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WMD Commission Releases Scathing Report

Panel Finds U.S. Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons Was 'Dead Wrong'

By *Walter Pincus*

Washington Post Staff Writer

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A special presidential commission reported today that the U.S. intelligence community was "dead wrong" when it overstated pre-war Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs and today knows "disturbingly little" about the weapons programs and intentions of U.S. adversaries, such as Iran and North Korea.

And while it also said the United States had some "solid intelligence successes" in the past, the commission's report added that the future requires innovations leading to "understanding the worst weapons that our enemies possess and how they intend to use them against us." It noted, however, that "our collection agencies are often unable to gather intelligence on the very things we care the most about."

The panel, officially called the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, presented its 600-page report and 74 recommendations to President Bush this morning as the product of its year-long investigation. The nine member commission was named in February 2004 and led by senior U. S. Appeals Judge Laurence H. Silberman and former senator Charles S. Robb (D-Va.).

The report detailed various intelligence failures related to Iraq, providing some information not disclosed in previous congressional and internal CIA investigations. The panel looked to the new director of national intelligence (DNI) to integrate the intelligence community, which it describes as "fragmented, loosely managed and poorly coordinated." Nonetheless, the report pointed out, it is valuable to insure that the intelligence analysts at individual agencies such as the Pentagon, CIA, State Department, Department of Energy and FBI, remain diverse and continue to debate their individual interpretations of information.

Under the recommendations from the commission, the DNI would also be given responsibility to direct new collection methods for human and technical intelligence, because the panel found that in the past the intelligence community has been "too slow to change the way it does business."

It also calls for greater exchange of information among agencies.

For example, the report notes, before the speech by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell to the United Nations Security Council in February 2003, the CIA failed to provide information "casting serious doubt on the reliability" of intelligence

—Bush's Comments—

- **Video:** President Bush discusses the release of the commission's report.
- **Transcript:** Text of Bush's Thursday press conference with commission co-chairs.



—Priest's Analysis—

- **Transcript:** The Post's Dana Priest discusses the WMD commission's report.



about Iraq's alleged mobile biological facilities initially obtained from an Iraqi defector.

The analysts who helped prepare Powell's speech were unaware that, as the commission's report puts it, the defector was "lying" and that he was the single source for that information, which became a central feature of Powell's presentation.

The panel also criticized the daily intelligence reports that Bush received before the Iraqi war -- known as the Presidential Daily Brief (PDB) -- for being "more alarmist and less nuanced" in headlines and contents than longer studies, such as the National Intelligence Estimates. It said the reports never cast doubt on prior information provided to Bush on Iraqi weapons programs when such doubts turned up and thus "seemed to be 'selling' intelligence in order to keep its customers, or at least the First Customer, interested." The PDB, it concluded was "disastrously one-sided."

The panel called for changes in the PDB, a toning down of headlines and limiting its contents to intelligence that "requires high-level attention." In addition, it approved Bush's announced decision that the new director of national intelligence have a small staff to take responsibility for the PDB, as well as the daily President's Terrorist Threat Report and the morning briefing by the FBI director. But it also said the intelligence director should not appear each morning because it puts too much of a burden on his time.

One of the major structural suggestions in the report is directed at the FBI. The panel found the FBI's current internal reform, which puts new emphasis on intelligence, will not be concluded until 2010 and leaves "murky" its relationship to the rest of the intelligence community.

The commission recommended that the bureau's counterintelligence and counterterrorism divisions as well as its new intelligence division be merged into a separate national security service within the FBI. The head of this new service would have authority to direct agents in the field and be subject to the DNI as well as the FBI director, much like the intelligence agencies at the Pentagon respond to both the DNI and defense secretary.

The panel reported it found no evidence that policymakers, such as Vice President Cheney influenced analysts' reports on Iraq's weapons programs. But the panel made clear it did not explore the controversial subject of how policymakers such as Bush and Cheney used the intelligence.

In the report it disclosed it was "not authorized" to review that subject, and although it interviewed current and former policymakers about how the intelligence community communicated with them, the purpose was "not to review how policymakers subsequently used that information."

Looking to the future, the panel raised a question ignored by other investigators. It complained that the intelligence community had not made study of biological weapons a priority. That approach, the panel said, was unacceptable and it recommended "new urgency and new strategies." In the area of human intelligence, the panel recognized the primacy of the CIA in the espionage field and suggested creation of a directorate to coordinate what it describes as increasing activity abroad by both the FBI and the Pentagon that "heightens the risk that intelligence operations will not be properly coordinated with the CIA's human espionage operations." The new directorate would be senior to the CIA's Directorate of Operations and would coordinate all human intelligence issues, including standards for community-wide training and tradecraft.

The panel found that covert action, the clandestine activities carried out overseas to counter terrorism and proliferation of weapons, are "energetic, innovative and well-executed." Because of secrecy, those programs were not described.

The panel questioned whether technical collection of electronic messages and imagery through satellites has kept up to date. For example, it disclosed for the first time that the National Security Agency lost access to "important aspects of Iraqi communications."

Imagery from satellites, which was an important tool against the Soviet Union, did not work against Iraq's unconventional weapons, according to the panel. Today, as countries learn deception methods, such satellites are not effective against some priority targets, the report said.

—WMD Report—

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