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A Compromised Central Intelligence Agency: What Can Be Done?

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It is said that truth is the first casualty of war. Truth was the currency of analysis in the Central Intelligence Agency in which I was proud to serve. The agency then was known as a unique place to which one could go and expect a straight answer, unencumbered by political agendas.

Sadly, that has now gone by the board. Central Intelligence Agency analysis has been corrupted, to the detriment of an America that has no comprehensive national security strategy against terrorism and had no proof of "weapons of mass destruction" before invading Iraq. It is time to acknowledge that the CIA has become so politicized that it has lost its credibility. Even though a remnant of indefatigable analysts in the ranks continues to try to "tell it like it is," the sound they make is akin to that of the proverbial tree falling far out of earshot. They have been sold out, their raison d'etre sacrificed by senior management on the altar of political expediency. The intelligence assessment process is broken, a reality greeted with striking nonchalance by senior Central Intelligence Agency leaders and by a president who appears unaware that an essential tool of effective policymaking has been lost.

Compared with the constitutional crisis of fall 2002, when Congress was misled into ceding to the president its constitutional right to declare war, the corruption of CIA analysis may seem like small potatoes. But the role that senior agency officials played as willing accomplices in the process has made a mockery of the verse chiseled into the marble at the entrance to CIA headquarters: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Analysts who still take that verse seriously are thoroughly demoralized.

The politicization of the Central Intelligence Agency began to be institutionalized twenty years ago under CIA Director William Casey and his protégé Robert Gates. But it culminated in the fall of 2002, when Director George Tenet succumbed to pressure to conjure up "intelligence" to justify a prior decision to invade Iraq. Had Tenet been tenaciously honest, it is a safe bet that agency analysts would have risen to the occasion. And their input might have helped prevent the launching of our country's first large-scale war of aggression—a war that Tenet and his analysts knew had little to do with the "intelligence" adduced to justify it.

The "high-confidence" judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate "Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction" of October 2002 are mocked by chief U.S. Inspector David Kay's 2004 report that he could find no such weapons. This constitutes the worst American intelligence debacle in forty years. Not since the National Intelligence Estimate of September 1962 that concluded that the Soviet Union would not risk putting missiles in Cuba (while, in fact, they were already en route) has an intelligence estimate been so wrong on so serious a matter.

The Cuban estimate was wrong—a grave but honest mistake. The estimate on Iraq was dishonest—and no mistake. 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.

That twin purpose 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 CIA officials. 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. The unforgivable sin is telling the policymaker what he wants to hear—justifying with cooked "intelligence" what he has already decided to do.

Central Intelligence Agency 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 intelligence committees have given new meaning to the word "oversight."

David Kay's report that "probably eighty-five percent of the significant things" have been found, but no weapons of mass destruction, sent out such political shock waves that the White House found it politic to appoint yet another commission to investigate. But the people hand-picked for the commission, its overly broad terms of reference, and its marching orders to report only after the 2004 elections have made it the butt of Washington jokes. Even the mainstream press was able to see and report the move as transparently disingenuous. The failure to include General Brent Scowcroft, chairman of the president's own Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, for example, spoke volumes. There are very few as well qualified for such work, but Scowcroft has an independent streak and a habit of speaking candidly. He raised White House eyebrows, for example, when he publicly described the evidence on ties between Iraq and al Qaeda as "scant" at the very time that the president and his top aides were trying to establish in the public mind the existence of such ties. Little has been heard of Scowcroft since.

INITIAL STEPS TOWARD REFORM

Sadly, the CIA I was privileged to serve is no more. Restoration of integrity and credibility will not come until top executive and legislative leaders are able to prescind from politics long enough to understand the serious risks attending the politicization of intelligence. This is not likely to happen soon, but some useful preparatory work has been done.

If any good can come out of the intelligence/policy debacle on Iraq, it would be the clear lesson that intelligence, crafted to dovetail with the perceived predilections of policymakers, spells disaster. This conclusion stands out in bas relief in *WMD in Iraq: Evidence and Implications*, the exhaustive study published in 2004 by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Carnegie recommended a "nonpartisan independent commission . . . to establish a clear picture of what the intelligence community knew and believed it knew about Iraq's weapons program throughout 1991–2002." An eminently sensible recommendation, but one that the White House no doubt will claim is overtaken by the president's own hand-picked commission. My enthusiasm for such panels is dampened by the painful experience of observing presidential and congressional commissions in the past, including the difficulty they encounter in remaining immune to political pressures, the steep learning curve that many commission members typically face, and the fact that such commissions, as often as not, come up with naïve, sometimes mischievous, recommendations.[1] And they often take years to complete their work.

The need to repair American intelligence cannot be left to the dalliance, caprice, and politics that typically taint such commissions. Fortunately, much solid work has already been done by serious scholars. Reading Carnegie's *WMD in Iraq: Evidence and Implications* carefully, a middle-schooler can figure out *what* happened. In this chapter, I will spend some time looking at *how* and *why* it happened. Additional footnotes could be added to the Carnegie study, but the key problems are already clear and the need for repair is urgent. Certain rudimentary steps can be taken even now to inoculate against the further spread of politicization.

This chapter focuses on ways to facilitate the return of fierce honesty and professionalism to the analytic process and to impede efforts to politicize the intelligence product. In an institution like the CIA, significant, enduring improvement requires vision and courage at the top. The nation needs the kind of integrity and courage not seen in a director of central intelligence for a quarter of a century.

It is clear, then, that we need to start right there—with the director. Character counts. Without the right kind of person in that position, the CIA is doomed to be prostituted and marginalized more and more, while strong personalities—in the Pentagon and the office of the vice president, for example—continue to usurp the agency's functions, preempt its analysis, and render it largely irrelevant.

Structural changes in recent years, as well as failings in leadership, have rendered intelligence analysis less complete, less professional, and easier to manipulate. So a good way to start the repair job would be to revert to some of the best practices of the past. Specifically, I recommend below that the United States needs to upgrade the standards upon which we choose a director of central intelligence; generate more timely, comprehensive, professional, transparent, and apolitical national intelligence estimates; return imagery analysis, agenda-free, from the Pentagon to the Central Intelligence Agency; and reconstitute an independent media analysis capability in the Central Intelligence Agency. With such reforms in place in recent years, America might have been better prepared for the September 11 attacks, an understanding of their underlying causes might have been developed, the tenuousness of the evidence on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq could have been injected into the public debate on Iraq, and a new national security agenda more in keeping with Gary Hart's proposals (chapter 2) would have been facilitated.

THE QUALITIES NEEDED IN A DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The director of central intelligence (DCI) must be a person whose previous professional performance has been distinguished by unimpeachable integrity and independence. The director must have the courage of his or her own convictions. Without integrity and courage, all virtue is specious, and no amount of structural or organizational reform will make any difference.

Instructive lessons can be drawn from the performance of George Tenet, the sixteenth director since the establishment of the Central Intelligence Agency in 1947, and from his predecessors regarding what attributes a director needs to discharge the duties of the office as the National Security Act of 1947 intended.

The director should have already made a mark on the world by excelling in a field unrelated to intelligence work—business, the military, or academia—bringing a well-established record of honesty and competence. If he comes from more humble circumstances than most top administration officials, it is essential that her or his strength of character and self-confidence be such that there is no need to depend on the anointing of Washington *hoi aristoi* for reassurance of self worth.

These qualities are all the more essential because of the mismatch of responsibility and authority in the director of central intelligence's position. As the chief foreign intelligence adviser to the president, the director has broad responsibility for coordinating the intelligence effort of a dozen agencies of government, but has little operational or budgetary control over most of them. As a result, the director's authority is essentially ad referendum to the president. Too many directors of central intelligence, out of a desire to be good team players, have been reluctant to seek and invoke that authority. A notable exception was Admiral Stansfield Turner, whose military background instilled in him an acute appreciation of the need for command authority to match responsibility. Turner knew he had to take determined steps to dispel the ambiguity—and did. Thus, when the parochial interests of, say, the Federal Bureau of Investigation or the National Security Agency got in the way of his intelligence community coordinating responsibilities, Turner would simply meet with President Carter and lay it on the line. "If you want me to be able to discharge my responsibilities as your principal intelligence adviser," he would say, "you need to tell the attorney general to instruct the Federal Bureau of Investigation to be more responsive, and the secretary of defense to tell the National Security Agency to do the same." In other words, there is a way to deal with the anomalies inherent in the director's portfolio, but it takes a DCI who is willing to put noses out of joint in order to assert the necessary authority to do his job. Such directors have been few and far between.

To be concrete, let's take the experience of George Tenet as an example. Here are a few of the things he should have told the president:

- The FBI is not sharing with my people the information they need. Would you instruct the attorney general to tell the bureau to cooperate?
- The vice president and secretary of defense have each established, in their offices, mini-CIAs to push their own agendas. They are using their privileged access to you to promote intelligence judgments with which my analysts and I do not agree. If you wish me to be able to discharge my statutory duties effectively, please make it clear to them that they are required to vet such analysis with the Central Intelligence Agency so that we can put it into perspective *before* it is given to you.
- The same goes for raw reporting from the field or from liaison intelligence services. I am particularly upset that Israel regularly skirts established procedures and gives raw information to top White House and Pentagon officials before Central Intelligence Agency analysts have time to evaluate it. Quite aside from the fact that by law I am responsible for substantive liaison with foreign services, serious mischief can result when the Central Intelligence Agency is not able to comment on key reports before they are acted upon. Think back to June of 2002, for example, when, on the strength of an Israeli report that the CIA had not had a chance to evaluate properly, you were persuaded to reverse the longstanding American policy of recognizing Yasir Arafat as the duly

elected representative of the Palestinian people. Surely, if the crescendo of violence over recent years has proven anything, it is that Arafat simply cannot be left out.

- You need to ensure that the Central Intelligence Agency and other parts of the intelligence community have the opportunity to provide appropriate intelligence input before major decisions are made. Think, for example, of the sudden, arbitrary decision by Ahmed Chalabi, Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and Ambassador Paul Bremer to disband the Iraqi army. Were my people given the chance, they could have told you that would be a very dumb idea.
- Experience—including mine—has shown that it is counterproductive over the long run for the DCI to have advocated for or become associated with any particular policy. I should have known better than to become so closely associated with the "Tenet Plan" for Israel-Palestine. How, for example, can my analysts retain any credibility for objective assessment of that plan's prospects for success when it bears my name?

The director of central intelligence must *not* need the job; and he must have the self-confidence and courage to resign when the demands of integrity dictate this as the only honorable course. Should the president refuse to honor the kind of requests I have just illustrated, the DCI should give very serious consideration to resigning.

Directors of central intelligence cannot let themselves be used, as the vice president and defense secretary have used Tenet, for example. Historically, depending on who was president at the time, several DCIs had the experience of being marginalized by the White House. And some, like William Colby, were fired. But Colby's marginalization and eventual firing came as a result of his standing on principle (and standing up to Henry Kissinger), not for letting himself be used.

It is a myth that the DCI must enjoy a close personal relationship with the president. In fact, doing so is a net minus. The White House is not a fraternity house; mutual respect is far more important than camaraderie. A mature, self-confident president will respect an independent director. The director must avoid being "part of the team" in the way the president's political advisers are part of the team. Overly close identification with "the team" can erode objectivity and cloud intelligence judgments. Former Speaker Newt Gingrich, like Vice President Dick Cheney a frequent visitor to CIA headquarters to "help" with analysis on Iraq, told the press that Director Tenet was "so grateful to the president [presumably for not firing him after September 11, 2001] that he would do anything for him." That attitude is the antithesis of what is needed in a director.

A DCI who has built a relationship of mutual respect with the president does not need to join the briefer who presents the President's Daily Brief. It is far better to encourage those senior analysts to brief, as we did in the past, unencumbered by a boss looking over our shoulder. And in ordinary circumstances, one session with the president per week should be enough face-time to discuss key substantive issues and, when necessary, Central Intelligence Agency operations.

As a general rule, a DCI should not be drawn from the operational ranks of the agency. Major mistakes made by Allen Dulles, Richard Helms, and William Casey provide ample proof that having a spy at the helm is a poor idea. (William Colby, who had an unusually wide grasp of the analytic as well as the operational function of intelligence—and a keen respect for the Constitution—was a notable exception to this guideline.)

A director has to be a wise manager. The director must be able to function effectively while standing astride the structural fault created by the National Security Act of 1947, which allowed for DCI involvement in operational matters in addition to the director's primary role as chief substantive intelligence adviser to the president. This unenviable, schizophrenic portfolio demands uncommon self-confidence, objectivity, balance, and skill—and, again, integrity. Among those who failed the test were Dulles, with the Bay of Pigs disaster; Helms, who, while running large-scale operations in Vietnam, knowingly acquiesced in General William Westmoreland's deceptively low estimates of Vietnamese Communist troop strength; and Casey, with his personal involvement in an array of misadventures in Central America and Iran/Contra, his cooking of intelligence to promote and support those escapades, and his unswerving devotion to the idea that the Soviet Union could never change. The congressional hearings on Iran-Contra and on Robert Gates's nomination to head the agency revealed many examples of how Casey and Gates politicized intelligence analysis.

Although appointed by the president, a director of central intelligence needs to resist pressure to play politics. Some directors of central intelligence have played the political game—most of them ineptly, it turns out. Helms, for example, bent over backwards to accommodate President Nixon—to the point of perjuring himself before Congress. Yet Helms never could overcome Nixon's paranoid suspicion of him as one of that "Georgetown crowd out to get me." Chalk it up to our naiveté as intelligence analysts, but we were shocked when James Schlesinger, upon succeeding Helms as director early in Nixon's first term, announced on arrival, "I am here to see that you guys don't screw Richard Nixon!" The freshly appointed DCI supplemented the news about his main mission by announcing that he would be reporting to Bob Haldeman, not Henry Kissinger. A director must not have a political agenda. Ironically—and to his credit—George H. W. Bush, who had been chair of the Republican National Committee before being named director of central intelligence, was careful to avoid policy advocacy. But even he found it impossible to resist political pressure to appoint "Team B," a group of extreme hardliners, to review intelligence community estimates on Soviet strategic forces.

Neither must a director of central intelligence have a personal agenda. The tenure of John Deutch provided a case study in the disasters that can attend overweening ambition on the part of a director. Deutch made no secret that he was accepting the job only as a way station to replacing his close friend William Perry as secretary of defense. Thus, it should have come as no surprise that Deutch made rather callous, calculated decisions to improve the chances for his candidacy. Deutch gave the Pentagon his full cooperation in covering up the fact for several years that about 101,000 (the Pentagon's current estimate) U.S. troops were exposed to chemical warfare agents, including sarin, cyclosarin, and mustard gases, at the end of the Gulf War. And in 1996 he ceded the Central Intelligence Agency's entire imagery analysis capability to the Pentagon, lock, stock, and barrel (about which more later). Deutch was devastated when President Bill Clinton picked William Cohen to succeed Perry, and he left the Central Intelligence Agency with such a long trail of grave security violations that he needed one of President Bill Clinton's last-day pardons to escape prosecution. (Deutch's personal agenda was so transparent that, aside from the people he brought with him to the Central Intelligence Agency to do his bidding, there was hardly a soul sorry to see him go.)

No director of central intelligence should come from Congress, the quintessential example of the kind of politicized ambience that is antithetical to substantive intelligence work. For example, outside intelligence circles, it was deemed a good sign that, as a congressional staffer, George Tenet had been equally popular on both sides of the aisle. But this raised a red flag for seasoned intelligence professionals. As we had all learned early in our careers, if you tell it like it is, you are certain to make enemies. Those enjoying universal popularity are ipso facto suspect of perfecting the political art of compromise—shading this and shaving that. However useful this may be on the Hill, it sounds the death knell for intelligence analysis. In addition to having come from Congress, Tenet had zero prior experience managing a large organization. He played the political game, and he has presided over two disasters: September 11 and Iraq.

RESCUING NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES

There is so much wrong now with the process of creating national intelligence estimates that it is hard to know where to begin the repair work. What follows is some background on the unhappy experience with a highly unfortunate "misoverestimate" and some rudimentary recommendations.

The Weapons of Mass Destruction Estimate

There was no national intelligence estimate on Iraq and its "weapons of mass destruction" before one was ordered and hurriedly prepared in September 2002, several months *after* the administration decided to make war on Iraq. That fact speaks volumes. The last thing the people running American policy from the Pentagon and the Office of the Vice President wanted was a national intelligence estimate from the intelligence community that might complicate their planning. Because it was abundantly clear that none was wanted, none was scheduled. The DCI and his senior managers were happy to acquiesce in this. It got them off the horns of a distasteful dilemma—namely, having to choose between commissioning an honest estimate that would inevitably call into serious question the Pentagon's rationale for war on Iraq (Option A), or ensuring that an estimate was cooked to the recipe of policy—that is, massaged to justify an earlier decision for war (Option B).

Until September 2002, George Tenet was able to avoid this dilemma, in the process abnegating his responsibility as the principal intelligence adviser to the president. Tenet probably calculated (no doubt correctly) that the president would be just as pleased not to have complications introduced after he had already decided for war. And so the director of central intelligence, precisely at a time when he should have been leaning hard on his analysts to prepare an objective estimate, danced away from doing one until it was forced on him.

In mid-September 2002, as the administration began making its case for war, Senator Richard Durbin alerted Senator Bob Graham, then chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, to the fact that no national intelligence estimate had been written. Graham insisted that an estimate be prepared. To no one's surprise, Tenet immediately chose Option B and picked a trusted aide, Robert Walpole, to chair the estimate. 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 like North Korea. Key conclusions (since proven mistaken) of that national intelligence estimate met Rumsfeld's immediate need quite nicely and greased the skids for early deployment of a multi-billion-dollar, unproven antiballistic missile system.

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—judgments at variance with the statements of senior intelligence and policy officials the year before.

In an apologia released by the Central Intelligence Agency in 2003, Stuart Cohen, Walpole's immediate boss as head of the National Intelligence Council, avoided personal endorsement of the judgments of the 2002 estimate but stated his belief that the writers were "on solid ground" in how they reached their judgments. Cohen cautioned that "we do not know" whether physical evidence of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons will ever be found. Cohen added, "If we eventually are proved wrong—that is, that there were no weapons of mass destruction and the WMD programs were dormant or abandoned—the American people will be told the truth." One is left wondering how much longer "eventually" will be.

In 2004, the vice president insisted on "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." And, speaking at Georgetown University in 2004, Tenet posed the question himself: "Why haven't we found the weapons? I have told you the search must continue and it will be difficult."

Reform of National Intelligence Estimates

Preventing a repeat of the agency's performance on Iraq will require changes at the most senior level of the Central Intelligence Agency and wholesale decontamination of the National Intelligence Council and the Directorate of Intelligence. Given the current composition and disposition of congressional overseers, that seems highly unlikely anytime soon. What follows, therefore, are some short-run measures to render it more difficult to continue to pollute the analytic process.

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence need to take an active hand in ensuring that appropriate national intelligence estimates are scheduled, prepared, and completed in a timely way. There can be no excuse for the deliberate absence of a national intelligence estimate on Iraq's weaponry before the administration decided in favor of war. And it is a sad commentary on congressional oversight that no one seemed to notice. When Senator Richard Durbin finally did, the juggernaut for war was halfway there.

Also conspicuous by its absence was a national intelligence estimate on Iraq's alleged ties to al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. As mentioned above, General Brent Scowcroft, chair of the president's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, felt this issue important enough to put himself on record as saying that evidence of such ties was "scant." But for Secretary Rumsfeld, the evidence was "bulletproof."

These are precisely the kind of polarized conditions in which preparation of an intelligence community–wide national intelligence estimate (NIE) can provide an invaluable service, if it is an objective assessment that is sought. And Congress should have insisted that such an NIE be prepared. George Tenet calculated correctly. The situation in which he found himself, however awkward, was *not* a case of "damned if he did, and damned if he didn't." True, if he "did," Tenet would have been damned—by Rumsfeld, Vice President Cheney, and other members of the "team." This would have been the inevitable result if Tenet had transcended his timidity and directed that an honest estimate be prepared, because Central Intelligence Agency analysts, after painstakingly vetting thousands of reports, continued to find no persuasive evidence of meaningful Iraqi ties to al Qaeda. But "damned if he didn't"?

Hardly. Tenet knew that, given the support he enjoyed among some key members of the intelligence committees for having been a dependable "member of the team" and given the general miasma prevailing among many committee members, there would be little risk to him if he ducked doing an estimate.

Sadly, Iraq is not an exceptional case. For years, George Tenet avoided commissioning an estimate on North Korea, preferring to let the Pentagon and State Department argue endlessly about Pyongyang's nuclear capability and its intentions. North Korea's nuclear capability is a key issue, but so is the more general question of what drives the leaders in Pyongyang. What are their aspirations and objectives? This is the stuff of a traditional NIE. Such estimates are not easy to produce, but in the past there were regularly scheduled NIEs on "Prospects for North Korea" and other critical countries and issues.

It is one thing for North Korea to have the wherewithal to make a nuclear weapon. It is quite another thing to develop a delivery capability that would enable an intercontinental ballistic missile to hit the United States with a nuclear warhead. I alluded above to senior Central Intelligence Agency official Robert Walpole, who in 1998 chaired an estimate that predicted, among other things, that North Korea could have the capability to deliver such a weapon on the United States in five years. This was judged to be of such importance that a congressionally directed action mandated an annual update on the nature and scope of the threat. Three such reports were done, and the date kept slipping for a North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile. But no matter. The 1998 estimate had served its purpose. Its erroneous conclusions had been of immense help in facilitating antiballistic missile funding, the decision to abrogate the ABM treaty of 1972, and initial construction for an ABM system even before it has been adequately tested. As such, the 1998 estimate smacked of what intelligence professionals greet with the deepest distain—what we call "budgetary intelligence."

Beyond appropriate and timely national intelligence estimates, we need a post mortem conducted by an independent body to evaluate the preparation of the 1998 NIE "Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States Through 2015" and a fresh estimate on this same subject, with a new chair to oversee it.

Is there an NIE that addresses the prospects for worldwide terrorism? One should be scheduled and conducted annually, with a sanitized version made widely available.

Then there is Israel, which has more weapons of mass destruction than all the Arab states put together. By what logic do intelligence community managers attempt to exclude estimates on Israel's formidable arsenal when scheduling NIEs on foreign countries with weapons of mass destruction? Do we not have a pressing need for NIEs looking at Israel's intentions vis-à-vis Syria, Iran, and Lebanon? And for estimates of how key Arab states regard Israel's formidable array of weapons of mass destruction?

Perhaps most useful of all, why not a broad-gauge estimate on the entire Middle East region, one that looks ahead to the expected outcome of various scenarios in the next few years? Arguably, there may be a market somewhere for an academic-type look twenty years ahead (like the "2020 Project" recently launched by the director's National Intelligence Council). But that market is not among policy makers and politicians with maximum horizons of six months, or two to four years. They would be far better served by an NIE titled "Near-Term Prospects for the Middle East," as used to be the custom.

In sum, it is high time that oversight committee members play a more active role in ensuring that the director of central intelligence discharges the statutory responsibility to provide timely national intelligence estimates on key countries and strategic issues, even (indeed, especially) when the administration itself appears just as happy to go without.

The congressional committees also should require more transparency in the process of preparing NIEs. John Adams warned us 240 years ago, "Liberty cannot be preserved without general knowledge among the people." There is good reason for the public to be made aware when an estimate is under way and to receive a summary version of at least the key judgments as soon as possible after the director has signed the estimate and given it to the president. Preparation of an unclassified version is a key step in the process and requires particular care. Consideration should be given to a possible role for committee staff at this editorial end of the process to ensure that what is released to the public is as faithful as possible to the original classified estimate.[2]

The Need for Formal Collegial Review

Last but not least, there should be a formal collegial review of all important NIEs. This used to take place in the National Intelligence Council's predecessor organization, the Board of National Estimates, which was comprised of a dozen or so distinguished men and women, including several from outside the intelligence community. A re-established board of that kind could provide a very valuable service.

Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity, the organization I co-founded, would be willing to devote time and effort to such an important task. Most of us graduated cum laude, so to speak, from our respective intelligence agencies and have the breadth of experience appropriate for such a review function. We are keenly aware of the critical role intelligence can and should play in support of the policy-making process, and we very much care what happens to intelligence.

Stuart Cohen, the National Intelligence Council official I mentioned above, might have avoided an unfortunate inaccuracy had he taken the trouble to read the op-eds and other issuances of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity members over the past two years. In his 2003 statement, Cohen claimed "No reasonable person could have viewed the totality of the information [on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction] and reached any conclusions or alternative views that were profoundly different from those reached in the NIE." The writings of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity members consistently contained conclusions and alternative views that were indeed profoundly different. And Cohen never indicated he thought us not "reasonable"—at least back when many of us worked with him at the Central Intelligence Agency.

AGENDA-FREE IMAGERY ANALYSIS

The Central Intelligence Agency has virtually no control over one of the most important sources of intelligence: imagery analysis. Former Director John Deutch ceded responsibility for imagery analysis to the Pentagon. (At the time, Deutch stood atop the short list of candidates to become secretary of defense as soon as his friend William Perry left that post.)

In the heyday of imagery analysis, the Central Intelligence Agency's Office of Imagery Analysis worked very closely with the interagency National Photographic Interpretation Center, proud discoverer of Soviet missiles in Cuba and guarantor of "trust-but-verify" strategic arms control agreements, to constitute a highly professional capability. The National Photographic Interpretation Center was staffed principally by analysts from the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency and was administered by the Central Intelligence Agency's Directorate of Science and Technology. Both the Office of Imagery Analysis (OIA) and the National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC) were as thoroughly apolitical as they were professional. John Deutch summarily terminated both.

When Deutch handed over the National Photographic Interpretation Center to the Pentagon in 1996, seasoned imagery analysts—many of whom had spent long years facing down Pentagon attempts to exaggerate the Soviet threat, for example, left imagery analysis in droves. They took other jobs at the Central Intelligence Agency rather than join an outfit in which they knew there would be no career protection for speaking truth to power if the truth in question was unwelcome. The damage from this brain drain could be seen all too plainly in the years that followed: For example, America failed to detect India's preparations to test a nuclear weapon in 1998 and mistakenly bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999. Against this background, Secretary of State Colin Powell's emphasis in his United Nations speech in 2003 on the importance of the "years and years of experience" needed by imagery analysts had an ironically poignant ring to those of us who knew what had happened when the National Photographic Interpretation Center and Office of Imagery Analysis were abolished.

One need not return to the 1990s, however, to see the damage. It is well known that Pentagon favorite Ahmed Chalabi and his associates were paid handsomely for defector reporting on Saddam Hussein's "weapons of mass destruction" and that this reporting was used to promote the war. Before the NPIC was given to the Pentagon, Central Intelligence Agency all-source analysts could depend on the veteran imagery analysts of the NPIC and OIA to either verify or cast doubt on such reporting. The fierce independence maintained by the NPIC and OIA in resisting command influence and departmental bias in analysis was as important an asset as the experience and professionalism of the imagery analysts. No serious secretary of defense would risk claiming, "We know where they [WMD] are," when he knew that his next telephone call would probably be from the NPIC or OIA saying, "Please tell us where they are. We've checked our own holdings, including the pile of reports from Chalabi's sources, but still cannot find any weapons of mass destruction."

Lack of professionalism showed through in a highly embarrassing way during Secretary Powell's debut as an imagery analyst before the United Nations Security Council in 2003. Just after his appearance, Powell had to sit for a public lecture from then-chief United Nations inspector Hans Blix, who exposed a glaring non sequitur in Powell's argument that two photos demonstrated Iraq's intent to hide chemical warfare–associated activity.

Powell should have known better than to rely on his erstwhile colleagues at Defense; it was not the first time he was burned. In his autobiography, he included a highly instructive vignette from the 1991 Gulf War. U.S. forces were having no luck finding Iraqi Scud surface-to-surface missiles before they could be launched at Israel and other targets. So Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs, was delighted to hear one day that General Norman Schwarzkopf had just told the press that several Scuds had been located and destroyed on their launchers.

Before Powell had time to rejoice, though, his intelligence chief warned that an imagery analyst on Schwarzkopf's own staff had concluded that what had been destroyed were not Scuds, but oil tanker trucks. Powell called Schwarzkopf at once, but Schwarzkopf badmouthed the imagery analyst and delivered such a rich string of expletives that Powell decided to let the story stand—a decision he regretted the next day when CNN showed photos of the destroyed Jordanian oil tankers. The fate of the imagery analyst who identified the tankers is not known; it would be interesting to discover whether his or her accurate call turned out to be career enhancing.

The role played by imagery analysis leading up to the war on Iraq is a major unanswered question. Given the billions invested in the most sophisticated satellite and other imagery systems, it remains a curiosity that imagery could not have at least hinted at what we all now know to be the case—that there have been no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq since the 1990s. (See also David Corn's conclusions in chapter 11 and Joseph Wilson's conclusions in chapter 14.)

The key task of imagery analysis therefore must be returned from the Pentagon to the one agency with a somewhat tarnished but more credible claim to objectivity. The Central Intelligence Agency's Office of Imagery Analysis should be reconstituted. The director of central intelligence should regain control of the imagery analysis capability that was transferred in 1996 from the National Photographic Interpretation Center to the Department of Defense's National Imagery and Mapping Agency (since renamed the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency).

MEDIA ANALYSIS: A KEY DISCIPLINE OF INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT

Media analysis for the American government was instituted in 1941 as a way of gleaning intelligence from German and Japanese open media. After the war, the Central Intelligence Agency received responsibility for media analysis, and its practitioners were housed in the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. Their work quickly distinguished itself by its intellectual vigor and its timeliness. The content analysis techniques and methodology employed in media analysis now represent a key subdiscipline of political science and won Foreign Broadcast Information Service analysts wide respect, both within and outside the intelligence community.

Because the Foreign Broadcast Information Service was devoted principally to collection, it eventually became an office in the Central Intelligence Agency's Directorate of Science and Technology, moving from the Directorate of Intelligence, which is responsible for all-source intelligence analysis. This anomalous perch—an analysis group outside the analysis directorate—had the felicitous, if unintended, consequence of affording media analysts in Foreign Broadcast Information Service an unusual degree of autonomy. This, in turn, made it particularly attractive to serious specialists with low tolerance for layer upon layer of bureaucracy.

As deputy director of Foreign Broadcast Information Service's Analysis Group in the mid-1980s, I was privileged to watch the group's Soviet analysts become the first in the intelligence community to recognize Mikhail Gorbachev for the revolutionary he was. While Central Intelligence Agency Director William Casey and his protégé Robert Gates held fast to the belief that Gorbachev was just a clever commie, Foreign Broadcast Information Service analysts were quick to see—and report—that profound change was in the offing for the Soviet Union.

From the day Gorbachev took power, Foreign Broadcast Information Service media analysts turned in an enviable performance in forecasting and tracking his path-breaking reforms—as is suggested by the titles of some of the early papers: Gorbachev's Arms Control Plan: Breaking With the Past (January 1986) and The 27th Soviet Party Congress: An Agenda for Change (April 1986). There were no early national intelligence estimates or Directorate of Intelligence papers reaching such conclusions, in part because of the well-known bias of Casey and Gates.

Foreign Broadcast Information Service analytic papers on key issues like arms control received particularly high consumer ratings for objectivity and professionalism. (Again, they were the only analytic papers on the street, given the sclerotic effect that the Casey/Gates mindset had on the all-source analysts in the Directorate of Intelligence.) Foreign Broadcast Information Service analysts subjected controversial issues to particularly rigorous scrutiny. Special memoranda analyzing Soviet pronouncements on antiballistic missile research, for example, found eager audiences among key U.S. government consumers on both sides of such highly contentious issues. Though accurate, these studies occasionally ran afoul of Gates, then deputy director for intelligence, who accused the Foreign Broadcast Information Service of poaching on his preserve.

Key players like Secretary of State George Shultz, who had grown openly distrustful of the intelligence coming from Casey and Gates, found Foreign Broadcast Information Service analysis an oasis of professionalism and objectivity. Shultz displayed an unusual openness to new possibilities and urged on President Ronald Reagan the possible merits of reaching out to Gorbachev. We know the rest of the story.

Despite all this—or perhaps because of it—ten years ago Central Intelligence Agency management abolished the Foreign Broadcast Information Service Analysis Group and dispersed media analysts among three geographically organized units focused on collection. The ability of the analysts to undertake in-depth analysis on increasingly urgent transnational problems like terrorism atrophied. Senior managers from the Directorate of Intelligence who were brought into the Foreign Broadcast Information Service had little appreciation for the power of media analysis, and this contributed further to the decline of the art.

Had there been a unit of media analysis practitioners plumbing the statements of Osama bin Laden and his chief lieutenants over the past decade or so, it is a safe bet that those analysts would have been able to throw helpful light on his intentions, his tactics, his supporters—and, indeed, on "why they hate us." As for the occasional statements attributed to the likes of bin Laden, the present administration is free to dismiss them as propaganda, but it is a pity that no one in the White House realizes that it is possible to squeeze useful intelligence out of such statements. Clandestine collection is by no means necessary to reach confident judgments as to "why they hate us."

This may sound strange coming from an intelligence officer with twenty-seven years of immersion in clandestinely acquired intelligence, but the lion's share of the information about most countries, movements, and groups comes from open sources. The most important data we have about a country's intentions is usually what that country says publicly. All too often the mystique of secret sources can trump more accurate information and common sense. Were any serious media analysts looking critically at what Iraqi media were saying before the war and reporting their findings to those who needed them?

Perhaps a tangible example drawn from recent history will bring further clarity on the merits of media analysis. In 2003, the Australian Senate censured Prime

Minister John Howard for misleading the public with spurious evidence that Iraq had stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons and for suppressing warnings from Australian intelligence that war on Iraq would increase the likelihood of terrorist attacks. Shortly before the censure, Colonel Andrew Wilkie, the only intelligence analyst to resign his post in protest against the war, had given testimony before a parliamentary committee: The Australian government, he said, had received "detailed assessments on the United States in which it was made very clear the United States was intent on invading Iraq for more important reasons than WMD and terrorism. Hence, all this talk about WMD and terrorism was hollow."

Australian intelligence analysts were applying media analysis. From their reading of the documents of the Project for a New American Century and the new, "preemptive" security policy announced by the White House in 2002, they could make confident judgments regarding actual United States motives behind the war. And if further proof were needed, it came in a close reading of what Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice had been saying in early 2001, namely that Iraq posed little security threat to its immediate neighbors, much less to the United States, and still less did it have weapons of mass destruction. When Australian journalist John Pilger included the relevant quotations in his documentary, "Breaking the Silence," the laziness and vacuousness that have infected journalism in the United States (as documented, for example, by Robert McChesney, John Nichols, and Amy Goodman in chapters 30 and 33) were held up to ridicule. The American press had not done its homework, as demonstrated by simple media analysis of statements by our own top officials.

For all these reasons, we need to reconstitute a media-analysis capability as an independent entity feeding from Foreign Broadcast Information Service collection and housed in FBIS. It is essential that the analysis group send its analyses directly to the White House and members of the National Security Council with copies to the Central Intelligence Agency and other intelligence agencies and consumers. The person appointed head of this reconstituted analysis group needs to be a fiercely independent, apolitical professional who is fully conversant with the tools and disciplines of media analysis and possessed of the same personal attributes as those needed in a director of central intelligence.

The need for independent media analysis on national security parallels the need for independent alternatives to corporate-controlled media, generally, on all issues, as discussed in part V of this book.

CONCLUSION

The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence community are in shambles. As in the case of Vietnam, an ill-advised war has sucked reason, courage, and integrity out of the system, and there is little prospect of improvement in the short term. At the same time, inaction is not a responsible option. In the years immediately ahead, we are likely to experience crisis after crisis. The United States cannot permit itself the luxury of putting off repair work on intelligence.

Happily, reformers do not face a tabula rasa. Good solid spade-work has been done—by the Carnegie Endowment, for example—in documenting graphically the disconnects between the intelligence estimates and reality. In this chapter I have tried to throw some light on why and how those disconnects exist. We now need to energize what can still be energized and hold the feet of congressional overseers to the fire. At very least we must, as Carnegie suggests, foster a healthy skepticism regarding intelligence claims—particularly in the light of the myriad "misrepresentations" of the past few years—and be alert to alarm bells alerting us to improprieties in intelligence.

Investigative commissions should do their thing, but they should not divert our attention from the problems at hand. We know enough now about what is needed that we can start repairing the process of preparing estimates and creating conditions conducive to truly independent imagery and media analysis.

Regarding Iraq, what is clear is that Ahmed Chalabi and his tailors were able to sell the emperor a new suit of clothes—an invisible suit that could be seen neither by imagery nor media analysis. If Chalabi's minions again flood the Pentagon and White House with alarming reports—this time regarding, say, Syrian "weapons of mass destruction" and ties with terrorists—imagery and other modes of collection must be enlisted quickly to verify or dismiss such reports. Media analysis, too, must gain a hearing in policymaking circles, if only to show that if the United States continues to be seen as the force behind policies in Israel, we are in for decades more of hate and violence at the hands of millions with literally nothing to lose.

While a good many intelligence analysts have up and left, there are still enough professionals in the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the State Department, and elsewhere to meet today's challenges. But they are sorely in need of courageous leadership, honest example, and adult supervision. Sadly, their ranks are dwindling, while those of careerists with a penchant for trimming their sails to the prevailing winds increase. There is little time to lose.

Let the decontamination begin.

NOTES

1. Not every commission is as successful as the Hart-Rudman United States Commission on National Security/21st Century. In 1996, for example, the Aspin-Brown Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community recommended transferring to the Defense Department the Director of Central Intelligence's responsibility for processing and disseminating satellite imagery—an egregious mistake, as will be shown later in this chapter. The

Senate Intelligence Committee expressed serious misgivings at this evisceration of the Director of Central Intelligence's charter for all-source analysis, but in the end supported the legislation.

2. There have been significant shortcomings in the preparation of sanitized summaries of major estimates. Veteran State Department intelligence official Greg Thielmann notes that it is "enormously important" to stay faithful to the original classified version and believes "there was some damage done to the truth" in preparing the unclassified version of the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq.

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