

Groupthink: george w. bush and central intelligence agency essay

[Business](#), [Decision Making](#)



Writing Assignment #1 Groupthink is described as a mode of thinking in which group member's premature striving for agreement somehow overrides their ability to realistically appraise alternative courses of action. After having watched " Bush's War" I feel groupthink did in part play a significant role in the decision making process leading up to the war on Iraq.

Members of cohesive, like-minded groups that share and cling to the same assumptions and beliefs while disregarding opinions and information to the contrary are more susceptible to groupthink. This kind of group cohesiveness was apparent within the Bush Administration where several key members steadfastly held onto the same assumption and course of action without logically considering different alternatives. The eight symptoms or antecedents of groupthink are: illusion of invulnerability, inherent morality of the group, rationalization, stereotypes of outsiders, self censorship, direct pressure, mind guards and an illusion of unanimity.

Given the group dynamic within the Bush Administration I will illustrate how the symptoms of an illusion of invulnerability, self censorship and direct pressure manifested in the decision making process. An illusion of invulnerability occurs when a group feels or begins to feel it is immune from error. Basically the group feels it is invincible and can do no wrong which often leads to excessive optimism and the taking of severe risks. There was evidence of this when the Bush Administration did not weigh out the factors of a postwar Iraq nor draw up any kind of feasible policy in accordance to likely emergence of an insurgency. They believed once the war was over it would just be a matter of a quick hand-off. General Shinseki, the former

Army Chief of Staff, had proposed several hundred thousand soldiers. His view was that a significant ground force presence would be required to counter ethnic tensions of postwar Iraq. The expert opinion of General Shinseki was deliberately disregarded as it was in direct conflict with the view of the group.

Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld's and Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz's public statement of Shinseki's proposal being "widely off the mark" further illustrates overconfidence and insulation within the group from outside opinions, as they feel they can do no wrong. The second example of a groupthink symptom that led to poor decision making concerning the invasion of Iraq is self-censorship. Self-censorship occurs when a member or members of the group decide themselves to hold back individual viewpoints that deviate from the apparent consensus of the group. George Tenet, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) did not believe there was a Saddam Hussein-Osama bin Laden link. He and the CIA did not find any conclusive evidence to support this claim.

Tenet was also aware that the data presented in the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) was flawed and inconclusive yet he did not put up a serious fight to voice his concerns, especially when the opportunity arose before President Bush. During a meeting in the oval office Bush remarks whether this is all the evidence they have to wage war against Iraq, Tenet confirms that it is a "slam-dunk". He knows very well that the data is not solid but out of fear of rocking the boat he purposely does not relay the correct information.

The appliance of direct pressure on members who appear to disagree is another effect of groupthink. Congress demanded a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Weapons of Mass Destruction from George Tenet and the CIA. They were already under stress given the short two week span within which the NIE on weapons of mass destruction needed to be completed. Added to this Vice President Dick Cheney and his chief of staff, Lewis (Scooter) Libby made deliberate visits to the CIA to 'check' on how the NIE was coming along. A lot of areas were asked to be looked over several times to discover the connection that suited the group's view. Hence the CIA was under intense political pressure from both Congress and the Administration. Vincent Cannistraro, a former CIA officer, confirms that direct pressure was applied with the statement, "...so you start looking very hard for anything at all that will support the answer that the Vice President wants, that the Defense Department wants. Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and the other neoconservatives all believed they were operating on a view that is true and so they went out of their way to prove that it is indeed true.

Any deviation from this truth resulted in direct pressure, making it clear that dissent against the group consensus was unacceptable. The final outcome was a very flawed National Intelligence Estimate. When groups exhibit groupthink the end result is disastrous decision making. This was evident concerning the decision regarding postwar Iraq with all the looting. The self-censoring of doubts presented a false picture and only served to maintain a false unity that gave an illusion of unanimity. Placing direct pressure resulted in an estimate filled with data that was not iron clad. Instead of narrowing

down on one course of action, as in the decision making process leading up to the invasion of Iraq, it is important that all alternatives and viewpoints are freely given, considered and broken down in detail to arrive at the best solution.