

Cheney Cat's-Paw, Porter Goss, As CIA Director?

by Ray McGovern

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There is, thankfully, a remnant of CIA professionals who still put objective analysis above political correctness and career advancement. Just when they thought there were no indignities left for them to suffer, they are shuddering again at press reports that Rep. Porter Goss (R-Fla.) may soon be their new boss.

That possibility conjures up a painful flashback for those of us who served as CIA analysts when Richard Nixon was President. Chalk it up to our naïveté, but we were taken aback when swashbuckling James Schlesinger, who followed Richard Helms as CIA director, announced on arrival, "I am here to see that you guys don't screw Richard Nixon!" To underscore his point, Schlesinger told us he would be reporting directly to White House political advisor Bob Haldeman (Nixon's Karl Rove) and not to National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger.

No doubt Goss would be more discreet in showing his hand, but his appointment as director would be the ultimate in politicization. He has long shown himself to be under the spell of Vice President Dick Cheney, and would likely report primarily to him and to White House political advisor Karl Rove, rather than to National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice.

Goss would almost certainly follow lame-duck Director George Tenet's practice of reading to the President in the morning, and become an integral part of the "White House team." The team-membership phenomenon is particularly disquieting.

If the failure-prone experience of the past few years has told us anything, it is that being a "team member" in good standing is the kiss of death for the CIA director's primary role of "telling it like it is" to the President and his senior

advisors. It was a painful moment of truth when former Speaker Newt Gingrich—like Cheney, a frequent visitor to CIA headquarters—told the press that Tenet was "so grateful to the President that he would do anything for him."

The Whore of Babylon

One need look no farther than what has become known as a latter-day Whore of Babylon—the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) of Oct. 1, 2002, the very title of which betrayed a politically correct, but substantively wrong, conclusion: "Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction." And bear in mind that it was only several months after President Bush decided to attack Iraq that Tenet commissioned that estimate. Not unreasonably, Congress was wondering about the views of the intelligence community, and the White House needed congressional acquiescence.

No problem. "Slam-dunk" Tenet, following White House instructions, ensured that the estimate was cooked to the recipe of Cheney's tart speech of August 26, 2002. "We know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons," Cheney said, and the estimate Tenet signed gave belated endorsement—with "high confidence," no less—to that lie.

The intelligence process, of course, was not the only thing undermined. So was the Constitution. Various drafts of that NIE, reinforced with heavy doses of "mushroom-cloud" rhetoric, were used to deceive congressmen and senators into ceding to the Executive their prerogative to declare war.

What was actually happening was clear to intelligence analysts, active and retired.

But what about CIA alumnus Porter Goss, then in his sixth year as chairman of the House Intelligence Oversight Committee? Republican Party loyalist first and foremost, Goss chose to give an entirely new meaning to "oversight." Even when it became clear that the "mushroom-cloud" reporting was based mostly on a forgery, he just sat back and watched it all happen. . . .

This is what CIA would get with Porter Goss at the helm. Appointing Goss would administer the *coup de grace* to intelligence analysts trying to survive while still speaking truth without fear or favor. Goss, who has a long history of subservience to Cheney, could be counted upon to play the Cheney/Gingrich/et al. role himself.

Don't Throw Me in That Briar Patch

Last month when Tenet was let go, Administration officials indicated that a permanent replacement would not be named until after the election. They indicated they wanted to avoid washing the dirty linen of intelligence once again in public. Evidently, they had not yet checked with Karl Rove.

The Democrats warn smugly that an attempt by the Administration to confirm a new CIA director could become an embarrassing referendum on CIA's recent performance, but they miss the point entirely—and show, once again, that they can't hold a candle to Rove for political cleverness. The name

of the Administration's game is to blame Iraq on intelligence failures, and Goss already did so last week in what amounted to his first campaign speech for the job of director. Consider court historian Bob Woodward's book, *Plan of Attack*, which Condoleezza Rice and other officials have promoted. Rice has publicly confirmed Woodward's story about Tenet misleading the President by claiming the evidence on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction was a "slam dunk."

While there is ample evidence of ineptitude on Tenet's part, this now-famous vignette obscures the fact that President Bush had unleashed the dogs of war well before checking to see if there was any credible intelligence to justify doing so. As the election nears, it serves the Administration nicely to keep the focus on intelligence shortcomings and to make it appear that the President was misled—on weapons of mass destruction, for example. And Porter Goss is precisely the right person to cooperate in this effort.

The report due later this month by the Senate Intelligence Committee investigating intelligence performance regarding the long-sought-after Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, is said to be scathing in its criticism of the CIA. No problem. This too will help keep the focus where the White House wants it—the more so since committee chair and Republican stalwart Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) can be counted on to do whatever Cheney and Rove tell him to do. It was not until Roberts was instructed to give Tenet the cold shoulder that the latter began to see the handwriting on the wall.

And Republicans are also in control of the 9/11 Commission, which will be issuing its own report later this month. There are already signs that Republican commissioners have begun to water down findings critical of the Administration, while highlighting those critical of intelligence performance.

Goss was happy to let the Senate Intelligence Committee take the lead in investigating intelligence performance on key issues like weapons of mass destruction and . . . chose to keep his committee's head (and his own) down. . . . The myriad shortcomings in intelligence work appeared on his somnolent watch; by any reasonable standard, he bears some responsibility for impaired oversight—not only on Iraq, but on 9/11 as well.

Goss on 9/11

With respect to the various investigations into 9/11, Goss was thrust into the limelight by Cheney, who initially opposed any investigation at all. In February 2002, Cheney went so far as to warn that if Congress decided to go ahead with an investigation, Administration officials might not show up to testify. When folks started talking about the need for a genuinely independent commission, though, Cheney acquiesced in the establishment of the congressional joint committee as the lesser evil, and took reassurance in the fact that Goss could be counted on to keep the lid on—and, when necessary, run rings around co-chair Sen. Bob Graham, (D-Fla.).

Porter Goss performed that task brilliantly, giving clear

priority to providing political protection for the President. Goss acquiesced when the White House and CIA refused to allow the joint committee to report out any information on what President Bush had been told before 9/11—ostensibly because it was "classified."

As a result, completely absent from the committee's report was any mention of the President's Daily Brief of Aug. 6, 2001, which bore the title "Bin Laden determined to strike in U.S.," even though the press had already reported the title and the gist of that damning piece of evidence. Small wonder that the families of 9/11 victims were outraged and pressed even harder for an independent investigation.

And a First for a Congressional Committee

The most notable (and bizarre) achievement of the joint committee was inviting the FBI to investigate members of Congress. In June 2002, Cheney called Goss and Graham to chastise them for a media leak of sensitive information from intercepted communications. A CNN report had attributed the leak to "two congressional sources," and Cheney was livid.

Goss admitted to being "chagrined" over Cheney's call. He and Graham promptly bypassed normal congressional procedures and went directly to Attorney General John Ashcroft, asking him to investigate the leak. Little thought apparently was given to the separation of powers between the executive and congressional branches, or the fact that Congress has its own capability for such investigations.

Next thing you know, the FBI is crawling all over Capitol Hill, questioning members of the joint committee that is investigating the FBI, CIA, et al., and asking members of Congress to submit to lie-detector tests.

That Goss and Graham could be so easily intimidated by Cheney speaks volumes.

Bottom Line

West Virginia Sen. Jay Rockefeller, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, is right in saying, "We need a director who is not only knowledgeable and capable but unquestionably independent." And politicians need not apply. Rockefeller would rule out "any politician from either party." But who pays attention to minority members these days—ranking or non-ranking? Rockefeller might have added that another prerequisite is prior experience managing a large, complex organization. Tenet had none; neither does Goss.

There seems a better than even chance the Bush Administration will nominate Goss, and use the nomination hearings as yet another forum at which to blame the Iraq debacle on faulty intelligence. And, as a bonus for Bush, if there is time before the election, it would seem a safe bet that Goss will be able to bring to heel recalcitrant analysts who are still "fighting the problem," still staring in disbelief at the given wisdom (given, apparently, only to the Pentagon and White House) that Iraq and al-Qaeda were in bed with each other.