

FACTS ABOUT PRE-IRAQ WAR INTELLIGENCE

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The Iraq War spawned controversies about the relationship of policy to intelligence. Some of these controversies stemmed from allegations that my office "politicized" intelligence - in other words, it was alleged that my office pressured intelligence officials to produce work that suited Bush administration policy preferences. The allegations have been thoroughly investigated and found to be groundless.

The allegations dealt with two subjects: the Saddam Hussein regime's programs for weapons of mass destruction and that regime's relationship to al Qaeda.

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the Silberman-Robb Commission looked into the allegations regarding both of these subjects. Each panel issued a unanimous, bipartisan report. The two reports agreed that the allegations of politicization are untrue.

Regarding Iraqi WMD, the Silberman-Robb Commission's findings included the following:

- ***"[Intelligence] analysts universally asserted that in no instance did political pressure cause them to skew or alter any of their analytical judgments.*** We conclude that it was the paucity of intelligence and poor analytical tradecraft, rather than political pressure, that produced the inaccurate pre-war intelligence assessments."¹
- "The Commission has found no evidence of 'politicization' of the Intelligence Community's assessments concerning Iraq's reported WMD programs. No analytical judgments were changed in response to political pressure to reach a particular conclusion. The Commission has investigated this issue closely, querying in detail those analysts involved in formulating pre-war judgments about Iraq's WMD programs."²
- "We urge that policymakers actively probe and question analysts. ...[S]uch interaction is not 'politicization.' Analysts should expect such demanding and

¹ Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction. *Report to the President of the United States* (Hereafter, "Silberman-Robb Report"), 31 March 2005, p. 51. Accessible at http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2005_03_31_Silberman-Robb_Report.pdf.

² Silberman-Robb Report, p. 188.

aggressive testing without - as a matter of principal and professionalism - allowing it to subvert their judgment."³

Like the Silberman-Robb Commission, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence examined interactions between policy officials and intelligence professionals on the issue of Iraqi WMD programs. Regarding the Iraq-al Qaeda relationship, the Committee examined how DoD policy officials questioned the work of intelligence officials who were filtering or suppressing intelligence to support their own preconceptions. In 2002, some DoD officials (including from my office) developed a briefing challenging the CIA's work on the Iraq-al Qaeda relationship.

Critics of the administration claimed that these challenges amounted to political pressure on intelligence officials. The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence rejected that view. It found, on the contrary, that the critique by DoD policy officials actually improved the intelligence community's work on the Iraq-al Qaeda relationship.⁴

On these issues, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence determined that:

- **it "did not find any evidence that Administration officials attempted to coerce, influence or pressure analysts to change their judgments related to Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capabilities."**⁵
- "none of the analysts or other people interviewed by the Committee said that they were pressured to change their conclusions related to Iraq's links to terrorism."⁶
- "when asked whether analysts were pressured in any way to alter their assessments or make their judgments conform with Administration policies on Iraq's WMD programs, not a single analyst answered yes. Most analysts simply answered, "no" or "never" . . ."⁷

³ Silberman-Robb Report, p. 27.

⁴ Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. *Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq* (Hereafter "SSCI Phase One Report"), 7 July 2004, p. 34. Accessible at http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2004_07_07_SSCI_PhaseOne_Report.pdf.

⁵ SSCI Phase One Report, p. 284.

⁶ SSCI Phase One Report, p. 363.

⁷ SSCI Phase One Report, p. 273.

- "no analyst questioned by the Committee stated that the questions [about the potential for cooperation between Saddam Hussein's regime and al-Qaida] were unreasonable, or that they were encouraged by the questioning to alter their conclusions regarding Iraq's links to al-Qaida."⁸
- "the questions had forced them [intelligence professionals] to go back and review the intelligence reporting, and that during this exercise they came across information they had overlooked in initial readings."⁹
- "this process—the policymakers probing questions—actually improved the Central Intelligence Agency's products."¹⁰

Later, Senator Carl Levin asked the Department of Defense Inspector General (DoD IG) to review whether my office did anything in the controversy with the CIA that was unauthorized, unlawful, or inappropriate.¹¹ Acting DoD IG Thomas Gimble found that my office's activities were authorized and lawful,¹² and that at no time did my office mislead Congress.¹³ He stated, however, that the critique of the CIA's work was "inappropriate." I disagree with that opinion of the Acting IG.¹⁴

Gimble makes a number of incorrect points in his report. For example, he claims that a critique of intelligence is itself an intelligence product. This is false. My office's work was not an intelligence assessment; it was a comment on CIA assessments. Remarkably, Gimble testified that he never evaluated whether DoD's critique of the CIA's work was valid -- that is, whether the substance of the criticism was correct.¹⁵

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Levin asked the DoD IG to answer ten questions regarding my office's work on intelligence-related issues. See Levin, Senator Carl. "September 22, 2005 Letter to Tom Gimble," in Department of Defense Inspector General, *Review of the Pre-Iraqi War Activities of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy* (Hereafter, "DoD IG Report"), 9 February 2007, p. 22. Accessible at http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2007_02_09_DoD_IG_Report.pdf.

¹² DoD IG Report, p. 4.

¹³ DoD IG Report, p. 30.

¹⁴ See Feith, Douglas J. "Tough Questions We Were Right to Ask," *Washington Post*, 14 February 2007. Accessible at http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2007_02_14_Tough_Questions_We_Were_Right_To_Ask.pdf

¹⁵ Senate Committee on Armed Services Hearing. *Briefing on the Department of Defense Inspector General's Report on the Activities of the Office of Special Plans Prior to the War in Iraq*, 9 February 2007, pp. 24, 39. Accessible at http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2007_02_09_DoD_IG_SASC_Hearing.pdf.

His view was that criticism of the CIA was inappropriate even if it was correct. I believe that is a bizarre conclusion. If Gimble's view were widely accepted, it would discourage policy officials from engaging in tough questioning of intelligence. For years, thoughtful commentators on policy and intelligence have argued that the key to good intelligence is careful, critical reading of intelligence products by policy officials and honest feedback from the policy officials. It is wrong and harmful for Gimble to have labeled such feedback an "inappropriate" intelligence activity by policy officials. As we saw in the case of Iraq, our country needs more not less skeptical and critical reading of CIA intelligence.

An additional controversy relating to the Iraq-al Qaeda relationship arose after Stephen F. Hayes wrote an article¹⁶ for the *Weekly Standard* about a document my office produced. Hayes described the document as a "memorandum" that asserted that Saddam Hussein had an operational relationship with al Qaeda. Critics of the administration claimed that the document was part of an effort to justify war against Iraq. In fact, however, the document was not produced as a "memorandum" and was not written for anyone in the Executive Branch. Rather, it was part of a letter produced to answer questions posed by the Senate Select Intelligence Committee. It was written months after Saddam Hussein had already been removed from power so it is incorrect to claim it was written to urge the initiation of war.

¹⁶ Hayes, Stephen F. "Case Closed," *Weekly Standard*, 24 November 2003. Accessible at http://www.dougfeith.com/docs/2003_11_24_Hayes_Case_Closed.pdf.