

TIME U.S.



Home Politics Battleland Olympics Education Immigration



Battleland

Where military intelligence is not a contradiction in terms

INTELLIGENCE

Iraq: How the CIA Says It Blew It on Saddam's WMD

By **MARK THOMPSON** | @MarkThompson_DC | September 6, 2012 | 59

[Log In with Facebook](#) Sharing TIME stories with friends is easier than ever. Add TIME to your Timeline. [Learn More](#)



DAVID FURST / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Saddam Hussein stands trial in Baghdad on Jan. 29, 2006. He was hanged later that year

Now that we're out of Iraq, the **CIA** has come clean on how it came to be bamboozled about Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) ferrets over at the National Security Archive (NSA) petitioned for, and got, the CIA's **equivalent** of the dog-ate-my-homework (technically, the NSA obtained this document under a mandatory-declassification-review request it made in 2006, which can be faster [*It still took six years!*] than an FOIA request, if the requester has sufficient details on a specific document).

Bottom line, from the CIA's point of view: Saddam used to lie about possessing WMD, so we believed he still was.

Unfortunately, the U.S. went to war based largely on that false intelligence. Four thousand, four hundred and eight-six U.S. troops, 318 allies and untold thousands of Iraqis died in the ensuing conflict.

While much of the CIA explanation has been redacted, these surviving passages stand out:

- When the [U.N. and International Atomic Energy Agency] inspections proved more intrusive than expected, the Iraqi leadership appears to have panicked and made a fateful decision to secretly destroy much of the remaining nondeclared items and eliminate the evidence.
- Clumsy but genuine Iraqi moves toward transparency — significant alterations in their “cheat and retreat” pattern — not only went undetected but instead seemed to confirm that Iraq could and would conceal evidence of proscribed programs.

— We now judge that the Iraqis feared that [Saddam’s son-in-law and Iraqi weapons expert Hussein Kamel Hassan al-Majid] — a critical figure in Iraq’s WMD and [denial and deception] activities — would reveal additional undisclosed information. Iraq decided that further widespread deception and attempts to hold onto extensive WMD programs while under U.N. sanctions was untenable and changed strategic direction by adopting a policy of disclosure and improved cooperation.

— Iraq’s firmly established “cheat and retreat” pattern made it difficult for U.N. inspectors and Western analysts to accept new Iraqi assertions at face value.

— A liability of intelligence analysis is that once a party has been proven to be an effective deceiver, that knowledge becomes a heavy factor in the calculation of the analytical observer.

Tom Blanton, director of the nonprofit NSA, called the document a “remarkable CIA mea culpa.” To which Battleland only adds: mea *maxima* culpa.

Stay Connected with TIME.com

[Subscribe to RSS Feeds](#)

[Sign Up for New sletters](#)

[Get the TIME Magazine iPad Edition](#)

[Read TIME Mobile on your Phone](#)

[Become a Fan of TIME](#)

[Get TIME Tw itter Updates](#)



[NewsFeed](#) [U.S.](#) [Politics](#) [World](#) [Business](#) [Money](#) [Health](#) [Science](#) [Entertainment](#) [Photos](#) [Videos](#) [Specials](#) [Magazine](#)

[© 2012 Time Inc. All rights reserved](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Your California Privacy Rights](#) [RSS](#) [Newsletter](#) [Mobile](#) [TIME For Kids](#)
[Subscribe](#) [Contact Us](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Media Kit](#) [Reprints & Permissions](#) [Help](#) [Site Map](#) [Ad Choices](#)  [Custom Content](#)

OUR PARTNERS

⌵