

Intelligence Distortions Under Investigation

by Edward Spannaus

The manner in which intelligence concerning Iraq was distorted for political purposes, in the period leading up to the invasion of Iraq, has set off alarms among many current and former intelligence officers. There are two relevant areas of concern: one is the special Pentagon intelligence unit in the Defense Department's policy shop—which we have described as the “Chicken-hawk Intelligence Agency”; and the second, is the Central Intelligence Agency itself, which came under tremendous political pressure to shape its findings to support the pre-existing desire for a war against Iraq among circles in the Administration centering around Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

The review of Iraq intelligence launched by CIA Director George Tenet, and disclosed by the *New York Times* on May 22, is expected by many sources and observers to lead to an examination of the Pentagon “Office of Special Plans,” in the office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Douglas Feith. The *Times* story reported that CIA analysts had complained that this unit was staffed by conservative ideologues eager to offer to the Administration an alternative view to that of the CIA. As *EIR* has documented, this office is run by avowed followers of Leo Strauss such as Abram Shulsky.

What Happened to the CIA?

For many CIA veterans, their bigger concern is what has happened to their agency. This concern led a number of retired CIA analysts to form the group known as Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, or VIPS.

On May 1, VIPS delivered an open letter to President Bush on what they termed the Iraq “Intelligence Fiasco” (see *EIR*, May 9, 2003). “You may not realize the extent of the current ferment within the intelligence community and particularly the CIA,” they wrote. “In intelligence, there is one unpardonable sin—cooking intelligence to the recipe of high policy. There is ample indication that this has been done with respect to Iraq. What remains not entirely clear is who the cooks are and where they practice their art”—and whether their cooking kitchens are in the Pentagon, the National Security Council, the Office of the Vice President, or the CIA itself.

The VIPS group called upon the President to ask Gen. Brent Scowcroft, the chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB), to launch an immediate inquiry into the performance of the various intelligence agen-

cies “in providing the intelligence upon which you have based your fateful decision for war against Iraq.”

(The VIPS call was echoed in the lead editorial of the *New York Times* on May 26, which likewise called on President Bush to ask his Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, “a group of outside experts headed by Brent Scowcroft, former National Security Adviser,” to assess the intelligence record on Iraq. The *Times* also urged the Congressional intelligence committees to conduct their own review.)

Manipulation of Intelligence

In a discussion with *EIR*, Raymond Close, a 25-year veteran of the CIA and former chief of station in Saudi Arabia who is also a participant in VIPS, expressed his alarm at what is happening within the CIA. Describing himself as “a very loyal alumnus” of the Agency, Close said that “something is being corrupted here that should not be.”

Close, as other CIA veterans, was particularly disturbed that when Secretary of State Colin Powell gave his presentation to the UN Security Council on Feb. 5, Director Tenet was sitting right behind Powell, on camera, which was taken as Tenet's giving the Agency's imprimatur to Powell's presentation of the alleged evidence against Saddam Hussein. Ray McGovern, a founder of VIPS, authored a Feb. 12 Op-Ed entitled “CIA Director Caves In,” in which he said that Tenet's “sitting like a potted plant” behind Powell, sent the message that the CIA stands, or sits, foursquare behind what Powell is saying.

In a May 30 column, *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristoff wrote about “the growing evidence that the administration grossly manipulated intelligence” about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction in the runup to the Iraq war. Kristoff says that a column on the same subject earlier in the month, “drew a torrent of covert communications from indignant spooks who say that Administration officials leaned on them to exaggerate the Iraqi threat and deceive the public.”

“I've never heard this level of alarm before,” Kristoff quotes CIA and State Department veteran Larry Johnson as saying. “It is an abuse and misuse of intelligence. The President was being misled. He was ill served by the folks who are supposed to protect him on this. Whether this was witting or unwitting, I don't know, but I'll give him the benefit of the doubt.”

The ‘Mobile Labs’

The latest perturbation about the CIA's role followed the May 28 public release of the Agency's official assessment of the two trailers containing mobile laboratories, which were found recently in Iraq. The CIA conclusion is that the trailers were most likely the mobile, biological weapons labs that Iraqi sources had described, and which Powell had cited in his February presentation to the UN Security Council. However, the report is cautious in asserting this outright. The report acknowledges that no trace of any biological agents were

found in the labs, and there is no evidence that the labs were ever used. A number of observers noted that the report used a rather strange methodology: attempting to eliminate the possibility of any other uses for the mobile laboratories, except the production of biological weapons.

Prof. Matthew Meselson, a Harvard University expert on biological processes and biological weapons, who has also served as an adviser to the CIA, points to a number of technical problems with the CIA's analysis, and calls for an independent review of the evidence. "For everyone's benefit, this has to be reviewed by an outside group," Meselson told *EIR*, emphasizing that the CIA "is under gigantic pressure."

Meselson highlighted the earlier incident, in which forged documents were used by both the U.S. and British governments, to attempt to prove that Iraq was trying to purchase enriched uranium from the African country of Niger. Whoever allowed this to get into the hands of U.S. government officials should be publicly fired, Meselson declared. "Is our President still at the mercy of some poor intelligence sources?" he asked.

Meselson says that the case of the forged documents "shows that they [the intelligence community] were working under terrible pressure, and with a very great desire to have it come out one way rather than another—a sure recipe for making mistakes."

With regard to the question of the mobile labs, Meselson proposes that rather than people nitpicking the issues one by one and relying on secondary sources, the National Academy of Sciences should be asked to set up a panel to review the evidence, with full latitude to conduct their own tests, and do their own interviews. He points out that the Academy was established by President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War "for just this type of thing"—to advise the government on scientific and technical issues.

'Look Like an Ass, or Escalate'

Asked about Meselson's proposal, Raymond Close responded that this is "a very sensible idea," explaining that "we have to restore our credibility in the eyes of the world.

"If we're going to get into a contest with Iran now, where we're going to start throwing around these accusations about connections with al-Qaeda and so forth, we'd better jolly well remember the lessons that we've learned over the past few months, and that is: don't go making accusations unless you're absolutely sure they're right," Close said. "Because not only do you destroy your own credibility, but you have a tendency to get yourself into a situation where you have only the choice between two disagreeable alternatives—either to back down, and make yourself look like an ass, or continue to escalate until you get to the point where you can't stop yourself. Both of those are extremely foolish things to do."

"Policy depends on good intelligence," he said, "and you've got to protect it, and you've got to preserve its integrity above anything else."