

State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III¹

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*[I also want to speak to] those of you who did not support my decision to send troops to Iraq: I have heard your disagreement, and I know how deeply it is felt. Yet now there are only two options before our country—victory or defeat. And the need for victory is larger than any president or political party, because the security of our people is in the balance. I don't expect you to support everything I do, but tonight I have a request: Do not give in to despair, and do not give up on this fight for freedom.*³

I. Introduction

Bob Woodward did it again. An editor at *The Washington Post* and a reporter for thirty-five years, Woodward “has authored or coauthored ten #1 national non-fiction bestsellers.”⁴ This time, in *State of Denial*, Woodward provides an inside look into the Bush Administration with a focus on its actions in post war Iraq.⁵ As the title suggests, Woodward describes President George W. Bush and his Administration as being in denial concerning the military and political progress being made in post war Iraq.⁶

The inside look into the Bush Administration during this critical time period is the greatest attribute of this book. In addition to this unique perspective, Woodward offers his readers a view of the unity of command issues during Operation Iraqi Freedom along with the top military leaders points of view concerning the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), both of which should be important to military readers. However, there are three issues that hamper the book's excellence. First, the author mistakes President Bush's optimism for the success of the military in Iraq for denial. Secondly, the book's format is awkward. Lastly, the credibility of some of the assertions made by sources in the book is questionable.

II. The Book's Strengths

State of Denial is a great addition to any professional development reading list for several reasons.⁷ First, and most importantly, Woodward gives his readers an insider's view of the Bush Administration. Secondly, for those who study the military profession, this book provides a case study into the importance of unity of command. Lastly, this book reveals what military leaders think of the effectiveness of the CJCS.

The tremendous strength of this book is Woodward's unparalleled behind-the-scenes access into the highest levels of the Bush Administration. This inside view provides readers not only a glimpse into the personalities of the Administration members, but also exposes the personal relationships between key players. While the American public only sees these figures at press conferences and public appearances, this book goes beyond the public personas to reveal the true characters.

The real personalities of those within the Bush Administration are the most entertaining aspect of this book. For example, the book discloses that President Bush has a sense of humor and enjoys the occasional “frat-boy prank.”⁸ In addition, one personality stood out from the rest—Colonel Steve Rotkoff.⁹ Colonel Rotkoff was an intelligence officer in

¹ BOB WOODWARD, *STATE OF DENIAL: BUSH AT WAR, PART III* (2006).

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³ WOODWARD, *supra* note 1, at 435 (quoting President George W. Bush, Address from the Oval Office (Dec. 18, 2005) (transcript available at http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=2005_presidential_documents&docid=pd26de05_txt-10)).

⁴ *Id.* at inside back cover.

⁵ WOODWARD, *supra* note 1.

⁶ *See id.* at 488–89.

⁷ The book provides two examples of the value and importance of reading for professional development from the highest levels of military command. First, Admiral Clark, Chief of Naval Operations, is depicted as an avid read reader, whose favorite book is *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. *Id.* at 55. Secondly, General Shelton, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, insisted that each of the service Chiefs read *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam*, by H. R. McMaster. *Id.* at 61.

⁸ *Id.* at 402.

⁹ *See id.* at 98–99.

Iraq at the start of the conflict and would display his sense of humor through the use of his colorful, yet insightful, haikus.¹⁰ However, the real interest of the book lies with the interaction between the many personalities working together behind the scenes. Often times, the public sees only the positive spin coming from government officials during news conferences and may not be able to see the tension between certain officials or what created that tension.¹¹ This book provides a more realistic view of the relationships exposing how members of the Administration feel about one another.¹² The revelation of the real relationships, as well as the personalities within the Bush Administration, provide an insight that many other books lack.

A must read for Soldiers, this book illustrates the importance of unity of command during an operation. Unity of command is a principle of war, which means, “a single commander directs and coordinates the actions of all forces toward a common objective.”¹³ In this book, Woodward describes a lack of unity of command with regard to the conflict in Iraq.¹⁴ When it is not possible to have unity of command, those in charge should cooperate with one another to ensure the mission is conducted in an effective and efficient manner.¹⁵ As the book reveals, however, there wasn’t always cooperation between those in charge in Iraq, either.¹⁶

Soldiers will also benefit from learning what the top military leaders really thought of the U.S. military’s top position, the CJCS.¹⁷ While the CJCS is supposed to be the principal military advisor to the President, Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Council,¹⁸ *State of Denial* reveals that some of the top military leaders feel that the power of the CJCS has diminished since 1991¹⁹ and in some cases, provides no real value to the country.²⁰ According to General Jones²¹, “Military advice is being influenced on a political level.”²² In fact, according to Woodward, General Jones believes the Goldwater-Nichols Act needs to be amended to reempower the service chiefs.²³ The perspectives of the nation’s top military leaders, especially on this issue, may be of interest to Soldiers.

¹⁰ An example of Colonel Rotkoff’s sense of humor is revealed in the following haiku that he wrote while in Iraq:

Where is WMD?
What a kick if he has none
Sorry about that

Id. at 192; *see also id.* at 98, 102, 147–48, 154, 210–11.

¹¹ A great example is the relationship between Lieutenant General (LTG) (Ret.) Jay Garner and Paul Bremer. At a press conference held on 18 June 2003, Jay Garner praised Bremer saying, “I think all the things he’s doing are absolutely the right things.” *Id.* at 221. When in reality, LTG (Ret.) Garner vehemently disagreed with Bremer and even informed Secretary Rumsfeld of the mistakes that Bremer made in Iraq. *Id.* at 219–21.

¹² For example, Steve Herbits thinks that Douglas Feith is worthless. *Id.* at 208. General Abizaid admires Secretary Rumsfeld but doesn’t really like him. *Id.* at 115.

¹³ U.S. DEP’T OF ARMY, FIELD MANUAL 3-0, OPERATIONS para. 4-4 (14 June 2001) [hereinafter FM 3-0].

¹⁴ General Keane tells LTG (Ret.) Garner that there is an issue with unity of command. WOODWARD, *supra* note 1, at 142. Secretary of State Powell tells President Bush that there is an issue with unity of command. *Id.* at 145.

¹⁵ FM 3-0, *supra* note 13, para. 4-45 (Unity of command isn’t always possible in multinational or interagency operations.).

¹⁶ WOODWARD, *supra* note 1, at 265, 269, 276–77.

¹⁷ “The Chairman, while so serving, holds the grade of general or, in the case of an officer of the Navy, admiral and outranks all other officers of the armed forces. However, he may not exercise military command over the Joint Chiefs of Staff or any of the armed forces.” 10 U.S.C. § 152(c) (2000).

¹⁸ *Id.* § 151.

¹⁹ WOODWARD, *supra* note 1, at 404–05.

²⁰ According to Woodward, General Jones had stated, “The Joint Chiefs have been systematically emasculated by Rumsfeld.” *Id.* at 404. In addition, the book states that General Myers, CJCS, at times wondered why he was even around because Secretary Rumsfeld was so hands on, requiring Myers to “adapt[] his mind to match Rumsfeld’s.” *Id.* at 72.

²¹ General (Ret.) James L. Jones was the Commandant of the Marine Corps before becoming the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Supreme Allied Commander and the U.S. Combatant Commander for Europe in 2003. *Id.* at 53, 104.

²² *Id.* at 404.

²³ *Id.*

III. The Book's Downfalls

State of Denial presents three weaknesses. First, Woodward misinterprets President Bush's optimism regarding the progress of the conflict in Iraq for denial. Second, the format of the book is awkward, presenting the story as essentially a daily chronicle of events. Lastly, the sources Bob Woodward lists, and more importantly does not list, leaves the reader questioning the credibility of his assertions.

A. Denial or Optimism?

Bob Woodward asserts that the strategy used by the Bush Administration in answering to the American people about the status of both the military situation and political stability of Iraq was denial.²⁴ Woodward goes on to emphasize that by using this denial strategy, President Bush was not telling the American public "the truth about what Iraq had become."²⁵ Woodward was wrong. He mistakes the President's optimism for denial.

Woodward uses several examples throughout the book to illustrate his claim that the Bush administration was in denial about the lack of military and political progress being made in post war Iraq.²⁶ First, he cites a meeting between the President and Lieutenant General (LTG) (Ret.) Jay Garner in which LTG (Ret.) Garner failed to tell the President of the mistakes²⁷ that occurred in Iraq.²⁸ Woodward states:

It was only one example of a visitor to the Oval Office not telling the president the whole story or the truth. Likewise, in these moments where Bush had someone from the field there in the chair beside him, he did not press, did not try to open the door himself and ask what the visitor had seen and thought. The whole atmosphere too often resembled a royal court, with Cheney and Rice in attendance, some upbeat stories, exaggerated good news, and a good time had by all.²⁹

Secondly, Woodward cites Vice President Dick Cheney's interview on CNN's *Larry King Live*. The Vice President stated: "I think they're in the last throes, if you will, of the insurgency."³⁰ Lastly, the author cites his personal interview with President Bush on 11 December 2003, in which the President wanted to qualify a yes or no answer concerning whether U.S. forces found any weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq.³¹

These examples and others in the book are not denial at all. Rather, they are examples of optimism by an administration motivating the nation to stay the course until a successful solution can be achieved in Iraq. History has shown that when a nation loses the support of its people it can lose an otherwise successful war.³² According to Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, a routine advisor to President Bush,³³ having seen the population withdraw their support during Vietnam, and watching that same scenario unfold with the conflict in Iraq, caused him to write in 2005, "Victory over the insurgency is the only meaningful exit strategy."³⁴ In order for President Bush to achieve victory in Iraq, he needed to ensure that the public

²⁴ *Id.* at 491.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *See id.* at 226, 397, 488–89.

²⁷ Lieutenant General (Ret.) Garner felt that Bremer had made three major mistakes in Iraq: de-Baathification, disbanding of the army, and the dumping of the Iraqi governing group. *Id.* at 224.

²⁸ *Id.* at 226.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.* at 397 (quoting Interview by Larry King with Dick Cheney, Vice President of the United States, in Atlanta, Ga. (May 30, 2005)). However, according to the author, "[t]he overall insurgent attacks in April had been about 1,700 and 52 Americans dead. In May, the attacks went up to 2,000, and 82 Americans had died." *Id.* at 397–98.

³¹ *Id.* at 488–89. Woodward states, "[The President's] unwillingness to acknowledge that no WMD had been found was making him less the voice of realism." *Id.* at 489.

³² "In his writing, speeches and private comments, Kissinger claimed that the United States had essentially won the war in 1972, only to lose it because of weakened resolve by the public and Congress." *Id.* at 407.

³³ *Id.* at 406–07.

³⁴ *Id.* at 408 (quoting Henry Kissinger, *Lessons for an Exit Strategy*, WASH. POST, Aug. 12, 2005).

and Congress didn't lose their resolve for completing the mission.³⁵ Contrary to Woodward's belief, President Bush was not in denial; rather, he was being optimistic in the hope of keeping the interest of the American people.

Despite Woodward's assertions, President Bush was well aware of the cost of America's involvement in Iraq. President Bush visited wounded Soldiers from Operation Iraqi Freedom thirty-four times.³⁶ In addition, President Bush knew the number of troops who had been killed in Iraq.³⁷ Clearly, the President was not in denial.

Woodward also claims that, "with all Bush's upbeat talk and optimism, he had not told the American public the truth about what Iraq had become."³⁸ On the contrary, with media embedded with the troops, the American public had enormous access to what was going on in Iraq.³⁹ Woodward then contradicts himself by acknowledging the efforts of the thousands of reporters in Iraq, helping to bring the truth to the American people.⁴⁰ The American public was learning the truth from the media; President Bush was just trying to maintain the nation's motivation to help ensure victory in Iraq. Without the President's optimism, the American people may have lost their interest in Iraq; similar to how the American people and Congress lost their interest in Vietnam.⁴¹

B. Awkward Format

Another issue with Woodward's book is the awkward format.⁴² *State of Denial* reads more like a journal than a completed work.⁴³ The method of using a daily chronicle of events is awkward for the reader to follow because when a chapter is completed, the topic discussed during that chapter is often times left unresolved. That same topic may then be revisited several times in subsequent chapters, awkwardly slipped in between other substantive topics.

A perfect example of this is the way Woodward treats the United States' search for WMD.⁴⁴ The allegations of Saddam Hussein's WMD was a major reason behind the United States decision to enter the War on Terror in Iraq.⁴⁵ The topic of WMD certainly deserves its own chapter; however, Woodward only mentions WMD sporadically throughout the book.⁴⁶ For instance, on page 92, Woodward introduces Major General (MG) James "Spider" Marks, the intelligence officer responsible for the search of WMD in Iraq.⁴⁷ Woodward continues to discuss MG Mark's search for WMD for the next twelve pages, despite the fact that a new chapter began on page 97.⁴⁸ Woodward then jumps to a new topic and begins discussing the concerns that Steve Herbits, a consultant to Secretary Rumsfeld, had with the post-Iraq planning.⁴⁹ The topic then switches

³⁵ *Id.* at 435 (citing President George W. Bush, Address to the Nation on Iraq and the War on Terror (Dec. 18, 2005)) (transcript available at http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=2005_presidential_documents&docid=pd26de05_txt-10).

³⁶ *Id.* at 437.

³⁷ During a speech President Bush made in Philadelphia on 12 December 2005, the President responded to a question concerning the number of lives lost by saying that, "we've lost about 2,140 of our own troops in Iraq." *Id.* at 431 (quoting President George W. Bush, Remarks to the World Affairs Council. (Dec. 12, 2005)) (transcript available at http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=2005_presidential_documents&docid=pd19de05_txt-5).

³⁸ *Id.* at 491.

³⁹ Message, 101900Z Feb 03, Dep't of Defense, subject: Public Affairs Guidance (PAG) on Embedding Media During Possible Future Operations/Deployments/in the U.S. Central Commands (CENTCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR), available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Feb2003/d20030228pag.pdf>. For example, Judith Miller, a reporter for the *New York Times*, was embedded with the Exploitation Task Force (XTF), a unit charged with the search for WMD. WOODWARD, *supra* note 1, at 147.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 523.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 407.

⁴² See Walter Shapiro, "State of Denial," Salon.com, <http://www.salon.com/books/review/2006/10/03/woodward/print.html>, Oct. 3, 2006 (reviewing WOODWARD, *supra* note 1). The author warns that "readers must pan their own gold." *Id.*

⁴³ See WOODWARD, *supra* note 1.

⁴⁴ See *id.* at 90, 92, 93, 98-99, 132, 159-60, 165.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 97.

⁴⁶ See *id.* at 90-132.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 92.

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 92-104.

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 103. Steve Herbits concern was that due to interagency squabbling the planning for what to do with Iraq after the invasion was not progressing smoothly. Herbits felt that Secretary Rumsfeld should step in to get the planning process back on track. *Id.* at 104.

in mid-chapter to General Jones's disinterest in interviewing for the job of CJCS.⁵⁰ Finally, the subject jumps back to postwar planning.⁵¹ The subject of WMD reemerges on page 115, where LTG Abizaid asked MG Marks what he thought about the WMD sites.⁵² Woodward's style of jumping between topics to maintain the chronological order, leaves the reader uncertain about the finality of any particular topic.

C. The Reliability of Some Statements is Questionable

The last issue with *State of Denial* is the reliability of some of the statements made by sources that the author used or by the author himself. The recollection of word for word conversations and detailed thoughts, months after an interview took place, is questionable at best. For example, Woodward interviewed LTG (Ret.) Garner regarding conversations that he had with Robin Rachel and Paul Bremer back in 2003.⁵³ The interview occurred on 16 October 2005, more than two years since LTG (Ret.) Garner had the conversations, and yet he claims to remember details with stark clarity.⁵⁴ Remembering the essence of a conversation two years after the fact, purely from memory, is one thing, but remembering a conversation word for word is something very different.

In addition Woodward makes statements that he does not support with evidence. One such example is Woodward's discussion of Congressman Jack Murtha's emotional plea on the House floor during his attempt to bring U.S. troops home from Iraq.⁵⁵ Woodward states, "informed military officers knew he was speaking for many more than himself,"⁵⁶ yet he fails to name any of the said military officers. The lack of evidence to support this statement leads the reader to question the credibility or reliability of the assertion itself.

IV. Conclusion

Bob Woodward's book, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III*, has a lot to offer readers.⁵⁷ This interesting book provides the reader an inside look into the Bush Administration. It also provides a case study for unity of command and reveals the personal thoughts of some of the military leadership regarding the joint staff and its effectiveness. However, the book does have its weaknesses. First, Woodward misinterprets President Bush's optimism for denial. Secondly, the journalistic format is awkward. Lastly, the credibility of some of the assertions is questionable. Readers should be able to look beyond the awkward formatting and should also be able to decide for themselves what they chose to believe as fact, pure speculation, or self-serving inflation of the facts.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ *Id.* at 105.

⁵² *Id.* at 115.

⁵³ *See id.* at 193–94, 200–01 (quoting Interview with LTG (Ret.) Jay Garner, in Orlando, Fl. (Oct. 16, 2005)).

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 225.

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 423–24.

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 424.

⁵⁷ WOODWARD, *supra* note 1.