

THE DEEPER END OF THE POND: 7 REASONS FOR THE FAILURE OF  
AMERICA'S INTELLIGENCE GATHERING COMMUNITY AT THE  
BEGINNING OF THE IRAQ WAR

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PINE BLUFFS—During the 2004 Presidential election campaign, when it became apparent that Democrat candidate John Kerry had glaring credibility problems, his supporters quickly developed a “strategy.” Attack the *President’s* credibility. Accuse him of lying about Iraq’s possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) when he led this Nation into war, and charge that the statement in his January 2003 State of the Union address, “The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein sought to purchase quantities of uranium in Africa,” was false.

Hoping that damaging Mr. Bush’s credibility might level the playing field for Mr. Kerry, Democrats cited claims of former weapons inspectors Hans Blitz and David Kay, that they no longer believed Iraq possessed WMD. They also relied on former Ambassador Joseph Wilson’s contention that information he gathered in Niger during February 2002 proved the president’s claim false. Although this wrongheaded “strategy” was quickly shot down, it *did* serve to focus Congressional attention on a serious problem; why was intelligence given to Mr. Bush during the months just prior to the Iraq War so inaccurate?

In July 2003, a bipartisan Senate Select Intelligence Committee (SSIC) concluded that President Bush neither exaggerated nor lied about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction but, instead, was given faulty information by the CIA. The Committee also decided that British, American and other intelligence agencies had substantial reasons to believe that Saddam Hussein had indeed sought uranium in Africa. Additionally, its

report thoroughly discredited Wilson's claims, finding that "it was reasonable for analysts to assess that Iraq had sought uranium from Africa based on CIA reporting and other intelligence." SSIC went on to list instances where Wilson *himself* had made false claims about the Niger affair, and questioned why the CIA had sent him on that mission, since he had no expertise in nuclear weapons.

But while exonerating Mr. Bush and shooting down Democrat allegations that he lied, the Senate Committee excoriated the intelligence community's failure to obtain and accurately assess intelligence about Iraq. It asserted in the strongest terms that CIA capacities had been decimated in the mid-1990s, and suggested that the Agency needed fixing. How had our CIA, once the best in the world at clandestine human intelligence collection, come to such a sorry state?

The failure to obtain accurate intelligence from Iraq and elsewhere in that region was caused by these seven things:

- 1) A hostile attitude emanating from liberal Democrats.
- 2) Emasculation of intelligence budgets during the Clinton presidency.
- 3) Presidential appointments of two unqualified DCIs.
- 4) Declassification of CIA Cold War covert operations methods.
- 5) Restraints on what were considered to be "politically incorrect" recruitment of agents.
- 6) Inclusion of more women and minorities at CIA.
- 7) A risk-averse mind-set among the leadership at CIA.

An examination of the Democrat Party's recent history reveals that, at least since the McGovern era, liberal Democrats seem unwilling to defend America against its foreign enemies. Worse, Democrats often support policies which, if followed, would lead to America's defeat. It's well known that Mr. Clinton and fellow Democrats hated the

American military. Less well known is their hatred of America's intelligence community. Because of their hostility, during the 1990s Democrats championed deep cuts in CIA and NSA budgets.

Also during that time frame, the Agency suffered from two disastrous DCI appointments. The worst was foreign-born John Deutch. Tapped by Mr. Clinton in 1995, Deutch promptly declassified records of all Cold War CIA operations, thus exposing its methods for all to see. He also placed restrictions on recruitment of "politically incorrect" agents—those previously arrested and convicted of a crime. Finally, he encouraged inclusion of more women and minorities at the Agency.

Well, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that people lacking ties to criminal communities such as terrorist groups will fail in certain missions. Nor does one have to be brilliant to understand that, the religion of Islam being prevalent in the Middle East, women agents would be ineffectual there.

Because of these problems, CIA morale suffered. By 2000, case officer resignations had hit an all-time high and agent recruitments had hit an all-time low. Enter George Tenet, CIA's Deputy Director under Deutch. Mr. Clinton appointed him to the top spot in July 1997, after Deutch resigned suddenly.

Under Tenet, at CIA stations around the world very little happened. Why? Intelligence gathering is extremely risky work, and Tenet ushered in a risk-averse mentality on Langley's seventh floor. Risk-taking activity went out of vogue. Risk-takers no longer received performance bonuses. The way to earn a promotion was to play it safe, keep your head down, and stay on the reservation.

Agent recruiting? Unpopular because risky. The seventh floor had begun to weigh every recruitment with only one idea in mind: *if this becomes public, how will it*

*look in the Washington Post?* By 2000, there were virtually no risk-takers operating in Iraq and surrounding nations. CIA's section chief in Riyadh didn't even speak Arabic, and had no Saudi recruitments. Furthermore, spotting, assessing, developing, and recruiting an agent can take 6 months or longer. With the onset of "the 30-day assignment," intelligence gathering tradecraft became almost nil.

What about non-official cover agents (NOCs) – operatives who assume covert roles in non-government organizations, to infiltrate suspected terrorist groups and dig out information? During the Deutch and Tenet reigns, the few who were operating used business covers. But neither Deutch nor Tenet understood that executives and salesmen would be unable to penetrate Al Qaeda networks. Gone were the sleazy characters recruited because they could move easily among various unsavory elements. Gone were the front groups in Germany, France, Holland, Pakistan, Indonesia, Qatar, Sudan, and the UAE, created to infiltrate Islamic Jihadists who championed the killing of Americans.

Human intelligence (HUMINT) was almost non-existent during the years prior to the Iraq war. Sure, there were a few Agency paramilitary personnel (PMs) and civilian contractors out there, but their reports were often ignored at CIA. Between organizational timidity, political correctness, risk aversion, and lack of strong leadership at the operational level, CIA had become dysfunctional. It was unable to develop the human intelligence necessary to satisfy White House requests for answers.

It was in this context that President Bush framed plans to invade Iraq and remove Saddam. And it was in this context that DCI George Tenet advised him that Saddam *did* have WMD, and an ongoing nuclear energy program to produce nuclear warheads.

When the commander-in-chief is given evidence developed by intelligence

agencies of his own and other nations, he cannot be faulted for acting on that information even if it's erroneous. To accuse him of lying ignores the facts and flies in the face of truth.

But here's the deeper end of the pond. If America is not to continue flying blind in much of the world, it's crucial that the CIA takes immediate and decisive corrective measures, beginning with the Directorate of Operations (DO), to return to its core mission of creating and sustaining a viable human intelligence collection capacity.

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