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The media after the Libby indictment

A lot of media outlets are now scrutinizing some of the lies told by the Bush administration before the invasion of Iraq. Yet the same news organizations are bypassing their own key roles in the marketing of those lies. A case in point is the New York Times.

On Oct. 29, hours after the indictment of Lewis Libby, the lead editorial of the Times ended by declaring that "the big point Americans need to keep in mind is this: There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq." On Oct. 30, the Times columnist Frank Rich referred to "Colin Powell's notorious presentation of WMD 'evidence' to the UN on the eve of war."

And so it goes in the opinion section of the New York Times. There's now eagerness to blast the Bush administration for some aspects of false prewar propaganda — while the newspaper continues to dodge its own crucial role in promoting that propaganda.

Many people have become aware that news articles by Judith Miller and other Times reporters — often splashed on the front page — were conduits for the administration's deceptive claims about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The New York Times has portrayed itself as a victim of misinformation, as though a conveyor of falsehoods has scant responsibility.

But bogus news reporting was not the only way that the Times helped to push the United States into invading Iraq. Despite its reputation as a strong opponent of going to war, the paper's editorial voice capitulated when it was needed most.

Let's reach down into the Orwellian memory hole and retrieve what the New York Times had to say — in an editorial headlined "The Case Against Iraq" — the day after what Frank Rich now calls Colin Powell's "notorious presentation."

The Times declared that Powell "presented the United Nations and a global television audience yesterday with the most powerful case to date that Saddam Hussein stands in defiance of Security Council resolutions and has no intention of revealing or surrendering whatever unconventional weapons he may have."

The Feb. 6, 2003, editorial by the Times also proclaimed: "President Bush's decision

MEDIABEAT 2005 | NORMAN SOLOMON

to dispatch Mr. Powell to present the administration's case before the Security Council showed a wise concern for international opinion. Since Mr. Bush's own address to the UN last September, he has kept faith with his commitment to work through the Security Council."

And the Times editorial gushed: "Mr. Powell's presentation was all the more convincing because he dispensed with apocalyptic invocations of a struggle of good and evil and focused on shaping a sober, factual case against Mr. Hussein's regime."

For a "notorious presentation," Powell's performance at the UN got a rave review from a newspaper supposedly objecting to the momentum for war.

Now, while the New York Times is busily clucking at deceptive prewar maneuvers by Dick Cheney's office, the Times refuses to own up to how effectively the Cheney operation gained its support, from page-one stories about WMDs to editorials assisting Washington's war makers.

Meanwhile, a distinct rhythm of drumming for a war dance is audible in the present. Consider a statement that appeared a couple of inches under the close of the New York Times editorial declaring on Oct. 29 that "there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq." In an editorial just below, the Times flatly stated conjecture as fact:

"Iran has a nuclear weapons program."

Norman Solomon is the author of the new book "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death." For information, go to: www.WarMadeEasy.com