

19. Sham Dunk: Cooking Intelligence for the President

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Let's review. It was bad intelligence that forced an unwitting president to invade Iraq, right? The sad fact that so many Americans believe this myth is eloquent testimony to the effectiveness of the White House spin machine. The intelligence was indeed bad – shaped that way by an administration determined to find a pretext to effect “regime change” in Iraq. Senior administration officials – first and foremost Vice President Dick Cheney – played a strong role in ensuring that the intelligence analysis was corrupt enough to justify,” *ex post facto*, the decision to make war on Iraq. It is not altogether clear how witting President George W. Bush was of all this, but there is strong evidence that he knew chapter and verse. Had he been mouse trapped into this “preemptive” war, one would expect some heads to roll. None have. And where is it, after all, that the buck is supposed to stop?

The intelligence-made-me-do-it myth has helped the Bush administration attenuate the acute embarrassment it experienced early last year when the *casus belli* became a *casus belly* laugh. When U.S. inspector David Kay, after a painstaking search to which almost a billion dollars – and many lives – were given, reported that there had been no “weapons of mass destruction” (WMD) in Iraq since 1991, someone had to take the fall. Elected was CIA director George Tenet, the backslapping fellow from Queens – always eager to do whatever might be necessary to play with the bigger kids. For those of you just in from Mars, the grave danger posed by Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction” was what President Bush cited as the *casus belli* for invading Iraq. It was only after Kay had the courage to tell the truth publicly that Bush fell back on the default rationale for the war – the need to export democracy, about which we are hearing so much lately.

Not surprisingly, the usual suspects in the mainstream media that played cheerleader for the war are now helping the president (and the media) escape blame. “Flawed intelligence that led the United States to invade Iraq was the fault of the US intelligence community,” explained the *Washington Times* last July 10, after regime loyalist Senator Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, released his committee’s findings.¹ Nine months later, after publication of similar findings² by a commission handpicked by the president, the *Washington Post’s* lead headline was “Data on Iraqi Arms Flawed, Panel Says.” The date was, appropriately, April Fools Day, 2005. In a word, they are playing us for fools. The remarkable thing is that most folks don’t seem able, or willing, to recognize that – or even to mind.

On May 1, 2005, a highly sensitive document published by *The Sunday Times* of London provided the smoking gun showing that President Bush had decided to make war on Iraq long before the National Intelligence Estimate was produced to conjure up “weapons of mass destruction” there and mislead Congress into granting authorization for war. The British document is classified “SECRET AND STRICTLY PERSONAL – U.K. EYES ONLY.” And small wonder. It contains an official account of Prime Minister Tony Blair’s meeting with top advisers on July 23, 2002, at which Sir Richard Dearlove, head of MI6 (the U.K. equivalent to the CIA) – simply “C” in the written document – reported on talks he had just held in Washington with top U.S. officials. (Blair has now acknowledged the authenticity of the document.)

As related in the document, Dearlove told Blair and the others that President Bush wanted to remove Saddam Hussein through military action, that this “was seen as inevitable,” and that the attack would be “justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD.” He continued: “...*but the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy*” (emphasis added), and tacked on yet

¹ *Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community’s Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq*, July 7, 2004.

² *Report of The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction*, March 31, 2005.

another telling comment: “There was little discussion in Washington of the aftermath after military action.” British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw concurred that Bush had made up his mind to take military action, but noted that finding justification would be challenging, for “the case was thin.” Straw pointed out that Saddam was not threatening his neighbors, and his WMD capability was less than that of Libya, North Korea, or Iran.

As head of MI6, Dearlove was CIA Director George Tenet’s British counterpart. We Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) have been saying since January 2003 that the two intelligence chiefs’ marching orders were to “fix” the intelligence “around the policy.” It was a no-brainer. Seldom, however, does one acquire documentary evidence that this – the unforgivable sin in intelligence analysis – was used by the most senior government leaders as a way to “justify” a prior decision for war. There is no word to describe our reaction to the fact that the two intelligence chiefs quietly acquiesced in the corruption of our profession on a matter of such consequence. “Outrage” doesn’t even come close.

Denial: not an Option

What has become painfully clear since the trauma of 9/11 is that most of our fellow citizens have felt an overriding need to believe that administration leaders are telling them the truth and to ignore all evidence to the contrary. Many Americans seem impervious to data showing that it was the administration that misled the country into this unprovoked war and that the “intelligence” was conjured up well after the White House decided to effect “regime change” in Iraq (or introduce democracy, if you favor the default rationale) by force of arms.

I have been asking myself why Americans find it so painful to delve deeper and let their judgment be influenced by the abundance of evidence showing this to be the case. Perhaps it is because most of us know that responsible citizenship means asking what might seem to be “impertinent” questions, ferreting out plausible answers, and then – if necessary – rectifying the situation and ensuring it does not happen again. Resistance, however, is strong. At work – in all of us to some degree – is the same convenient denial mechanism that immobilized so many otherwise conscientious German citizens during the 1930s, enabling Germany to launch its own unprovoked wars and curtail civil liberties at home. Taking action, or just finding one’s voice, entails risk; denial is the more instinctive, easier course.

So, fair warning. If you prefer denial, you may wish to page directly to the next chapter. No hard feelings.

Iraq: Prime Target From the Start

Was the intelligence bad? It was worse than bad; it was corrupt. But what most Americans do not realize is that the intelligence adduced had nothing to do with President Bush’s decision to make war on Iraq.

On January 30, 2001, just ten days after his inauguration, when George W. Bush presided over the first meeting of his National Security Council (NSC), he made it clear that toppling Saddam Hussein sat atop his to-do list, according to then Secretary of the Treasury Paul O’Neil sworn in earlier that day. (The Treasury Secretary is by statute a full member of the NSC.) O’Neil was thoroughly confused: why Saddam, why now, and why was this central to U.S. interests, he asked himself. The NSC discussion did not address these questions. Rather, at the invitation of then-National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, George Tenet showed a grainy overhead photo of a factory in Iraq that he said might produce either chemical or biological material for weapons. Might. There was nothing – in the photo, or in other intelligence sources – to support that conjecture, but it was just what Doctor Rice ordered. The discussion then turned from

unconfirmed intelligence, to which targets might be best to begin bombing in Iraq. Tenet had shown his mettle. The group was off and running; the planning began in earnest. And not only for war. O'Neil says that two days later the NSC reconvened to discuss Iraq, and that the deliberations included not only planning for war, but also for how and with whom to divide up Iraq's oil wealth.

Saddam and al-Qaeda

Seven months later, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 raised the question of possible Iraqi complicity, and on 9/12 White House terrorism adviser Richard Clarke experienced rather crass pressure directly from the president to implicate Saddam Hussein. To his credit, Clarke resisted. This did not prevent the White House from playing on the trauma suffered by the American people and falsely associating Saddam Hussein with it. Following Clarke's example, CIA analysts also held their ground for many months, insisting that there was no good evidence of such an association. Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, national security advisor to the first President Bush and chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board until just a few months ago, supported them by stating publicly that evidence of any such connection was "scant," while Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was saying it was "bulletproof." And President Bush said flat out a year after 9/11, "You cannot distinguish between al-Qaeda and Saddam when you talk about the war on terror." The 9/11 commission has now put the lie to those claims, but the PR campaign has been enduringly effective. According to a recent poll, most Americans have not been able to shake off the notion, so artfully fostered by the administration and the compliant media, that Saddam Hussein played some role in the events of 9/11. (This, even though the president himself, in a little noticed remark on September 17, 2003, admitted for the first and only time that there was "no evidence Hussein was involved" in the 9/11 attacks.)

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Unable to get enough intelligence analysts to go along with the carefully nurtured "noble lie" that Iraq played a role in 9/11, or even that operational ties existed between Iraq and al-Qaeda, the administration ordered up a separate genre of *faux* intelligence – this time it was "weapons of mass destruction." This was something of a challenge, for in the months before 9/11, Condoleezza Rice and then-Secretary of State Colin Powell had said publicly that Saddam Hussein posed no security threat. On February 24, 2001, for example, Powell said, "Saddam Hussein has not developed any significant capability with respect to weapons of mass destruction. He is unable to project conventional power against his neighbors." And just six weeks before 9/11, Condoleezza Rice told *CNN*: "...let's remember that his [Saddam's] country is divided, in effect. He does not control the northern part of his country. We are able to keep his arms from him. His military forces have not been rebuilt." Conveniently, the U.S. media pressed the delete button on these statements.

And, as is well known, after 9/11 "everything changed" – including apparently Saddam's inventory of "weapons of mass destruction." We were asked almost immediately to believe that WMD wafted down like manna from the heavens for a soft landing on the sands of Iraq. Just days after 9/11, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld began promoting the notion that Iraq might have weapons of mass destruction and that "within a week, or a month, Saddam could give his WMD to al-Qaeda." (This is an early articulation of the bogus "conjunction of terrorism and WMD," now immortalized in the minutes recording Richard Dearlove's report to Tony Blair ten months later, as the way the attack on Iraq would be "justified.") And it was not long before the agile Rice did a demi-pirouette of 180 degrees, saying, "Saddam was a danger in the region where the 9/11

threat emerged.” By the summer of 2002, the basic decision for war having long since been taken, something persuasive had to be conjured up to get Congress to authorize it. Weapons of mass *deception*, as one wag called them, were what the doctor ordered. The malleable Tenet followed orders to package them into a National Intelligence Estimate, which Colin Powell has admitted was prepared specifically for Congress.

What about the CIA? Sadly, well before the war, truth took a back seat to a felt need on the part of then-CIA Director George Tenet to snuggle up to power – to stay in good standing with a President, vice president, and secretary of defense, all of whom dwarfed Tenet in pedigree, insider experience, and power; and all hell-bent and determined to implement “regime change” in Iraq.

So What Really Happened?

In our various oral and written presentations on Iraq, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) colleagues and I took no delight in exposing what we saw as the corruption of intelligence analysis at CIA. Nothing would have pleased us more than to have been proven wrong. As it turned out, we did not know the half of it. Last year’s Senate Intelligence Committee report on prewar intelligence assessments on Iraq showed that the corruption went far deeper than we had thought. Both Senator Pat Roberts and the latest presidential panel have insisted, disingenuously, that no intelligence analysts complained about attempts to politicize their conclusions. What outsiders do not realize is that each of those analysts was accompanied by a “minder” from Tenet’s office, minders reminiscent of the ubiquitous Iraqi intelligence officials that Saddam Hussein insisted be present when scientists of his regime were interviewed by U.N. inspectors. The hapless Democrats on Roberts’ committee chose to acquiesce in his claim that political pressure played no role – this despite the colorful testimony by the CIA’s ombudsman that never in his 32-year career with the agency had he encountered such “hammering” on CIA analysts to reconsider their judgments on operational ties between Iraq and al-Qaeda. It is no surprise that the president’s own commission parroted the Roberts’ committee’s see-no-evil findings regarding politicization, even though the commission’s report is itself replete with examples of intelligence analysts feeling the political heat.

Last July, George Tenet resigned for family reasons the day before the Senate committee issued its scathing report. He left behind an agency on life support – an institution staffed by careerist managers and thoroughly demoralized analysts embarrassed at their own naiveté in having believed that the unvarnished truth was what they were expected to serve up to their masters in the agency and the White House.

The Senate report and now the presidential commission’s findings have performed masterfully in letting the White House off the hook. With copious instances of unconscionable intelligence missteps to draw from, it was, so to speak, a slam dunk – hardly a challenge to pin all the blame on intelligence. George had supplied the petard on which they hoisted him – and the intelligence community. The demonstrated malfeasance and misfeasance are a sharp blow to those of us who took pride in working in an agency where our mandate – and our orders – were to speak truth to power; an agency in which we enjoyed career protection from retribution from powerful policymakers who wished to play fast and loose with intelligence; an agency whose leaders in those days usually had the independence, integrity, and courage to face down those who would have us sell out in order to “justify” policies long since set in train.

Off-Line “Intelligence:” The Pentagon’s Office of Special Plans

The various committees and commissions assessing intelligence performance on Iraq avoided investigating the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans (OSP), whose *de facto* chain of command, from division chief to commander-in-chief, was a neocon dream come true: from Abram Shulsky to William Luti to Douglas Feith to Paul Wolfowitz to Donald Rumsfeld to Dick Cheney and George W. Bush. Journalist Seymour Hersh rightly calls this a stovepipe. It is also a self-licking ice cream cone. The lower end of this chain paid for and then stitched together bogus "intelligence" from the now thoroughly discredited Ahmed Chalabi and his Pentagon-financed Iraqi National Congress. Then Shulsky, Luti, and Feith cherry-picked "confirmation" from unevaluated reports on Iraq from other agencies, and served up neatly packaged, alarming sound-bites to "Scooter" Libby, Cheney's chief of staff. Whereupon Libby would scoot them right in to Cheney for him to use with the president, the Congress, and the media. But what about the CIA and the rest of our \$40 billion intelligence establishment? Tenet and his crew were seen as far too timid, not "forward leaning" enough. The attitude in the world of the OSP was a mixture of chutzpah and naiveté: after our cakewalk into Baghdad, let the intelligence analysts eat cake.

Since this was all done off-line, and not, strictly speaking, as part of the activities of the "intelligence community," it could conveniently be ignored in the various inquiries into intelligence performance on Iraq³ – effectively letting the Defense Department off the hook, while putting the spotlight on CIA and other intelligence professionals. Also ignored was the OSP-like operation⁴ of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office and its role in providing "intelligence," possibly including the famous forgeries – in which neocon operative Michael Ledeen reportedly played a key role – regarding Iraq's alleged attempts to acquire "yellowcake" uranium.

Even though quintessential Republican loyalist Pat Roberts characterized the activities of the Office of Special Plans as possibly "illegal," official responses to queries about the rogue OSP have ducked the issue. Some, like Senator John Kyl⁵ and Paul Wolfowitz, the former deputy secretary of defense, maintain that the OSP provided a valuable service by exercising initiative and challenging the assumptions of the intelligence community. Cherry-picking intelligence, according to them, is simply taking a hard look at the intelligence community's analysis and "going against the grain" in an effort to think creatively and critically about conclusions made by analysts. The problem is that the OSP was pushing the same *wrong* conclusion vis-à-vis the danger posed by Iraq that those most politicized within the intelligence community were pushing. The OSP – like Tenet and Co. – ignored the analysts' conclusions in favor of feeding the administration what it wanted to hear. Call it "thinking outside the box" if you like; it was also acting out of bounds.

The other response from the Pentagon is equally disingenuous. Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Feith have argued that OSP activity was merely an effort by two individuals to assist the Department of Defense in reviewing intelligence on Iraq in order to "assist [Feith] in developing policy recommendations." There is, of course, a multi-billion dollar Defense Intelligence Agency with the charter to do just that, but, to their credit, DIA analysts could not always be counted on to cook the intelligence to the Rumsfeld/Wolfowitz/Feith recipe. And, while Rumsfeld keeps repeating that the OSP assisted Feith in "developing policy recommendations," it is no secret that

³ The Senate Intelligence Committee's investigation into the Iraq intelligence debacle was supposed to look into the use/misuse of intelligence by administration officials in their public statements. Senator Roberts was successful in postponing that part of the inquiry until after the November 2004 election, in return for a promise to pursue it as "phase 2" of the committee's investigation. In March 2005 Roberts dismissed the need for "phase 2," but when Democrats on the committee objected to his renegeing, he expressed reluctant willingness to go forward. "Phase 2" was also supposed to look into the role of the Office of Special Plans. Time will tell.

⁴ Reported on by Robert Dreyfuss in the July 7, 2003, issue of *The Nation* and a July 17, 2003, piece in *The Guardian* (U.K.) by Julian Borger.

⁵ "DOD's Role in Pre-War Iraq Intelligence: Setting the Record Straight," remarks for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 3, 2004.

the policy – “regime change” by force in Iraq – came well before the “intelligence.” The OSP simply worked hard to provide the nation’s leadership with “evidence” that such a policy should be pursued. Seymour Hersh and others⁶ have reported credibly on this effort by the OSP to discredit the analysis of the intelligence community and to push its own, much more sinister picture of Iraq’s capabilities and intentions.

Having to contend with Feith-based “intelligence” from the OSP and its powerful patrons greatly increased political pressure on intelligence analysts throughout the community to come up with conclusions that would “justify” policy decisions. Worst of all, George Tenet lacked the courage to stand up to Feith, Wolfowitz, and Rumsfeld. Neither would Porter Goss, Tenet’s successor, have the backbone to go to the mat with Rumsfeld (or his own patron, Dick Cheney) on the role of the OSP, as was made clear when this whole question arose during Goss’s nomination hearings. It was clear, for that matter, that Goss would not go to the mat over anything else either.

The Cancer of Careerism

Within the intelligence community, the ethos in which fearless intelligence analysis prospered began to evaporate big-time in 1981, when CIA Director William Casey and his protégé Robert Gates in effect institutionalized the politicization of intelligence analysis. Casey saw a Russian under every rock and behind every “terrorist,” and summarily dismissed the idea that the Soviet Union could ever change. Gates, a former analyst of Soviet affairs, knew better, but he quickly learned that parroting Casey’s nonsense was a super-quick way to climb the career ladder. Sadly, many joined the climbers, but not all. Later, as CIA director, Gates adhered closely to the example of his avuncular patron Casey. In an unguarded moment on March 15, 1995, Gates admitted to *Washington Post* reporter Walter Pincus that he had watched Casey on “issue after issue sit in meetings and present intelligence framed in terms of the policy he wanted pursued.”

In the early eighties, after Casey became director, many bright analysts quit rather than take part in cooking intelligence-to-go. In contrast, those inspired by Gates’ example followed suit and saw their careers prosper. By the mid-nineties senior and mid-level CIA managers had learned well how to play the career-enhancing political game. So it came as no surprise that director John Deutch (1995–96) encountered little opposition when he decided to cede the agency’s world-class imagery analysis capability – lock, stock, and barrel – to the Department of Defense. True, all of Deutch’s line deputies sent him a memo whimpering their chagrin over his giving away this essential tool of intelligence analysis. Only his statutory Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, George Tenet, thought it a great idea. (Tenet set the tone even in those days, by repeatedly referring to his boss – often in his presence – as “the great John Deutch.”)

Deutch went ahead and gave imagery analysis away, apparently out of a desire to ingratiate himself with senior Pentagon officials. (No other explanation makes sense. He had made no secret of his ambition to succeed his good friend and former colleague William Perry as soon as the latter stepped down as secretary of defense.) But still more shameless was Deutch’s order to agency subordinates to help the Pentagon cover up exposures to chemicals that accounted, at least in part, for the illnesses of tens of thousands of Gulf-War veterans. Sadly, with over a decade’s worth of the go-along-to-get-along ethos having set in among CIA managers, Deutch could blithely disregard the whimpers, calculating (correctly) that the whimperers would quietly acquiesce.

⁶ Cf. Hersh, “Selective Intelligence,” *The New Yorker*, May 12, 2003, online; Borger, Julian, “The Spies Who Pushed for War,” *The Guardian* (U.K.), July 17, 2003, online; Dreyfuss, Robert, and Vest, Jason, “The Lie Factory,” *Mother Jones*, January/February, 2004, online; *Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community’s Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq*, July 7, 2004, pp. 361–636; and Levin, Senator Carl, *Report of an Inquiry into the Alternative Analysis of the Issue of an Iraq-al Qaeda Relationship*, October 21, 2004.

Corruption is contagious and has a way of perpetuating itself. What we are seeing today is largely the result of senior management's penchant for identifying and promoting compliant careerists. Deutch did not stay long enough to push this trend much farther; he did not have to. By then functionaries like John McLaughlin, who was Tenet's deputy director, and whose meteoric rise began with Gates, had reached very senior positions. In September 2002, when Tenet and McLaughlin were asked to cook to Cheney's recipe a National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's putative "weapons of mass destructive," they were able to tap a number of willing senior co-conspirators, and what emerged was by far the worst NIE ever produced by the U.S. intelligence community. Several of the key managers of that estimate were originally handpicked by Gates for managerial positions. These include not only McLaughlin but also National Intelligence Officer Larry Gershwin, who gave a pass to the infamous "Curveball" – the main source of the "intelligence" on Iraq's biological weapons program – and Alan Foley who led those who mishandled analysis of the celebrated (but non-nuclear-related) aluminum tubes headed for Iraq and the forged documents about Iraqi efforts to acquire uranium from Niger. More recently, a rising star who grew up in this ambience explained to me, "We were not politicized; we were just leaning forward, given White House concern over Iraq." Far from being apologetic, he actually seemed to have persuaded himself that "leaning forward" is not politicization!

Leaning Forward...or Backward

More recently, McLaughlin and Tenet have been accused by senior CIA officers of the operations directorate of suppressing critical information that threw strong doubt on the reliability of Curveball and his "biological weapons trailers." That highly dubious information was peddled by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell – with artists' renderings on the big screen, no less – at the U.N. on February 5, 2003.

If the accusers are telling the truth, what could McLaughlin and Tenet have been thinking in failing to warn Powell? Clearly, someone should ask them – under oath. Perhaps it was what intelligence officers call "plausible denial," one of the tricks of the trade to protect senior officials like Powell. (He could not be accused of lying about what he didn't know.) But could CIA's top two officials have thought the truth would not eventually get out? It seems likely that their thinking went something like this: When Saddam falls and the Iraqis greet our invading forces with open arms and cut flowers, who at that victorious point will be so picayune as to pick on the intelligence community for inaccuracies like the absence of the "biological weapons trailers?" I don't know where they got the part about the open arms and cut flowers – perhaps it came from the Office of Special Plans.

What Casey Begat

Casey begat Gates. And Gates begat not only John McLaughlin but also many others now at senior levels of the agency – notably the malleable John Helgerson, CIA's inspector general. No one who worked with these three functionaries for very long was surprised when Helgerson acquiesced last summer in the suppression of his congressionally mandated report on intelligence and 9/11. In December 2002 Helgerson was directed by Congress to determine "whether and to what extent personnel at all levels should be held accountable" for mistakes that contributed to the failure to prevent the attacks on 9/11. After 18 months, his report was finally ready in the spring of 2004, and it identified individual officers by name. But many of those officers had records of the umpteen warnings they had provided the White House before 9/11, not to mention painful memories of the frustration they felt when they and Richard Clarke were ignored. It

would have been far too dangerous to risk letting that dirty linen hang out on the line with the approach of the November election.

To his credit, knowing the report was ready, House Intelligence Committee Chairman Peter Hoekstra (R-Michigan) asked Helgerson to release it to the committee. In an August 31, 2004, letter, Helgerson told Hoekstra that then-Acting Director John McLaughlin had broken with usual practice and told him not to distribute his report. The tenacious chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Pat Roberts, called the postponement “uncommon but not abnormal.” His meaning is clearer than it might seem. Indeed, it is not abnormal. The whole episode was just further confirmation that Roberts takes his orders from the White House, that checks and balances are out the window, and that people like Helgerson can still be counted upon to play along to get along. Helgerson’s report has still not been released. And it may be some time before it is, for the CIA Inspector General’s job jar is full to overflowing. Managing inquiries into alleged CIA involvement in torture and “extraordinary renderings,” and now into *L’Affaire Curveball* as well, Helgerson is a busy man. But don’t hold your breath; these things take time.

Defining Politicization

An unusually illustrative first-hand example of politicization of intelligence became available in relation to the recent nomination of former Under Secretary of State John Bolton to be U.S. ambassador to the U.N., with the declassification and release to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of email exchanges involving Bolton’s office. In one of those emails, obtained in April by *The New York Times*, Bolton’s principal aide, Frederick Fleitz proudly told his boss that he had instructed State Department intelligence analyst Christian Westermann on whose prerogative it properly is to interpret intelligence. Said Fleitz (who we now know was a CIA analyst on loan to Bolton), “I explained to Christian that it was a *political judgment as to how to interpret* this data [on Cuba’s biological warfare capability], and the intelligence community should do as we asked” (emphasis mine).

Were it not for the numbing experience of the past four years, we intelligence professionals, practicing and retired, would be astonished at the claim that how to interpret intelligence data is a political judgment. But this is also the era of the Rumsfeld maxim: “Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence,” and the Cheney corollary: “If you build it, they will come” – meaning that intelligence analysts will come around to any case that top administration officials may build. All it takes is a few personal visits to CIA headquarters and a little arm-twisting, and the analysts will be happy to conjure up whatever “evidence” may be needed to support Chenevogue warnings that “they” – the Iraqis, the Iranians, it doesn’t matter – have “reconstituted” their nuclear weapons development program.

George Tenet, however docile, could not have managed the cave-in on Iraq all by himself. Sadly, he found willing collaborators in the generation of CIA managers who bubbled to the top under Casey and Gates. In other words, Tenet was the “beneficiary” of a generation of malleable managers who prospered under CIA’s promotion policies starting in the early eighties.

Why dwell on Gates? Because, a careerist in both senses of the word, he bears the lion’s share of responsibility for institutionalizing the corruption of intelligence analysis. It began big-time when he was chief of the analysis directorate under Casey. Since this was well known in intelligence circles in late 1991 when President George H. W. Bush nominated Gates to be CIA director, all hell broke loose among the rank and file. Former Soviet division chief Mel Goodman had the courage to step forward to give the Senate Intelligence Committee chapter and verse on how Gates had shaped intelligence analysis to suit his masters and his career. What followed was an even more intense controversy than that precipitated in April by the equally courageous Carl Ford, former director of intelligence at the State Department, who spoke out strongly and knowledgeably against John Bolton’s attempts to skew intelligence to his own purposes.

At the hearings on Gates, Goodman was joined at once by a long line of colleague analysts who felt strongly enough about their chosen profession to put their own careers at risk by testifying against Gates' nomination. They were so many and so persuasive that, for a time, it appeared they had won the day. But the fix was in. With a powerful assist from George Tenet, then staff director of the Senate Intelligence Committee, members approved the nomination. Even so, 31 senators found the evidence against Gates so persuasive that, in an unprecedented move, they voted against him when the nomination came to the floor.

"Centrifuge/Subterfuge Joe"

A corrupted organization also breeds people like "centrifuge/subterfuge Joe." Although it was clear to us even before we created VIPS in January 2003 that the intelligence on Iraq was being cooked to the recipe of policy, not until the Senate report of July 2004 did we learn that the recipe included outright lies. We had heard of "Joe," the nuclear weapons analyst in CIA's Center for Weapons Intelligence and Arms Control, and had learned that his agenda was to "prove" that the infamous aluminum tubes sought by Iraq were to be used for developing nuclear weapons. We did not know that he and his CIA associates deliberately cooked the data – including that from rotor testing ironically called "spin tests."

"Who could have believed that about our intelligence community, that the system could be so dishonest," wondered the normally soft-spoken David Albright, a widely respected authority on Iraq's moribund nuclear program. We in VIPS share his wonderment. I am appalled – and angry. You give 27 years of your professional life to an institution whose main mission – to get at the truth – you are convinced is essential for orderly policy making, and then you find it has been corrupted. You realize that your former colleagues lacked the moral courage to rebuff efforts to enlist them as accomplices in gross deception – deception that involved hoodwinking our elected representatives in Congress into giving their blessing to an unnecessary war. Even Republican stalwart Senator Pat Roberts has said that, had Congress known before the vote for war what his committee has since discovered, "I doubt if the votes would have been there."

Catering to "The Powers That Be"

It turns out that only one U.S. analyst had met with the Iraqi defector appropriately codenamed "Curveball" – the sole source of the scary fairy tale about alleged mobile biological weapons factories. This analyst, in an email to the deputy director of CIA's Task Force on Weapons of Mass Destruction, raised strong doubts regarding Curveball's reliability before Colin Powell highlighted his claims at the United Nations on Feb. 5, 2003.

I became almost physically ill reading the cynical response from the deputy director of the Task Force: "As I said last night, let's keep in mind the fact that this war's going to happen regardless of what Curveball said or didn't say, and the powers that be probably aren't terribly interested in whether Curveball knows what he's talking about."

This brought to consciousness a painful flashback to early August 1964. My colleague analysts working on Vietnam knew that reports of a second attack on U.S. destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf were spurious, but were prevented from reporting that in the next morning's publication. The director of current intelligence "explained" that President Johnson had decided to use the non-incident as a pretext to escalate the war in Vietnam and added, "We do not want to wear out our welcome at the White House." So this kind of politicization is not without precedent – and not without similarly woeful consequences. Still, in those days it was the exception, rather than the rule.

George Tenet's rhetoric about "truth" and "honesty" in his valedictory last July 2004 has a distinctly Orwellian ring. Worse still, apparently "Centrifuge/Subterfuge Joe," the above-mentioned deputy director, and their co-conspirators get off scot-free. Senator Roberts has stressed, "It is very important that we quit looking in the rearview mirror and affixing blame and, you know, pointing fingers." And, besides, they were only doing what they knew Roberts' patrons in the White House wanted. And, if they were cashiered, would they sing? John McLaughlin, who became acting director when Tenet left, willingly played his part. He told the press that he saw no need to dismiss anyone as a result of what he said were honest, limited mistakes. But what about the dishonest ones? It is enough to make one wonder what it would take to get fired. Tell the truth?

Forecast: Mushroom Cloudy

As we have seen, the standard line on why things went so wrong is that administration officials were taken in by intelligence on Iraq that turned out to be wrong. Senator Roberts put it concisely when he spoke with reporters in March: "If you ask any member of the administration, 'why did you make that declarative statement?' ...basically, the bottom line is they believed the intelligence and the intelligence was wrong."

Again, you would not know it from our domesticated mainstream press, but this does not stand up to close scrutiny. Take the ubiquitous mushroom clouds that, we were warned, could come to us as the "first evidence" that Iraq had a nuclear weapon. On October 7, 2002, the president pulled out all stops in a major speech in Cincinnati. Associating Saddam Hussein with 9/11 and claiming that he would be "eager" to use a nuclear weapon against us, Bush warned, "Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof – the smoking gun – that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud." Condoleezza Rice parroted that line the next day, and the Pentagon spokeswoman did likewise on October 9. It was no coincidence that Congress voted on October 10 and 11 to authorize war.

Those of us who worked with former CIA deputy director John McLaughlin know that he is an amateur magician. In the fall of 2002 he had a chance to learn from a real pro. For it was Vice President Dick Cheney who conjured up the mushroom clouds. Indeed, it was Cheney, not Saddam Hussein, who "reconstituted" Iraq's nuclear weapons development; and he did it out of thin air.

There was nothing but forgery, fallacy, and fairy tales to support key assertions in Cheney's speech of August 26, 2002. The most successful midwife of fairy tales, Ahmed Chalabi, later bragged about facilitating the spurious claims of WMD in Iraq. He said, "Saddam is gone.... What was said before is not important.... We are heroes in error."

Cheney and the Son-in-Law

Cheney's August 26 address provided the recipe for how the intelligence was to be cooked in September. The speech, in effect, provided the terms of reference and conclusions for a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) commissioned at the behest of Congress a few weeks later and completed on October 1, 2002. That NIE, nick-named "The Whore of Babylon," has been (aptly) criticized as one of the worst ever prepared by U.S. intelligence. But it did the job for which it was produced; i.e., to deceive Congress out of its constitutional prerogative to declare or otherwise authorize war. During September 2002, the intelligence community dutifully conjured up evidence to support Cheney's alarmist stance. The vice president claimed:

...We now know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. Among other sources, we've gotten this from the firsthand testimony of defectors – including Saddam's own son-

in-law, who was subsequently murdered at Saddam's direction. Many of us are convinced that Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon.

That statement was highly misleading. Saddam's son-in-law, Hussein Kamel, had been in charge of Iraq's nuclear, chemical, biological, and missile programs before he defected in 1995. But what Kamel told us then was that *all that weaponry had been destroyed* at his command in the summer of 1991. And everything *else* he told us checked out, including particularly valuable information on Iraq's earlier biological weapons programs. Now we know he was telling us the truth on the 1991 destruction of weapons, as well.

Many in the intelligence community knew of Cheney's playing fast and loose with the evidence and the administration's campaign to deceive Congress. Most just held their noses; sadly, no one spoke out.

Cheney's misleading reference to Kamel calls to mind the unbridled chutzpah in vogue during the march to war. This was no innocent mistake. Even if the vice president's staff had neglected to show him the debriefing report on Kamel, the full story became public well before the invasion of Iraq. A veteran reporter for *Newsweek* obtained the transcript of the debriefing in which Kamel said bluntly, "All weapons – biological, chemical, missile, nuclear – were destroyed." *Newsweek* broke the story on February 24, 2003, more than three weeks before the war began. But this news struck a discordant note amid the cheerleading for war, and the mainstream media suppressed it. Even now that Kamel's assertion has been proven correct, the press has not corrected the record.

The NIE: First None; Then Cooked

That there was no National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" before Cheney's preemptive speech of August 26, 2002, speaks volumes. The last thing wanted by the policymakers running the show from the Pentagon and the Office of the Vice President was an intelligence estimate that might complicate their plans for "regime change" in Iraq. Since it was abundantly clear that no estimate was wanted, none was scheduled. This was clearly the course George Tenet preferred, and his lieutenants were happy to acquiesce. It got them all off the horns of a distasteful dilemma – namely, having to choose between commissioning an honest estimate that would inevitably call into serious question the White House/Pentagon ostensible rationale for war on Iraq, or ensuring that an estimate was cooked to the recipe of policy – that is, massaged to justify an earlier decision for war.

As noted above, forcing "regime change" in Iraq – intelligence or no, legal or no – was a top priority from day one of the George W. Bush administration. The attacks of 9/11 were a fillip to military planning to invade Iraq after the brief sideshow in Afghanistan. On August 29, 2002, after three months of war exercises conducted by the Pentagon, President Bush approved "Iraq goals, objectives and strategy," and the juggernaut started rolling in earnest. We know this from a Pentagon document titled "Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Strategic Lessons Learned," a report prepared in August 2003 for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and stamped SECRET. The report was obtained by the *Washington Times* in late summer 2003, and Rowan Scarborough – no liberal he – wrote the story. Remarkably, it got virtually no play in other media.

Until September 2002, George Tenet was able to keep his head way down, in the process abnegating his responsibility as principal intelligence adviser to the president. Tenet probably calculated (by all indications correctly) that the president would be just as pleased not to have complications introduced after he had already decided for war and set military deployments in motion. And so the director of central intelligence, precisely at a time when he should have been leaning hard on intelligence analysts throughout the community to prepare an objective estimate,

danced away from doing one until it was forced on him. He then made sure that the estimate's findings were the kind that would be welcome in the White House and Pentagon.

In mid-September 2002, as senior officials began making their case for war, it occurred to them that they needed to do what George H. W. Bush did before the first Gulf War; i.e., seek the endorsement of Congress. Senator Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) alerted Senator Bob Graham (D-Fla.), then-chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, to the fact that no National Intelligence Estimate had been written. Awakened from his sleep, watchdog Graham wrote to Tenet requesting an NIE. Tenet asked the White House, and got the go-ahead – on one condition: that the estimate's judgments had to parallel those in Cheney's August speech. To his discredit, Tenet saluted and immediately chose a trusted aide, Robert Walpole, to chair the estimate and do the necessary. Walpole had just the pedigree. In 1998 he had won Donald Rumsfeld's favor by revising an earlier estimate to exaggerate the strategic threat from countries such as North Korea. The key conclusions (since proven far too alarmist) of that National Intelligence Estimate met Rumsfeld's immediate needs quite nicely, greasing the skids for early deployment of a multi-billion-dollar, unproven antiballistic missile system.

Aiming to Please

Walpole came through again in September 2002 – this time on Iraq, and in barely three weeks (such estimates normally take several months). An honest National Intelligence Estimate on "Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction" would not have borne that title, but rather would have concluded that there was no persuasive evidence of "continuing programs." But that, of course, was not the answer desired by those who had already decided on war. Thus, a much more ominous prospect was portrayed, including the "high-confidence" (but erroneous) judgments that Iraq had chemical and biological weapons and was reconstituting its program to develop nuclear weapons.

Although those widely publicized judgments differed sharply with the statements of senior intelligence and policy officials the year before (a highly curious fact that U.S. media ignored), they dovetailed nicely with Cheney's claims. In an apologia released a year later by the Central Intelligence Agency, Stuart Cohen, another Gates protégé and Walpole's immediate boss as acting head of the National Intelligence Council, contended that the writers were "on solid ground" in how they reached their judgments; and, defying credulity, some of those involved still make that argument.

Without Fear or Favor...or With Lots of Both?

Sorry to say, CIA analysis can no longer be assumed to be honest – to be aimed at getting as close to the truth as one can humanly get. Now, I can sense some of you readers smirking. I can only tell you – believe it or not – that truth *was* the currency of analysis in the CIA in which I was proud to serve. But that was B.C. (before Casey).

Aberrations like the Tonkin Gulf cave-in notwithstanding, the analysis directorate before Casey was widely known as a place in Washington where one could normally go and expect a straight answer unencumbered by any political agenda. And we were hard into some very controversial – often critical – national security issues. It boggles my mind how any president, and particularly one whose father headed the CIA, could expect to be able to make informed judgments on national-security and foreign-policy issues without the ability to get candid, straightforward intelligence analysis.

In 2004, the vice president insisted on having "some additional, considerable period of time to look [for weapons of mass destruction] in all the cubbyholes and ammo dumps...where you'd

expect to find something like that.” (“Cubbyholes?” The vice president’s very vocabulary betrays a *tabula rasa* on military matters.) Speaking at Georgetown University in 2004, George Tenet put it this way: “Why haven’t we found the weapons? I have told you the search must continue and it will be difficult.” Difficult indeed. But now, the expensive, prolonged search has found nothing. Mistake or willful deception, the jig is up. Tenet, mercifully, has gone away – at least until he starts pushing his book. (No wish to steal his thunder, but a good source tells me Tenet’s book says, “Condi made me do it.”)

The alarming thing is that Cheney is now looking in the cubbyholes of Iran.

Blaming (and “Fixing”) the Intelligence Community

The current administration approach is, as we’ve seen, to place all blame on the intelligence community – and then to insist upon bureaucratic “reform.” But the problem is not organizational diagrams; it is lack of integrity and professionalism. Lt. Gen. William Odom, one of the country’s most highly respected and senior intelligence officers, now retired, put a useful perspective on last summer’s politically driven rush into wholesale intelligence reform. In a *Washington Post* op-ed on August 1, 2004, he was typically direct in saying, “No organizational design will compensate for incompetent incumbents.” I believe he would be the first to agree that the adjectives “careerist and sycophantic” should be added to “incompetent,” for incompetence often is simply the handmaiden of those noxious traits. For the surest way to produce incompetent incumbents is by promoting folks more interested in career advancement than in performing professionally and speaking truth to power. And a major part of the problem is the failure of the 9/11 commission and Congress to hold accountable those whose misfeasance or malfeasance led to the disasters of 9/11 and Iraq.

Now, more than two years and tens of thousands of lives after the invasion of Iraq, I marvel at the ease with which the White House has succeeded in getting Congress to scapegoat the intelligence community. All it takes is “a few good men” – like Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman (and former Marine) Pat Roberts, living out the Marine Corps motto, *Semper Fi* – always faithful.

But faithful to what? Faithful, first and foremost, to the party, in what – let us be frank – has become to all intents and purposes a one-party state. That pejorative label, you may recall, is what we used to pin on the dictatorship in the U.S.S.R., where there were no meaningful checks and balances. There has been a dangerous slide in that direction in the U.S.

What is required is character and integrity, not a re-jiggered organizational chart. Those who sit atop the intelligence community need to have the courage to tell it like it is – even if that means telling the president his so-called “neoconservative” tailors have sold him the kind of suit that makes him a naked mockery (wardrobe by the imaginative designer, Ahmed Chalabi).

Enter John Negroponte

A major step in intelligence “reform” came on February 17, 2005, with the president’s announcement that he had selected John Negroponte for the newly created post of director of national intelligence and his subsequent confirmation in the post by the Senate on April 21.

Is Negroponte up to being a fearless director of national intelligence? Will he be able to overcome decades of being a super-loyal “team player,” implementing whatever policies the White House thrust upon him? Is there a chance he will summon the independence to speak to the president without fear or favor – the way we were able to do in the sixties and seventies?

It is, of course, too early to tell. Suffice it to say at this point that there is little in his recent government service to suggest he will buck his superiors, even when he knows they are wrong –

or even when he is aware that the course they have set skirts the constitutional prerogatives of the elected representatives of the American people in Congress. Will he tell the president the truth, even when the truth makes it clear that administration policy is failing – as in Iraq? We shall have to wait and see.

The supreme irony is that President Bush seems blissfully unaware that the corruption that Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and he have fostered in the intelligence community – politicization that seems certain to continue, intelligence community reform or no – has frittered away an indispensable resource for the orderly making of foreign policy. Institutional politicization at the CIA is now virtually complete. It pains me to see how many senior careerists at CIA and elsewhere have made a career (literally) of telling senior officials in the White House and elsewhere what they think the White House wants to hear.

If that is the template John Negroponte chooses, and if he contents himself with redrawing organizational diagrams, the security of our country is in even greater danger. If, on the other hand, Negroponte intends to ensure that he and his troops speak truth to power – despite the inevitable pressure on them to trim their analytical sails to existing policy – he has his work cut out for him. At CIA, at least, he will have to cashier many careerists at upper management levels and find folks with integrity and courage to move into senior positions. And he will have to prove to them that he is serious. The institutionalization of politicization over the last two dozen years has so traumatized the troops that the burden of proof will lie with Negroponte.

His prior career and lack of experience in managing a large organization offer slim hope that he is up to that task. Let us remember, though, that even at the bottom of Pandora's box lies hope. Negroponte is likely to be faced immediately with strong challenges. From what can be discerned of Bush's intentions vis-à-vis Iran, for example, it appears altogether likely that the challenge of speaking truth on this issue will be Negroponte's first acid test. Let us hope that a combination of integrity and self-interest will win the day. Awareness of what happened to the hapless George Tenet may give Negroponte pause before saluting smartly and marching off in his footsteps. One can only hope that Negroponte will forget that Tenet earned a Medal of Freedom for his servility.

Show Me Your Company...

Negroponte is best known to most of us as the ambassador to Honduras with the uncanny ability to ignore human rights abuses so as not to endanger congressional support for the attempt to overthrow the duly elected government of Nicaragua in the mid-1980s. His job was to hold up the Central-American end of the Reagan administration's support for the Contra counterrevolutionaries, keeping Congress in the dark when that was deemed necessary.

Stateside, Negroponte's opposite number was Elliot Abrams, then assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, whose influence has recently grown by leaps and bounds in the George W. Bush administration. Convicted in October 1991 for lying to Congress about illegal support for the Contras, Abrams was pardoned, along with former Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger (also charged with lying to Congress), former National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane, and three CIA operatives. Indeed, their pardons came *cum laude*, with President George H. W. Bush stressing that "the common denominator of their motivation...was patriotism." Such "patriotism" has reached a new pinnacle in his son's administration, as a supine Congress no longer seems to care very much about being misled.

The younger President Bush completed Elliot Abrams' rehabilitation in December 2002 by bringing him back to be his senior adviser for the Middle East, a position for which the self-described neoconservative would not have to seek congressional confirmation. Immediately, his influence with the president was strongly felt in the shaping and implementation of policy in the Middle East, especially on the Israel-Palestine issue and Iraq. In January of this year, the president made him his Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs and Deputy National

Security Advisor for Global Democracy Strategy, where he can be counted on to overshadow – and outmaneuver – his boss, the more mild-mannered Stephen Hadley.

It is a safe bet Abrams had a hand in recruiting his erstwhile partner-in-crime, so to speak, for director of national intelligence. There is little doubt, in my opinion, that he passed Negroponte's name around among neoconservative colleagues to secure their approval. On the day Negroponte was nominated, Fox News Channel commentator Charles Krauthammer granted him a dubious distinction. Krauthammer noted that Negroponte "was ambassador to Honduras during the Contra War...and he didn't end up in jail, which is a pretty good attribute for him. A lot of others practically did."

Organizational "Reform" Won't Cut It

No amount of reform, however – not even the promotion of pedigreed loyalists from the Reagan era – can remedy what is essentially the root of the problem. Over and over again we hear the plaintive plea for better information sharing among the various intelligence agencies – and for a single individual, now Negroponte, to make it happen. We keep hearing this plea because it furthers the notion that the poor intelligence on Iraq was essentially an "accident," that it was a function of bad intelligence work, and is to be remedied by intelligence reform. The truth is that the main problem was *corrupted* intelligence work, caused not by a broken system but by men and women with broken character, most of whom knew exactly what they were doing.

The NIE on Iraq, for instance, was out-and-out dishonest. It provided the cover story for a war launched for a twin purpose: (1) to gain an enduring strategic foothold in the oil-rich Middle East, and (2) to eliminate any possible threat to Israeli dominance of the region. While these aims are generally consistent with longstanding American policy objectives, no previous U.S. administration thought it acceptable to use war to achieve them.

And, on Occasion, Candor Slips Through

These, of course, were not the reasons given to justify placing U.S. troops in harm's way, but even the most circumspect senior officials have had unguarded moments of candor. For example, when asked in May 2003 why North Korea was being treated differently from Iraq, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz responded, "Let's look at it simply.... [Iraq] swims on a sea of oil." Basking in the glory of "Mission Accomplished" shortly after Baghdad had been taken, he also admitted that the Bush administration had focused on weapons of mass destruction to justify war on Iraq "for bureaucratic reasons." It was, he added, "the one reason everyone could agree on" – meaning, of course, the one that could successfully sell the war to Congress and the American people. And in another moment of unusual candor – this one before the war – Philip Zelikow, a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board from 2001 to 2003, more recently executive director of the 9/11 commission, and now a senior State Department official, discounted any threat from Iraq to the U.S. Instead, Zelikow pointed to the danger that Iraq posed to Israel as "the unstated threat – a threat that dare not speak its name...because it is not a popular sell." In this connection, General Brent Scowcroft recently noted that the president has in fact been "mesmerized" by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and that Sharon has Bush "wound around his little finger."

The (real) twin purpose for the war leaps out of neoconservative literature and was widely understood from Canada to Europe to Australia. Australian intelligence, for example, boldly told the government in Canberra that the focus on weapons of mass destruction was a red herring to divert attention from the "more important reasons" behind the neoconservatives' determination to launch this war of choice. It strains credulity to suppose that what was clear in Canberra could

have escaped the attention of senior intelligence officials in America. They knew it all too well. And, sadly, they proved all too eager to serve up to their masters what was clearly wanted – an ostensible *casus belli*: “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq. Sycophancy has no place in intelligence work, and certainly not in matters of war and peace.

It bears repeating that the unforgivable sin in intelligence analysis is telling the policymaker what he/she wants to hear – justifying with cooked “intelligence” what they have already decided to do. And that, in a nutshell, is what happened on Iraq. CIA credibility has taken a major hit, and it is far from certain that the agency can recover. It used to be that, in such circumstances, one would look to Congress to conduct an investigation. But the highly partisan intelligence committees of Congress have given new meaning to the word “oversight.”

Character Counts

It is important to understand, as we follow the continuing “reform” process, that the real culprit is a failure of leadership in both the executive branch and Congress, not a structural fault.

I served under nine CIA directors, four of them at close remove. And I watched the system *work* more often than malfunction. Under their second hat as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), those directors *already had the necessary statutory authority* to coordinate effectively the various intelligence agencies and ensure that they did not hoard information. All that was needed were: (1) a strong leader with integrity, courage, a willingness to knock noses out of joint when this was unavoidable, and no felt need to be a member of the “president’s team”; and (2) a president who would back him up when necessary. Sadly, it has been over 24 years since the intelligence community has had a director – and a president – fitting that bill.

When President-elect Jimmy Carter asked Admiral Stansfield Turner, then-commander of the Sixth Fleet, to be director of central intelligence, Turner shared his concern at assuming responsibility for the entire intelligence community absent unambiguous authority to discharge those responsibilities. An executive order signed by Carter delineating and strengthening the authorities implicit in the National Security Act of 1947 was all Turner needed. And on those few occasions when that did not suffice (let’s say the FBI was caught hoarding intelligence information useful to CIA analysts), Turner would not hesitate to go directly to the president for his help in rectifying the situation. And the problem would be fixed.

No shrinking violet, Admiral Turner was not overly concerned about putting noses out of joint; he didn’t need the job. Unlike his more timid successors, he would have been a match for Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, the consummate insider. If Turner were to learn that the Pentagon – or the vice president’s growing empire, for that matter – had set up small “intelligence” offices of their own – like the Office of Special Plans, there would have been hell to pay. Turner would have asked Carter to put a quick end to it. It is no secret that both George Tenet and Porter Goss have been obsequious toward Rumsfeld, and Negroponte’s comments at his nomination hearings strongly suggest that he will follow suit. A friend who knows Rumsfeld, Goss, and Negroponte well has quipped, “Goss will lead Negroponte down the garden path, and Rumsfeld will eat Negroponte’s lunch.”

The analysts in the trenches will still be there, of course, and some will keep trying to tell it like it is – whatever the hierarchy above them might look like at any given time. In the before-Casey days, at least, we had career protection for doing so. And so we did. Anything short of that would have brought the equivalent of professional censure and ostracism by our own colleagues. And if, for example, a senior policymaker were to ask a briefer if there were good evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and we knew that serious analysts we trusted thought not, we would simply say, “No.”

Danger to Civil Liberties Grows

One important reality that gets lost in all the hand wringing about problems in sharing intelligence among agencies is the fact that the CIA and the FBI are separate and distinct entities for very good reason – first and foremost, to avoid infringement on the civil liberties of American citizens. So a red flag should go up when, under the intelligence reform legislation, the director of national intelligence will have under his aegis not only the entire CIA but also a major part of the FBI. Under existing law, the CIA has no police powers and its operatives are generally enjoined against collecting intelligence information on American citizens. Since citizens' constitutional protections do not sit atop the list of CIA priorities and its focus is abroad, it pays those protections little heed. In contrast, FBI personnel, for judicial and other reasons, are trained to observe those protections scrupulously and to avoid going beyond what the law permits. That accounts, in part, for why FBI agents at the Guantanamo detention facility judged it necessary to report the abuses they witnessed. Would they have acted so responsibly had they been part of a wider, more disparate environment in which the strict guidelines reflecting the FBI's ethos were not universally observed?

It is an important question. In my view, the need to protect the civil liberties of American citizens must trump other exigencies when rights embedded in the Constitution are at risk. The reorganization dictated by the latest reform legislation cannot be permitted to blur or erode constitutional protections. That would be too high a price to pay for hoped-for efficiencies of integration and scale. Rather, there is a continuing need for checks and balances and – especially in law enforcement – clear lines of demarcation *within* the executive branch as well as outside it. Unfortunately, the structure and functions of the oversight board created by the most recent intelligence legislation make a mockery of the 9/11 commission's insistence that an *independent* body be established to prevent infringement on civil liberties. Sadly, the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board created by the new law has been gutted to such a degree that it has become little more than a powerless creature of the president.

The concern over endangering civil liberties is fact-based. In discussing it we are not in the subjunctive mood. No one seemed to notice, but on June 16, 2004, when CIA director Porter Goss was chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, he actually introduced legislation that would have given the president new authority to direct the CIA to conduct law-enforcement operations *inside* the United States – including arresting American citizens. This legislation would have reversed the strict prohibition in the National Security Act of 1947 against such CIA activities in the U.S. Goss's initiative got swamped by other legislation in the wake of the 9/11 commission report. More recently, Goss's answers to Senators' questions regarding CIA interrogation techniques and the use of torture have been disingenuous and, at times, transparently evasive. For the most part, Senators and Representatives have allowed themselves to be diddled by such evasive testimony. And with the U.S. media thoroughly domesticated, there is essentially no one to hold the administration accountable. The White House, the congressional intelligence committees, and the media simply tell us that we should await the results of another ongoing investigation on torture, this one led by CIA Inspector General John Helgeson!

Second Wind for COINTELPRO?

Some of us are old enough to remember operation COINTELPRO, in which the FBI, CIA, Army Intelligence, and other agencies cooperated closely in provocative and often unlawful actions targeting civil rights leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., protesters against the Vietnam War, and a wide range of left- and right-wing groups. We thus have a real-life reminder of what can happen when lines of jurisdiction are blurred and super-patriots are given carte blanche to pursue U.S. citizens in time of war. History can repeat itself.

A year and a half ago, FBI guidance to local police anticipating peace marches in Washington, D.C., and protest demonstrations in Miami blurred the line between legitimate protesters and “terrorists.” Local authorities and police were advised, for example, to watch for telltale behavior like raising money via the Internet, or going limp upon arrest. Such behavior, they were told, were signs that they might be dealing with “terrorists.”

Let’s be clear. There is in this country an already discernible trend toward the establishment of a national security state of the kind I closely observed during my career as an analyst of Soviet affairs. Our intelligence and security establishment has come to resemble more and more what the Russians called their all-powerful “organs of public safety,” which were – pure and simple – tools of the ruling party. If this trend continues here, it is entirely conceivable that civil liberties may come to be regarded as an artifact of the past. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales may even feel free to characterize laws protecting them as “obsolete” or “quaint” – adjectives he applied to provisions of the Geneva Conventions. Gonzales, you may recall, was the chief White House counsel who advised President Bush that he could disregard with impunity the Geneva Conventions’ prohibitions, and also have a “reasonable” chance of avoiding subsequent prosecution under U.S. law, specifically the War Crimes Act (18 U.S.C. 2441) of 1996.

The January 25, 2002, torture-is-not-only-okay-but-necessary memorandum from Gonzales to President Bush is just one of several signs that the president has been advised by his lawyers that – to put it simply – he is above the law. He has acted on that advice and there is plenty of disquieting evidence that he intends to continue doing so. If you have read down this far, you probably are among those who have succeeded in overcoming the common resistance to admitting that to yourself.

And yet we keep hearing the glib denial, “It could not happen here.” Please tell your friends it has already begun to happen here. Tell them it is time for all of us to wake up and do something about it.

In Sum

Intelligence reform in a highly charged political atmosphere – laced with a pinch of hysteria – gathers a momentum of its own. The reform bill Congress passed late last year creates more problems than it solves, largely because the changes do not get to the heart of the main problem. Again, what is lacking is not a streamlined organizational chart, but integrity. Character counts.

My own recommendations – for any who might be interested – include some simple organizational changes, but have mostly to do with integrity.⁷ The leadership sets the tone, and one very important lesson leaping out of the performance of intelligence on Iraq is that greater care needs to be exercised in selecting intelligence community leaders. Next, the process of creating relevant, timely, apolitical National Intelligence Estimates needs to be improved and inoculated against politicization, with managers held accountable for their performance.

Organizational changes: Imagery analysis should be returned, agenda-free, to the CIA, after languishing in the Department of Defense for the past nine years, so that chicken coops can once again be distinguished from missile storage facilities, and imagery can again act as a check on information peddled by dubious émigré sources. Had professional imagery analysts been able to report their findings without fear of their ultimate master, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, the tenuousness of the evidence on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq could have been injected into the debate. (Remember? Rumsfeld said he knew where they were!)

In addition, CIA must rebuild its independent media analysis capability. The Analysis Group of the agency’s Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) filled that role after Pearl Harbor

⁷ See “A Compromised Central Intelligence Agency: What Can Be Done” in *Patriotism, Democracy and Common Sense: Restoring America’s Promise At Home and Abroad*, Rowman & Littlefield, New York, 2004.

for more than 50 years, and enjoyed wide respect in government and academe, before shortsighted senior CIA managers disbanded it a decade ago. Both the 9/11 commission and the more recent presidential commission led by Judge Lawrence Silberman and former Senator Chuck Robb recommended new emphasis on media analysis, and the Silberman-Robb panel even proposed creating a separate “directorate” for that purpose. That is hardly necessary. All that is needed is (1) to acknowledge that it was a huge mistake to abolish FBIS’s Analysis Group, and (2) to reconstitute it, staffing it with supervisors who are familiar with the tools of the exacting but fruitful discipline of media analysis. Such expertise could, for example, give the president and his advisers a better understanding of terrorism and what breeds it (beyond the “they hate our democracy” mantra).

“You Will Know the Truth...”

Chiseled into the marble wall at the entrance to CIA Headquarters is: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” This was the ethos of the intelligence analysis directorate during most of the 27 years I spent there.

The experience of the past four years suggests a visit might be in order to ensure that the inscription has not been sandblasted away. Many of us alumni are astonished that, of the hundreds of analysts who knew in 2002 and 2003 that Iraq posed no threat to the US, not one had the courage to blow the whistle and warn about what was about to happen. And even Paul O’Neil and Richard Clarke, who are to be commended for eventually speaking out, waited until it was too late to stop the administration from launching an unprovoked war.

This is by no means a water-over-the-dam issue. If plans go forward for an attack on Iran, it may become necessary for those intelligence professionals with the requisite courage to mount their own preemptive strike against the kind of corrupted intelligence that greased the skids for war on Iraq. That this would mean going to the press, preferably with documentation, is a sad commentary. But no alternatives with any promise are available. The normal channel for such redress, the inspector generals of the various agencies, is a sad joke. And the prospect for any appeal to the intelligence lapdog/watchdog intelligence committees of Congress is equally sad – and even more feckless.