



Let A Thousand Team Bs Bloom: Douglas Feith Deserves Our Thanks

There Is No Category of 'Inappropriate' Activities

OPINION By HUGH HEWITT

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Ever hear of "Team B?"

Edward Jay Epstein explains what it refers to:

"In January 1976, in response to pressure from the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) to examine the way the CIA arrived at its National Intelligence Estimates, George Bush, then the newly appointed director of Central Intelligence, agreed to a test in which both the CIA (called Team A) and a panel of non-CIA experts (called Team B) would independently analyze the same underlying material on three national security issues.

Team B members, all approved by the CIA, included Harvard political scientist Richard Pipes; Gen. Daniel Graham, who had headed the Defense Intelligence Agency; Paul Nitze, a former deputy secretary of defense; Gen. John Vogt, the former Air Force chief of staff; Thomas Wolfe, a top Rand Corp. executive; Gen. Jasper Welsh, the head of the Air Force's system analysis; and Paul Wolfowitz, who was at the Arms Control Agency.

The three topics selected by the National Security Council were:

- Soviet missile accuracy
- The ability of low-flying U.S. bombers to penetrate Soviet defenses
- Overall Soviet strategic capabilities and intentions

A fourth proposed topic, the detectability of U.S. submarines, was rejected by the Navy. The exercise began in August 1976 and ended in December 1976, with both sides presenting their conclusion to PFIAB.

The same data produced two startlingly different results. On the issue of Soviet missile accuracy, for example, Team A concluded that Soviet missiles were relatively inaccurate ($\frac{1}{4}$ of a nautical mile), and therefore did not pose a major threat to U.S. silos; whereas Team B concluded that Soviet missiles may have attained sufficient accuracy ($\frac{1}{15}$ th of a nautical mile) to threaten these same silos. (As Soviet missile testing later revealed. Team B turned out to be correct on this issue.)

The lesson of this extraordinary disputation was not that the Soviet Union had a greater or lesser capacity but that intelligence estimates, no matter how objective they may seem, are an inherently uncertain enterprise, based on questionable assumptions and selective exploitation of sources.

The facts of intelligence work are not like marbles that can be lined up, counted and weighed. They assume different meanings depending on who selects them and orders them into a mosaic. Intelligence estimates are at best, therefore, an incomplete product."

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With this background we turn to the report of the interim inspector general of the Department of Defense who is not a fan of independent analysis of the intelligence community's work product by the Department of Defense. The Defense Department undertook just such an analysis in 2002 when the Bush administration wanted to know whether or not Iraq was cooperating with al Qaeda.

"It's healthy to criticize the CIA's intelligence," said former Pentagon policy chief Douglas Feith on "Fox News Sunday." "What the people in the Pentagon were doing was right. It was good government."

It was indeed "good government" to push for a Team B approach to the question of Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda, and given the CIA's failure to understand the WMD situation in Iraq, or predict the civil unrest that has followed the overthrow of Saddam, or -- going back to 1991 -- the closeness to nuclear capacity that Saddam had achieved, skepticism about the reliability of CIA work product seems a very healthy thing indeed.

The idea that any "inspector general," much less one at the Department of Defense in time of war would question the "appropriateness" of the demand from duly nominated and confirmed civilian appointees is astounding. Illegal activities ought to be ferreted out and condemned, but there is no category of "inappropriate" activities with a definition other than CYA that applies. The damage this report has done, not to Feith or his staff, but to the willingness of future officials to push for alternative interpretations of data may be lasting. The country needs to constantly push all of its intelligence agencies to sift through the noise and find the patterns and the facts that matter. We need more people like Feith demanding studies like the one he ordered up, not timid time servers and conventional wisdom warmed over once again. Perhaps if Bill Clinton's Department of Defense had ordered up a Team B-like assessment of al Qaeda's capabilities in 1999, the Twin Towers would still be standing.

The left is at its most incoherent in its rage about Feith. The usual suspects are claiming that Feith did a terrible thing in pushing for second looks at CIA conclusions, but they are also deeply enmeshed in a theory of intelligence that demands that we never trust any conclusions that point to the United States having enemies and those enemies intending us harm.

Take a tour around the left with regard to the new report on the Iranian supply of American-killing weaponry to the terrorists in Iraq. (If MSM has failed to alert you to that story, read all about it at Bill Roggio's Fourth Rail blog: hughhewitt.com)

The anti-war zealots are now in full "defend Iran mode," led by the Glenn Greenwald, the greatest one-time "litigator in N.Y.C. specializing in First Amendment challenges, civil rights cases, and corporate and securities fraud matters" that you've never heard of, who on Saturday branded a New York Times' reporter

writing about the evidence of Iranian complicity in the death of American troops as "in Pravda Spokesman mode," and characterized the Times' as having:

Published a lengthy, prominent front-page article by Michael Gordon that does nothing, literally, but mindlessly recite administration claims about Iran's weapons-supplying activities without the slightest questioning, investigation, or presentation of ample counter-evidence. The entire article is nothing more than one accusatory claim about Iran after the next, all emanating from the mouths of anonymous military and "intelligence officials" without the slightest verified evidence, and Gordon just mindlessly repeats what he has been told in one provocative paragraph after the next.

This is madness, a refusal to admit any evidence that contradicts pet conclusions. Iran could open up a Weapons Wal-Mart in Sadr City and Greenwald et al would say, "So what?" They are to these years as Stanley Baldwin was to the '30s. They cannot be bothered: The necessities of politics matter too much.

We need a permanent "Team B," whether housed at the Department of Defense or somewhere else, and staffed by pros overseen by the smartest folks in the world of intelligence gathering. Perhaps it should be a group whose membership is dictated by past positions held -- all former secretaries of defense, all former heads of CIA, all former heads of NSA etc.

But we need to be constantly evaluating and asking the toughest questions because the stakes are so high. Spare me the opinions of careerists and order up, again and again, all the contrarian reports we can find.

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