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Washington Post Implies, ABC Accuses Bush of Knowingly Misleading Public on WMD in Iraq

No Media Apologies for Bush-Lied Mistake

Liberals have been stirred up by Wednesday's *Washington Post* story by Joby Warrick which hinted heavily that the White House intentionally lied to the public in 2003 when it insisted that trailers they had found in Iraq were mobile laboratories to make biological weapons: "even as Bush spoke, U.S. intelligence officials possessed powerful evidence that it was not true."

On ABC's *Good Morning America*, co-host Charles Gibson embellished that hint into a full-blown accusation: "*The Washington Post* has a story today that says the President knew at the time that was not true." (The *Post* did not assert Bush knew.) Reporter Martha Raddatz did not correct Gibson as she lauded the story as "extraordinary." He then asked Raddatz if this was "another embarrassment for the White House." She agreed.

At yesterday's White House briefing, Scott McClellan said the incident was not an embarrassment for the White House, "it's an embarrassment for the media that is out there reporting this." McClellan said he talked to "one network" about the story and "they've expressed their apologies to the White House. I hope they will go and publicly apologize on the air about the statements that were made." Fat chance.

ABC responded with another story on *World News Tonight* – with absolutely no public apology or acknowledgment that Gibson was wrong. Raddatz stormed ahead with the *Post* story again, and concluded that administration officials "weren't answering questions" about how Bush and his top advisers didn't see the no-WMD report. There was no mention of ABC apologizing privately to the White House or McClellan's soundbite to that effect.

Raddatz's evening story ran again on Thursday's *Good Morning America*, and she again avoided Gibson's error by merely citing White House complaints: "Charlie, the White House says this was based on the best intelligence at the time and the White House has blasted the *Washington Post* and ABC for its reporting." Gibson offered no apology.

But both the *Post* and ABC omitted evidence that might drain some of the "powerful evidence" they were citing: there was more than one government-assembled team used to evaluate the trailer. There were three. The other two concluded they were mobile bio-weapons labs. (Their findings were eventually rejected by the government's Iraq Survey Group.)

The President knowingly lied, said ABC's Charles Gibson. Bush spokesman Scott McClellan said "one network" privately apologized. But ABC made no attempt to correct the story or apologize in public.

MSNBC's Keith Olbermann fell on his face, like Gibson, asserting without evidence that Bush knowingly lied: "The President knew they weren't mobile weapons labs from the very start. How Nixonian is this?"

But at least Olbermann made an honest man out of Warrick by asking if more than one inspection team went in: "Did anybody go in later on and reach a different conclusion?"

Warrick acknowledged: "There were **several groups** that went in and looked at it. Two of them went actually before this team. They were Pentagon people, military experts, without as much expertise as this later group that went, and they all found things that they thought looked like possible weapons equipment, and so they filed those reports back to the CIA, and that's how this first impression came to be."

But there's no mention of this in Warrick's *Post* stories. On Wednesday, Warrick noted a May 2003 CIA report endorsed the bio-labs finding, but did not mention the other two teams of inspectors. On Thursday, Warrick reported "the White House does not deny the existence of the technical team's report but portrays it as a preliminary finding," contrasting that report with the 2003 CIA report.

It's ironic for ABC and the *Washington Post* to hype a story that suggests the Bush team kept presenting information they knew to be false or incomplete – when that's exactly what they have done here. — *Tim Graham*

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