

# Uses and Misuses of Strategic Intelligence

By Melvin A. Goodman

The Bush administration argues that the Central Intelligence Agency's intelligence demanded that the United States go to war against Iraq. The events and the evidence of the past year, however, make it clear that it was the administration's decision to go to war that drove CIA Director George Tenet and his senior analysts to slant and politicize intelligence in order to support that decision. When intelligence analysts become the victims of such a political fixation, the entire system of intelligence and policy becomes corrupted and weakens the United States in its campaign against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

No administration can safeguard the national security interests of the United States if it does not understand the motives and purposes of its allies and adversaries. President Harry S. Truman created the CIA for this purpose, but President George W. Bush misused the intelligence community in going to war against Iraq and thus compromised the CIA's central mission.

The intelligence failure of 9/11

and the misuse of intelligence to justify war against Iraq in March 2003 demonstrated a dysfunctional intelligence community. Despite numerous warnings and a flurry of earlier terrorist attacks, the United States lacked strategic warning and was completely unprepared for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. And despite the absence of significant intelligence on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the CIA helped the Bush administration convince Congress to go to war against Iraq.

To make matters worse, the congressional oversight process has broken down, with intelligence



**Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet gestures while testifying before a House committee.**

committees unwilling to monitor the intelligence community. In various intelligence failures over the past ten years, particularly the failure to monitor the decline of the Soviet Union, the oversight committees have not been “junkyard dogs” in monitoring the CIA. Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA) says “Everyone’s in awe of them [intelligence agencies]. Everyone just melts in their presence.” Rep. David Obey (D-WI) agrees, adding that congressional oversight has been “miserable.” Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) conceded that the congressional intelligence committees have a “share in the blame for not providing better oversight.”

Nevertheless, the preliminary report of the joint intelligence committees on 9/11 did ferret out evidence documenting CIA and FBI failures, describing a director of central intelligence who declared a war on terrorism in 1998, but allocated no additional funding or personnel to his agency’s task force on terrorism; an intelligence community that never catalogued information on the use of airplanes as weapons; and a CIA that prepared its last national intelligence estimate on terrorism six years before 9/11.

More recently, the Bush administration made its case for war against Iraq by misusing bad intelligence and ignoring good intelligence on weapons of mass destruction and possible links between Iraq and al Qaeda. President Bush and Vice President Cheney falsely charged that Iraq had reconstituted its nuclear weapons capabilities, and the CIA drafted a UN speech for Secretary of State Powell in February 2003 that provided a worst-case argument for WMD, not a balanced intelligence assessment. CIA Director Tenet falsely charged in October 2002 that there were links between Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda and authorized a national intelligence estimate that claimed Iraq was “reconstituting its nuclear weapons programs.”

### **Failures of Intelligence**

The failure to deliver a tough-minded and objective assessment of Iraqi WMD was the latest in a long series of CIA blunders. The 9/11 intelligence failure pointed to the need for reform of the entire intelligence community, but congressional intelligence committee chairmen view themselves as “ad-

vocates” of the intelligence community and not overseers. Over the past 50 years, presidents have misused the CIA in covert actions in Guatemala, Iran, and Cuba that contributed to instability in these countries and surrounding regions. The Bay of Pigs in 1961 and Iran-Contra in the 1980s were directed from the White House. Congress never examined the absence of strategic warning for the 1973 October War; the 1979 Iranian revolution and the fall of the shah; Iraq’s invasion of Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1990; the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon; or the 1983 terrorist bombings that killed 250 U.S. marines and destroyed the U.S. embassy in Beirut.

In the 1980s, CIA director William Casey and his deputy director for intelligence, Robert Gates, politicized intelligence analysis, which led to the failure to foresee the Soviet collapse in 1991. In an unguarded moment in March 1995, Gates admitted that he had watched Casey on “issue after issue sit in meetings and present intelligence framed in terms of the policy he wanted pursued.” There has never been a better definition of politicization.

The performance of the intelligence community did not improve in the 1990s. When the CIA missed Indian underground nuclear testing in 1998, Director Tenet stated, “We didn’t have a clue.” The failure to monitor Indian nuclear testing and Tenet’s inexplicable testimony that the CIA could not guarantee verification of nuclear testing led to the Senate’s unwillingness to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The CIA also underestimated the progress of the North Korean missile program, leading to congressional calls for a national missile defense. Since 1998, when the Rumsfeld commission issued a report that exaggerated the missile threat to the United States from Iran and Iraq, CIA analysis of this threat took on a worst-case flavor, politicizing intelligence data in order to exaggerate the threat to the United States. The CIA’s distortion of Iraqi WMD fits the larger picture of the agency’s hyping of the third world missile threat.

The CIA has been particularly weak on the issue of terrorism, frequently politicizing intelligence. In the 1980s, Casey and Gates used a national intelligence estimate to distort the Soviet role in international terrorism and sponsored a spurious intelligence

assessment to charge Moscow with the attempt to assassinate the pope. They created the Counter-Terrorism Center (CTC), believing that the Soviet Union was responsible for every act of international terrorism (it wasn't), that intelligence analysts and secret agents should work together in one office (they shouldn't), and that the CIA and other intelligence agencies would share sensitive information (they didn't). The CIA and FBI provided no warning of the major terrorist attacks that followed, including the World Trade Center in 1993, U.S. barracks in Saudi Arabia in 1996, U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998, and the USS Cole in 2000. The CTC was slow to link al Qaeda to acts of terrorism against the United States and to link Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the planner of the WTC attack, to Osama bin Laden.

The CIA's CTC and the FBI's terrorism experts also missed the connection between Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, the coordinator of the 1993 WTC attack, and al Qaeda. The CTC always expected an attack abroad, never at home. Not even the foiled plot to bomb Los Angeles International Airport in December 1999 led the CIA and the FBI to heighten concerns over the ability of al Qaeda to strike inside the United States. Even when the CIA tracked al Qaeda operatives, it never placed their names on immigration service watch lists; the FBI failed to track al Qaeda operatives attending U.S. flight schools. Clinton's national security adviser told the joint intelligence inquiry in 2002 that the FBI repeatedly assured the White House that al Qaeda lacked the ability to launch a domestic strike.

The 9/11 attack exposed the CIA's inability to conduct strategic analysis, to imagine terrorist operations in the United States, and to anticipate commercial airplanes as terrorist weapons. The fact that al Qaeda had planned such operations in the mid-1990s in Europe and Asia did not jar CIA's complacency. Without the benefit of classified information and foreign liaison, however, the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress and University of Pennsylvania Professor Stephen Gale anticipated such hijackings and warned both the CIA's National Intelligence Council and the Department of Transportation.

## Misuse of Intelligence on Iraq

Tenet's inability to coordinate intelligence differences within the community was revealed in January 2003, in the wake of President Bush's State of the Union address. The president resorted to spurious intelligence to charge Iraq with seeking to purchase enriched uranium from Niger and thus reconstitute its nuclear capabilities. The CIA director had never read the draft of the speech and was unaware of a special emissary that his Directorate of Operations had sent to Niger in March 2002 to debunk the Iraq-Niger story. Seven months later, however, Tenet's senior analyst for proliferation released an intelligence estimate that charged Iraq with trying to obtain enriched uranium in Africa.

At war's end, when U.S. forces located two trailers in northern Iraq, the CIA quickly produced an unclassified paper for its website that described the items as mobile biological-agent production facilities and the "strongest evidence to date that Iraq was hiding a biological warfare program." President Bush immediately claimed vindication, but State Department and Defense Intelligence Agency analysts challenged CIA findings. Currently, the CIA is running a large-scale inspection effort in Iraq under the leadership of David Kay, a former UN inspector, who has produced no evidence of WMD and has reneged on a commitment to issue comprehensive findings.

## Structural Flaws

One reason for the consistent failures at CIA and FBI is the organizational disarray at both agencies. The CIA has an operational mission to collect clandestine intelligence and conduct covert action; it also analyzes all-source intelligence and produces national intelligence estimates. The agency cannot perform both missions well; the operational demands of the agency have often politicized the intelligence analysis. This has happened in Central and South America, where the CIA supported right-wing dictators and covered up human rights abuses, and Southwest Asia, where the agency covered up intelligence on Pakistan's strategic weapons programs to maintain Pakistan as an aid conduit to the Afghan *mujahideen* fighting Soviet occupation.

The FBI also suffers from a bipolar mission. Its traditional law enforcement mission involves reacting to crimes that have already occurred. Its counter-terrorism mission, by contrast, requires ferreting out threats to national security before they occur. Under former FBI director Louis Freeh, the FBI remained hostile to the inexact world of intelligence analysis that is the basis of investigating terrorism. Walter Lippmann reminded us 70 years ago that it is essential to “separate as absolutely as it is possible to do so the staff which executes from the staff which investigates.”

Turf issues abound throughout the intelligence community. The protection of “sources and methods” has been an obstacle to information sharing. This is not only the case between CIA and FBI: intelligence agencies and the Pentagon often lock horns as well. The director of central intelligence (DCI) is responsible for foreign intelligence, but lacks control and authority over 90 percent of the intelligence community, including the National Security Agency (NSA), the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA), and the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), which are staffed and funded by the Department of Defense.

The priorities of the DCI and those of the Pentagon are quite different. Previous DCIs, particularly Gates and John Deutch, de-emphasized strategic intelligence for policymakers and catered to the Pentagon’s tactical demands. The CIA, as a result, produces fewer strategic intelligence assessments and emphasizes tactical support for the warfighter. Gates ended CIA analysis on controversial military issues in order to avoid contentious analytical struggles with the Pentagon; Deutch’s creation of the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA) at the Department of Defense (DoD) enabled the Pentagon to be the sole interpreter of satellite photography. In its short history, NIMA has been responsible for a series of major intelligence disasters, including the failure to monitor Indian nuclear testing in 1998 and the bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999.

Worst of all, the Bush administration has referred to a “marriage” between the Pentagon and the CIA, which confirms that the key intelligence agency

is subordinate to the Pentagon. The CIA’s worst-case analysis on global issues is being used to justify the highest peacetime increases in defense spending since the increases of the Reagan administration, as well as the deployment of an untested national missile defense. In cases where CIA intelligence has not been helpful to policy, the Bush administration has turned to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, who created his own undersecretary of defense for intelligence and an Office of Special Plans to supply information to support the administration.

One of the CIA’s major missions, covert action, remains a dangerously unregulated activity. There are no political and ethical guidelines delineating when to engage in covert action. Previous covert actions have harmed U.S. interests, placing on the CIA payroll such criminals as Panama’s General Manuel Noriega, Guatemala’s Colonel Julio Alpírez, Peru’s intelligence chief Vladimiro Montesinos, and Chile’s General Manuel Contreras. Unlike previous presidents since Gerald Ford, President Bush has resorted to political assassination in Iraq and Afghanistan. In another instance, a CIA-operated Predator destroyed a car in Yemen in 2002, killing several alleged al Qaeda operatives and a naturalized American citizen.

In 1998, the United States and the CIA used the cover of the UN, particularly the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM), to conduct secret operations against Iraqi military communications in order to topple Saddam Hussein. Neither the UN nor UNSCOM had authorized the U.S. surveillance, which Baghdad used to limit activities of UN monitors. As a result, the inspection process was compromised, and the United States lost its most successful program to monitor Iraqi WMD.

### **Misuse of Intelligence to Go to War**

The president and the vice president were the most persistent supporters of the notion that Iraq was “reconstituting” its nuclear weapons program, the justification for going to war. Bush, Cheney, and national security adviser Rice consistently raised the “smoking gun that would appear as a mushroom cloud” in order to gain congressional and public support for war. Two months after the war, however, the Pentagon withdrew the task force it had sent to Iraq to

search for WMD, acknowledging that no chemical, biological, or nuclear materials had been found. After four months of intensive inspections and interviews, the Kay team conceded it found no illicit weapons.

The Bush administration was forced to concede its error on Iraq's nuclear capability because of an op-ed article from retired ambassador Joseph Wilson, who was sent to Africa in February 2002 to investigate reports of an Iraqi uranium purchase. Wilson determined that Niger would not sell uranium to Iraq and that, in any event, Niger could not do so without being detected. A four-star general from the Pentagon's joint staff reported similar findings to the military chain-of-command; the U.S. ambassador in Niger similarly informed the State Department. The Department of Energy and the Department of State, as well as most CIA analysts, never believed the fabricated charges regarding uranium purchases. (The Justice Department is currently examining charges that White House officials leaked the name Wilson's wife, an undercover CIA employee, in order to intimidate him.)

Nevertheless, the president, his national security adviser, the director of central intelligence, and the secretary of defense claimed to know nothing of Wilson's trip to Niger until after the State of the Union speech. Similarly, no policymaker claimed to have knowledge of the general's trip, and even the chairman of the joint chiefs denied receiving any briefing on the findings.

This campaign of deceit has serious consequences for U.S. interests:

- Distortion of evidence of Iraqi WMD makes it harder to gain international cooperation in the war against terrorism and the spread of WMD, which require international support. Information from foreign intelligence services is central to capturing al Qaeda terrorists and stopping strategic weapons programs in Iran and North Korea.
- Misuse of intelligence by the White House and the CIA weakens the key instrument in preventing terrorist acts and undermines U.S. security interests. The misuse of intelligence during the Vietnam War prolonged a brutal and costly war; ma-

nipulation of intelligence during Iran-contra led to political embarrassment for the Reagan administration. Any administration's use of intelligence for political ends is unacceptable.

- Finally, one of the worst possible scenarios for U.S. interests, and those of the international community, would be to learn that WMD had been looted from Iraqi weapon sites. As former White House spokesman Ari Fleischer noted during the Iraqi war: "[WMD] is what this war was about and is about. And we have high confidence that it will be found."

Fleischer also remarked, "I think the burden is on those people who think he didn't have weapons of mass destruction to tell the world where they are." Actually, the burden of proof is on the Bush administration, which insisted on going to war even while UN inspectors were doing their job—and obviously doing it well.

### **What Is To Be Done?**

What the CIA and the intelligence community should be, and what it should do, are more at issue today than at any time since the cold war. The intelligence community must provide an independent source of intelligence to decisionmakers. Currently, the Pentagon dominates the collection and analysis of sensitive technical intelligence, which means that the CIA is no longer a check on the military bureaucracy as it was during the Vietnam War and during the arms control decision-making process of the 1960s and 1970s. Since the Gulf War in 1991, the CIA has not played a major role in military intelligence affecting national security, which represents a threat to American civilian control of the military for policy purposes.

Retired General Brent Scowcroft, the head of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, has conducted a comprehensive review of the intelligence community, which favors transferring intelligence collection and budgetary control from the Pentagon to a new office that reports to the Director of Central Intelligence. This office would monitor such agencies as NSA, which conducts worldwide electronic eavesdropping; NRO, which designs spy satel-



lites; and NIMA, which analyzes satellite photography. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld opposes this transfer and uses the new position of undersecretary of defense for intelligence to preempt reform. A comprehensive investigation of all intelligence on Iraqi WMD, including the Niger documents, is needed to determine how the CIA handled the WMD problem and how the White House handled intelligence it received on sensitive weapons matters.

The CIA and other intelligence agencies must strengthen their intelligence-sharing links. Unfortunately, these agencies place too much emphasis on the compartmentalization of intelligence and the “need-to-know,” which pose obstacles to intelligence sharing. The Pearl Harbor and 9/11 failures might have been prevented with greater sharing of sensitive intelligence, which moves vertically within intelligence agencies instead of horizontally across them. The FBI and the CIA have never effectively shared information with each other or with such key agencies as the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Federal Aviation Agency, the Border Guards, and the Coast Guard. There is no guarantee that the CIA and FBI will share reporting on terrorism with the Department of Homeland Security, which has no capability for collecting or analyzing its own terrorism-related intelligence.

Even if the thirteen agencies and departments of the intelligence community were willing to share information, the obsolescent computer systems of many of these agencies would not allow it. The FBI computer system is particularly anachronistic, unable to store and recall basic data, because former director Louis Freeh believed that computer technology was overrated and too expensive. The State Department computer system is from another age, which means that American embassies issue visas to likely terrorists because consular officials cannot obtain up-to-date information. State Department computers, meanwhile, are not linked to the CIA, the FBI, or the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The inability to transfer data between these agencies contributed to the problems that allowed the 9/11 terrorists to enter the United States on multiple-entry visas.

The CIA’s clandestine operations and finished

intelligence production must be placed in separate agencies in order to prevent the future politicization of intelligence analysis. The CIA director should be responsible for clandestine collection of intelligence and covert action. A new director of national intelligence should be responsible for national intelligence estimates and all other intelligence analysis. This division is made necessary by the fundamental differences between the CIA’s two major functions. The Directorate of Operations is responsible for clandestine collection and covert action, relying on secrecy, hierarchy, and a strict need-to-know basis. It is part of the policy-making process. The Directorate of Intelligence, meanwhile, is devoted to analysis, which helps set the context for people who formulate policy; it should never be directly involved in making policy.

The chronic shortage of language experts in the intelligence community is the Achilles’ heel of all collection and analysis agencies. The FBI lacked the means to translate documents found in the wake of the murder of Rabbi Meir Kahane that could have provided significant intelligence on the role of al Qaeda and alerted the FBI and CIA to al Qaeda operatives in the United States. The National Security Agency lacked the means to translate important messages that were intercepted on the eve of 9/11.

### **The Need for *Glasnost***

CIA Director Tenet has reversed the modest steps toward greater openness that were instituted by his predecessors. At his confirmation hearings in 1997, Tenet emphasized that it was time for the agency to stop looking over its shoulder at its critics and to increase its clandestine role in support of national security. Accordingly, he withheld thousands of sensitive documents detailing covert operations in Chile that took place more than 25 years ago, despite demands for openness by the Clinton administration. Tenet argued that releasing these documents would compromise covert sources and methods; more likely, he feared that declassification would embarrass the United States by revealing the efforts of the Nixon administration to overturn a constitutionally elected government and by exposing the details of the murders of former Chilean foreign minister Orlando Letelier and his assistant, Ronnie Moffitt, on

the streets of Washington, D.C. in 1975. The CIA's intelligence failure regarding 9/11 and the politicization of intelligence regarding the Iraqi war indicate that Tenet is not capable of coordinating or arbitrating intelligence analysis throughout the community and will not carry tough and unpopular messages to the president and the policy community.

Tenet, in fact, has no control over the intelligence community, making no attempt to block the formation of a separate intelligence department in the Department of Defense, the Office of Special Plans, which carried its own separate messages to the White House. OSP cultivated its own sources among the Iraqi exile community and used these sources to collect disinformation that supported the Bush administration's drive toward war. At the State Department, Undersecretary of State for Arms Control John Bolton ran his own intelligence program, providing "white papers" on WMD that lacked support within the intelligence community and delivering testimony to congressional committees that falsified WMD programs in Syria and Cuba.

There is great urgency for congressional oversight and public knowledge of the CIA's performance. A House intelligence committee report in September 2003 finally determined that the CIA and the intelligence community used largely outdated, "circumstantial," and "fragmentary" information with "too many uncertainties" to conclude that Iraq had WMD and ties to al Qaeda. If the Senate and House intelligence committees were doing their job, then they could have made this determination a year ago, long before the Bush administration moved to use force against Iraq.

The late Senator Daniel Moynihan's 1995-96 commission on secrecy concluded that the American public must have a full accounting of U.S. covert operations. This would require a presidential executive order to extend openness to intelligence material, along with congressionally mandated limits on the intelligence community's prerogative to conceal information. Senator Richard Shelby, former chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, accused the CIA and the intelligence community of slowing the flow of information to the congressional investigation of 9/11.

Nevertheless, Shelby and Tenet cooperated in 2000 to orchestrate a bill that would have criminalized the disclosure of all "properly classified" information, thus creating an official secrets act. Fortunately, President Clinton vetoed the bill, choosing to protect the public's right to know rather than endorse the zeal of his CIA director. More recently, the Bush administration has blocked attempts to declassify intelligence materials and release information under the Freedom of Information Act.

Finally, the CIA should not be able to hide behind its secret budget and remain in violation of Article I, Section 9 of the Constitution, which demands a "regular Statement and Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of all public Money...from time to time." The intelligence community budget (now nearly \$40 billion) has been declassified only in 1997 and 1998, but the CIA budget (nearly \$4 billion) has never been declassified. The CIA maintains that the release of old budget figures would "identify trends in intelligence spending" that permit correlations "between specific spending figures and specific intelligence programs."

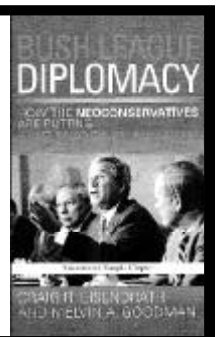
The intelligence community, particularly the CIA, faces a situation comparable to that of 55 years ago, when President Harry S. Truman created the CIA and the National Security Council. As in 1947-1948, the international environment has been recast and the threats have been altered; the institutions created to fight the Cold War must be redesigned. Without serious improvements to the intelligence community, we can expect more terrorist operations against the United States. The self-aggrandizing behavior of the FBI and CIA in refusing to investigate past intelligence failures, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the terror attacks of 9/11, does not augur well for U.S. national security.

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