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Intelligence Officers Challenge Bush

by Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

May 1, 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

SUBJECT: Intelligence Fiasco

We write to express deep concern over the growing mistrust and cynicism with which many, including veteran intelligence professionals inside and outside our movement, regard the intelligence cited by you and your chief advisers to justify the war against Iraq. The controversy over intelligence on Iraq has deep roots, going back a decade. It came to a head over recent months as intelligence was said to be playing a key role in support of your administration's decision to make war on Iraq. And the controversy has now become acute, since you have been backed into the untenable position of assuming the former role of Saddam Hussein in refusing to cooperate with UN inspectors. (Chief UN nuclear inspector Mohamed ElBaradei noted earlier this week, "We have years of experience and know every scientist worth interviewing.") The implications not only for US credibility abroad but also for the future of US intelligence are immense. They need to be addressed without delay.

Prominent pundits (and, quite probably, some of your own advisers) are now saying it does not matter whether so-called "weapons of mass destruction" are ever found in Iraq. Don't let them fool you. It matters a great deal. The Wall Street Journal had it right in its page-one lead article on April 8:

Officials Debate Involving the UN in Verification:

American forces in Iraq are rapidly confronting two other tasks (besides hunting down Saddam Hussein) of enormous importance: finding any weapons of mass destruction and convincing the world the finds are real. The weapons search is a critical one for the Bush administration, which went to war charging that the Iraqi leader had hidden huge amounts of chemical and biological weapons and could pass them on to terrorists. If the US doesn't

make any undisputed discoveries of forbidden weapons, the failure will feed already-widespread skepticism abroad about the motives for going to war.”

The failure to find weapons of mass destruction six weeks after US and UK forces invaded Iraq suggests either that such weapons are simply not there, or that those eventually found there will not be in sufficient quantity or capability to support your repeated claim that Iraq posed a grave threat to our country’s security. Your opposition to inviting UN inspectors into Iraq feeds the suspicion that you wish to avoid independent verification; some even suggest that your administration wishes to preserve the option of “planting” such weapons to be “discovered” later. Sen. Carl Levin recently warned that, if some are found “Many people around the world will think we planted those weapons, unless the UN inspectors are there with us.”

Complicating matters still further, foreign resistance is building to lifting the economic sanctions against Iraq until the UN can certify that Iraq is free of weapons of mass destruction. Russian President Vladimir Putin this week joined others in insisting that only UN weapons inspectors can reliably certify that. With considerable bite and sarcasm, he asked Prime Minister Tony Blair on April 29, “Where are these arsenals of weapons of mass destruction, if they were there?”

What is at play here is a policy and intelligence fiasco of monumental proportions. It is essential that you be able to separate fact from fiction—for your own sake, and for the credibility of our country’s intelligence community. We urge you to do two things immediately:

(1) Invite UN inspectors to return to Iraq without further delay; and

(2) Ask Gen. Brent Scowcroft, Chair of your Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, to launch an immediate inquiry into the performance of the CIA and other intelligence agencies in providing the intelligence upon which you have based your fateful decision for war against Iraq.

You may not realize the extent of the current ferment within the Intelligence Community and particularly the CIA. In intelligence, there is one unpardonable sin—cooking intelligence to the recipe of high policy. There is ample indication that this has been done with respect to Iraq. What remains not entirely clear is who the cooks are and where they practice their art. Are their kitchens only in the Pentagon, the National Security Council, and the Vice President’s office? There are troubling signs, as will be seen below, that some senior officials of the CIA may be graduates of the other CIA—the Culinary Institute of America.

While there have been occasions in the past when intelligence has been deliberately warped for political purposes, never before has such warping been used in such a systematic way to mislead our elected representatives into voting to authorize launching a war. It is essential that all this be sorted out; Gen. Scowcroft is uniquely qualified to lead such an investigation.

Some things are already quite clear to us from our own sources and analysis. We present them below in the hope that our findings will help get the investigation off to a quick start.

Forgery

One of the many lawmakers who believe they were deceived last summer and fall, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) wrote you a letter on March 17, asking that you explain why “evidence” that your administration knew to be forged was used with him and others to garner votes for the war. Waxman was referring to bogus correspondence purporting to show that Iraq was trying to obtain in Africa uranium for nuclear weapons, and noted that it was the perceived need to prevent Iraq from developing nuclear weapons that provided “the most persuasive justification” for war. The continued lack of any White House response to Waxman’s letter can only feed the suspicion that there is no innocent explanation and that the use of the forged material was deliberate.

Determined to find out what had happened, Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), vice-chair of the Senate intelligence oversight committee, suggested that the committee ask the FBI investigate, but committee chair Pat Roberts (R-OK) resisted—giving a fresh meaning to the word “oversight.” Roberts said through a spokeswoman that it was “inappropriate for the FBI to investigate at this point.” Roberts then declined to join Rockefeller in signing a letter to the FBI requesting an investigation. Rockefeller sent one anyway but the response he has just received from the Bureau was a brush-off. Unless you give FBI Director Robert Mueller different instructions, it appears doubtful that any genuine investigation will take place.

Rep. Waxman is right to point out that the specter of Saddam Hussein armed with nuclear weapons was the crucial element that convinced many representatives and senators to vote to give you the authority to use military force against Iraq. It is now clear that bogus intelligence fed lawmakers’ fears before the vote on October 11, 2002.

NIC Memorandum: “Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs”

On October 4, 2002, a week before Congress voted on the war resolution, the National Intelligence Council, an interagency body under the CIA Director as head of the entire Intelligence Community, published an unclassified version of a memorandum that had been briefed to Congressmen and Senators over the previous weeks.

Among the key judgments: “Most analysts assess Iraq is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program.”

The clumsy clause conceals a crass cave-in. The preponderant view, then as now, among nuclear scientists and engineers of the Intelligence Community and the Department of Energy’s national laboratories is that Iraq had not been able to reconstitute in any significant way the nuclear development program dismantled by UN inspectors prior to 1998. The conclusions of the vast majority of analysts dovetailed with the findings repeatedly presented to the UN by International Atomic Energy Agency Director Mohamed ElBaradei and his inspectors after their inspection work at the turn of the year; i. e., that Iraq had no nuclear program worthy of the name.

The NIC memorandum’s discussion of alleged Iraqi attempts to reconstitute a nuclear weapons program does not pass muster as rigorous analysis. The only data offered that can

remotely be called “evidence” is Iraq’s efforts to obtain high-strength aluminum tubes. The NIC memorandum claims, again, that “most intelligence specialists” believe the rods were intended for use in uranium enrichment, while “some believe that these tubes are probably intended for conventional weapons programs.”

The truth is just the opposite. Those who posit a nuclear application are in the distinct minority in the US and foreign intelligence, scientific, and engineering community.

The rest of the “evidence” adduced to support the existence of a “Nuclear Weapons Program” includes Baghdad’s failure to provide inspectors with all the information sought, the fact Saddam Hussein held frequent meetings with nuclear scientists, and the surmise that Baghdad “probably uses some money from illicit oil sales to support its weapons of mass destruction efforts.” The memorandum concedes that the IAEA “made significant strides toward dismantling Iraq’s nuclear weapons program,” but claims that, in the absence of inspections since late 1998, “most analysts assess that Iraq is reconstituting its nuclear program.” “Most analysts” in the Pentagon, perhaps; and in the Vice President’s office, surely; in the intelligence/scientific/engineering community, no.

Addressing how soon Iraq could go nuclear, the NIC memorandum states “Iraq is unlikely to produce indigenously enough weapons-grade material for a deliverable nuclear weapon until the last half of this decade.” It goes on to say that Iraq could produce a nuclear weapon “within a year,” if it could acquire the necessary fissile material abroad.

In your speech of October 7, 2002, just four days before the vote in Congress, your advisers had you blur that distinction and raise the prospect that if Iraq could “produce, buy, or steal” highly enriched uranium, it could have a nuclear weapon in less than a year. You went on to warn that “the smoking gun could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.” (The “mushroom cloud” specter was again used on October 8 by National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice with Wolf Blitzer on national TV, and on October 9 by Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Victoria Clarke with TV commentator Sam Donaldson.)

Interestingly, the NIC memorandum does not include the information from the forgery purporting to show that Iraq was trying to get uranium from Niger, although that material had been around for at least several weeks. Since the other “evidence,” like the argument from aluminum rods, was presented in such a way as to play up the threat from Iraq, the absence of the forgery information is conspicuous. Its absence may be explained by the reluctance of the purveyors of that information to make available the actual source material, which representatives of the various intelligence agencies preparing the NIC paper would have required, and the consequent likelihood that the hoax would be prematurely uncovered.

Whence the “Intelligence” on Weapons of Mass Destruction?

Glen Rangwala, the Cambridge University analyst who exposed the plagiarism by British intelligence of “evidence” on Iraq from a graduate student in California, suggests that much of the information on such weapons has come from Ahmed Chalabi’s Iraqi National Congress (INC), which has received Pentagon money for intelligence gathering. “The INC saw the demand and provided what was needed,” says Rangwala. “The implication is that they polluted the whole US intelligence effort.”

It is well known in intelligence circles that Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz has overseen the polluting of the stream of intelligence reporting on Iraq with a flood of fabricated material from Chalabi, who has few supporters and still fewer sources inside Iraq. When both the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency refused to give credence to such reporting, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld set up his own intelligence analysis unit headed by Rich Haver—a passed-over but still ambitious aspirant to the post of CIA director. The contribution of reporting from émigrés has been highly touted for months by Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, who seem unaware of Machiavelli's warning that of all intelligence sources, exiles are the least reliable.

In the face of like admonitions from the Intelligence Community, Wolfowitz has chosen to take the offensive. He has stated in public, for example, that CIA analysis "is not worth the paper it is written on."

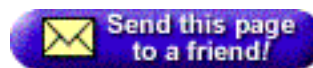
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Richard Beske, San Diego
Kathleen McGrath Christison, Santa Fe
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Steering Group
Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) is a coast-to-coast enterprise; mostly intelligence officers from analysis side of CIA. Ray McGovern (rmcgovern@skschool.org) worked as a CIA analyst for 27 years.

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