Those of us who are old enough to remember the Second Gulf War remember “Comical Ali,” the Iraqi Information Minister whose bold lies to the Iraqi people struck our funny bones with a sense of irony that’s usually reserved for television. Mohammed Saeed al Sahaf, as the comedic minister was better known, was hailed as a hero in the Arab world, proclaiming defeat of “American infidels” even as Coalition forces advanced into Baghdad. The opinions of the Western Hemisphere, however, were best epitomized by an American soldier’s joke: “When we capture him, we’ll bring him back to the States and put him on ‘Saturday Night Live.’” What we didn’t realize at the time, however, was that the real comedian was the Bush administration, falsifying most of its case against Saddam Hussein’s dictatorial regime to rouse the support of the American people and isolated in the international community for its lack of skepticism.

The White House claimed a number of reasons for invading Iraq. Reducing the threat posed by Al Qaeda, preventing Hussein from employing weapons of mass destruction, liberating the Iraqi people, and replacing the Baath Party’s regime were all on the list, while cynics worldwide decried oil as the real reason for the invasion, citing George H.W. Bush’s 1991 invasion in pursuit of petroleum. While some or all of these reasons may have applied, several anonymous “Deep Throat” informants from the second Bush administration have credited one simple idea as the primary motive for the 2003 offensive: politics.

It all began, those sources say today, during Bush’s 2000 presidential campaign. But first, it’s necessary to understand the theory driving high-level politicians: the only thing politicians seek is re-election, and holding office is merely a game of holding the largest satisfied constituency. This explains why several congressmen have been seen in the last decade to suddenly change their views on complex moral issues such as abortion and homosexual rights. The Bush campaign, already discussing how to obtain
re-election, looked to the first Bush’s term in office and decided that swift victory in a war with little American loss would result in immense popularity and easy re-election. History has proven that campaign only half-right.

Documents surfaced shortly after the war showing that the use of military force, and specifically against Iraq, was planned even before the 2000 election fiasco which placed Bush in office. Many of these documents, which were dated in the year 2000, had pre-emptively awarded contracts to major American companies to “rebuild” Iraq. Most notably, the contract to rebuild Iraq’s oil infrastructure was given to KBR - a subsidiary of Halliburton, the company which former Vice-President Dick Cheney headed up before becoming Bush’s running mate.

Bush, barely holding his foot in the door of the White House, then issued his challenge to the world, wasting no time in choosing his enemies. Iraq, Iran, and North Korea were together tossed into what Bush proclaimed “The Axis of Evil” – countries which together posed a significant threat to the Western world, if provoked. The administration set to making its case against the first part of the Axis in order to cripple this fictitious Axis which was not allied within itself.

Next came an event which shattered the United States’ self-image but served as a tool for the White House: the World Trade Center attacks of September 11, 2001. After a successful military campaign in Afghanistan targeting the leaders of Al Qaeda, the terrorist group that masterminded the attack, the Bush administration then used the World Trade Center attack to bolster support for another military campaign in Iraq. Bush boldly claimed that Saddam Hussein’s government was harboring members of Al Qaeda, an offense which by the so-called Bush Doctrine resulted in war. To advance the case further, Bush accused Hussein of holding weapons of mass destruction – nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons that could be used against neighboring countries, and possibly even the United States.
Both accusations were shown to be largely unfounded. After thoroughly combing the entire country, Coalition forces failed to find any leads that pointed to Al Qaeda activity. American intelligence agencies had produced proof that Hussein acquired uranium that could be refined into a nuclear weapon – but the paperwork was quickly shown to be forged, prompting investigations into the FBI and CIA to determine liability. Ultimately, the directors of both agencies resigned in protest of Bush “intentionally misleading the intelligence community.”

There was some good to be done, however. Another objective of the war was ending the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, who ruthlessly used force to keep the Iraqi people subordinated. After the conquest of Baghdad, Iraqi civilians explained to American officers and journalists that Hussein killed his countrymen by the hundreds, that civilians informed on one another (which usually led to execution) to earn bounties necessary for survival, and torture of political prisoners led to forced confessions and implications of family members. The Hussein dictatorship killed and tortured with a precision and method unlike any form of terror since the Nazi exterminations of World War II.

After two months of fighting, Coalition forces had conquered Baghdad and toppled Hussein’s government. The White House announced that the “major combat” was over; however, over the next two years American casualties increased eight-fold as American forces remained in Iraq and the war continued. Clearly, the Iraqis thought the war was not yet over. Regardless, the American government set to building an interim government in Iraq that could make way for democracy. The reconstruction phase would prove to be the greatest challenge for the United States in the war.

While the fighting continued across the country, Iraqi civilians took to the streets, taking advantage of the lack of law enforcement. Shops, streets, and even Iraqi palaces for Hussein and his lackeys were looted beyond recognition. Anarchy quickly swept the land while dissatisfied Iraqis told American media that the United States
caused the disorder and failed to restore stability, as was promised. Worse still, most local utilities were destroyed in the takeover, leaving the vast majority of Baghdad without water or electricity. Iraqi police were nonexistent in the governmental fallout, so American soldiers were left to do the work in their place.

American soldiers became trapped in a morale-eating routine reminiscent of Vietnam. Soldiers often took the role of policeman in an attempt to curb the lawlessness of major cities. Lacking law enforcement training, these soldiers quickly became unhappy and eventually enraged as officers promised their men dates when they could return home, only to repeatedly rescind those promises. Relations between soldiers and Washington turned sour in some cases, and units spoke out against the continued occupation and were court martialed in retaliation.

Corporate America outside KBR had a role to play in Iraq’s reconstruction. The American security industry suddenly saw a boom after September 11th that resulted from mass paranoia. As that growth began to level out, hundreds of companies saw an opportunity to provide “security services” to American officials in Iraq during the reconstruction process, including corporate security and emergency planning. Companies which received federal funding suddenly saw dramatic increases in their grants, of which the American population was largely ignorant. KBR, particularly, saw its funding double in the span of a month. We are left to believe, in the wake of continued turmoil in Iraq, that the money was mostly squandered, since emergencies have still led to chaos and oil prices for Americans are still higher than in the economic boom following the First Gulf War, even considering inflation. Billions of dollars spent toward establishing secure environments for American businesses to grow in Iraq proved useless, as the country quickly fell back to military tyranny, forcing the businesses not dealing in oil to abandon their efforts to expand into the Middle East. KBR, however, has seen its stock prices continually rise despite recession (accompanied by an oil price spike) in 2008.
Back at home, the Coalition struggled to find post-mortem justification for the invasion. Countless leads in the search for weapons of mass destruction yielded nothing save smaller arms such as surface-to-air missiles. In the US and England, politicians who spearheaded the war effort began to catch heat for attacking with a false case for war. An outraged English Parliament verbally punished Prime Minister Tony Blair time and again. Despite President Bush’s adamant support of the Prime Minister, the Parliament moved overwhelmingly to recall Blair from office in early 2004. Stateside, Democratic Senator from California Henry Waxman saw an opportunity to retaliate for the 1998 impeachment of Bill Clinton and throughout 2003 pushed for the impeachment of Bush, rallying uncharacteristically aggressive Democrats in support. Unwilling to compromise Bush’s enormous approval ratings, the Republican-controlled Congress refused to allow impeachment proceedings but, similar to Clinton’s term, settled for a censure of Vice-President Cheney for “high crimes and misdemeanors” that cynics attributed to corruption.

The U.S. military continued to struggle for the remainder of the mission all the way until its end in early 2005. Morale sank to the depths of the Vietnam era as soldiers killed themselves and each other out of resentment for the continued occupation. Lawlessness continued even after several renewed efforts by the Army to have its soldiers keep peace in major cities and on roads. Just as things looked their worst, the White House announced it had successfully established an interim government in the nation, headed by several members of the Hussein regime who had proven sympathetic to the American cause. It was not enough to save Bush’s presidency. The announcement came just before the 2004 presidential election, which Bush lost to Howard Dean. As Dean took office, one of his first moves was to return to home troops which had spent much more time in Iraq than had been promised. As soon as American forces left, that interim government quickly proved to be ineffective and superficial. By mid-2005, a bloody coup had already taken place placing Saddam
Aziz – the son of the Iraqi deputy prime minister Tariq Aziz, named for his superior – at the helm. Political scientists note that several of the criteria for democracy, including a stable market economy and civil order, were never met despite the Coalition’s best efforts.

Dean quickly turned his attention to matters of the interior, ones which many complained had been long neglected by the Bush White House. He instituted several new economic policies similar to the Clinton administration’s approach in the 1990s, which took off due to the country’s relief with the end of involvement in Iraq. Nonetheless, the country was baffled when the security industry collapsed in the same manner as the dot-com boom of the late 90s. Critics today say that the downturn came from a lack of confidence in the industry after its poor performance overseas.

Al Qaeda never surfaced in Iraq, even after the “Second Saddam” established complete control over the country as his surrogate uncle once had. In fact, the terrorist group had all but disappeared until 2008, when an attempted bombing targeted at American athletes at the Beijing Olympic Games was linked to a cell based in Bangladesh.

Sadly, Iraqis today live under the same reign of terror that they did ten years ago. Inside sources say that this Saddam is a weaker leader than his predecessor, but gets by on the vitality and ambition of his youth. Intelligence leaked to the press in 2007 showed that neighboring country Iran might have been planning an invasion of the country for its massive oil reserves – but as of today no such attack has yet happened. Ultimately, Bush failed on two counts: he was not Iraq’s savior, nor did he meet the approval of the American people on Election Day. It’s far from comical that terror was victorious over the promise of freedom and democracy, but the history of the last decade has told us that true freedom for the Iraqi people was never in the President’s plans.