Thus, both Rumsfeld and Bush were spared the humiliation that befell Gen. Augusto Pinochet, who had been head of Chile's military dictatorship from 1973 to 1990. While on a trip to the United Kingdom in 1998, Pinochet was arrested on a Spanish judicial warrant and was held under house arrest until 2000.

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