
Open Letter to Bush

Intelligence Vets Ask: Probe Iraq 'WMD' Fraud

by Edward Spannaus

A group of former intelligence officers sent an open letter to President Bush on May 1, asking the President to order an immediate investigation into the performance of the special Pentagon intelligence unit, the CIA and other intelligence agencies, that resulted in what they term a “policy and intelligence fiasco of monstrous proportions” evident in the failure to uncover weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The signers of the memorandum formed the organization Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) in January, to critique the way intelligence was being used to justify war on Iraq. Excerpts of the memorandum follow. The full memorandum is posted on www.veteransforcommonsense.org.

May 1, 2003

Memorandum For: The President

From: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

Subject: Intelligence Fiasco

We write to express deep concern over the growing mistrust and cynicism with which many, including veteran intelligence professionals inside and outside our movement, regard the intelligence cited by you and your chief advisers to justify the war against Iraq.

The controversy over intelligence on Iraq has deep roots, going back a decade. But the issue came to a head over recent months as it played a key role in supporting your administration’s decision to attack Iraq. And it has now become acute, since you have been backed into the untenable position of assuming the former role of Saddam Hussein in refusing to cooperate with UN inspectors. (As chief UN nuclear inspector Mohamed El-Baradei noted earlier this week, “We have years of experience and know every scientist worth interviewing.”) The implications not only for U.S. stature abroad but also for the future of U.S. intelligence are immense. They need to be addressed without delay.

Prominent pundits (and, quite probably, some of your own advisers) are now saying it does not matter whether so-called “weapons of mass destruction” are found in Iraq. Don’t let them fool you. It matters a great deal. . . .

The lack of success in locating weapons of mass destruction six weeks after U.S. and U.K. forces in-

vaded Iraq suggests they either do not exist at all, or will not be found in sufficient quantity or capability to support your repeated claim that Iraq posed a grave threat to U.S. security. Your opposition to inviting UN inspectors into Iraq feeds the suspicion that you wish to avoid independent verification by the UN, and even that you may wish to preserve the option of “planting” such weapons to be “discovered” later. Sen. Carl Levin recently warned that, if some are found, “Many people around the world will think we planted those weapons unless the UN inspectors are there with us.”

Complicating matters still further, foreign resistance is building to lifting the economic sanctions against Iraq until the UN can certify that Iraq is free of weapons of mass destruction. Russian President Vladimir Putin has joined others in insisting that only UN weapons inspectors can reliably certify that. With considerable bite and sarcasm, he asked [British] Prime Minister Tony Blair on April 29, “Where are these arsenals of weapons of mass destruction, if they were there?”

What is at play here is a policy and intelligence fiasco of monumental proportions. It is essential that you be able to separate fact from fiction—for your own sake, and for the credibility of our country’s intelligence community. We urge you to do two things without delay:

(1) Invite UN inspectors to return to Iraq without further delay; and

(2) Ask Gen. Brent Scowcroft, Chair of your Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, to launch an immediate inquiry into the performance of the CIA and other intelligence agencies in providing the intelligence upon which you have based your fateful decision for war against Iraq.

You may not realize the extent of the current ferment within the Intelligence Community and particularly the CIA. 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. Are their kitchens only in the Pentagon, the National Security Council, and the Vice President’s office?

There are troubling signs, as will be seen below, that some senior officials of the CIA may be graduates of the other CIA—the Culinary Institute of America.

While there have been occasions in the past when intelligence has been deliberately warped for political purposes, never before has such warping been used in such a systematic way to mislead our elected representatives into voting to approve going to war. It is essential that all this be sorted out; General Scowcroft is uniquely qualified to lead such an investigation.