

Opening Statement
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An Oversight Hearing On Iraq Pre-War Intelligence
Monday, June 26, 2006

Today, the Democratic Policy Committee is holding an oversight hearing on the intelligence leading up to the war in Iraq.

We are holding this hearing in the spirit of an old saying: those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat it.

Aldous Huxley had a variation on that quote. He said that “the most important thing we learn from history is that we never learn from history.”

Well, in this instance we need to prove Huxley wrong. We need to understand whether intelligence was flawed or misused in the build-up to the Iraq war, and make sure that this never happens again.

Looking forward, the stakes couldn't be higher.

There is a leader in Iran who has denied that the Holocaust happened, and has called for the destruction of Israel. He has also declared that his country is determined to develop a nuclear program. We need to know how close Iran has come to having nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, a secretive regime in North Korea, led by an erratic leader, has apparently already acquired nuclear weapons and is aiming to produce more. We know that North Korea has transferred nuclear weapons technology to other regimes. We need to watch their every move.

There are many other potential flashpoints around the world that are critical to our country.

In Kashmir, there is the potential for a conflict between India and Pakistan, both of whom have nuclear weapons. A crisis in Kashmir could quickly engulf other countries.

Then there is the issue of Taiwan. Last year, China's parliament passed a law authorizing an attack to stop Taiwan from pursuing formal independence. Tensions in that part of the world could flare up at any time, and the United States could find itself drawn into such a conflict.

The President needs to have first rate, accurate intelligence – and the American people need to have the confidence that intelligence assessments are made free from political pressures, and that they are used appropriately and wisely.

There have been some signs that the Administration has learned from its mistakes in the run-up to the Iraq war. In its dealings with Iran, the Administration has been more candid about the limits of the available intelligence.

For instance, earlier this month the Director of National Intelligence, John Negroponte, estimated that Iran could develop a nuclear bomb in as little as five years. But he admitted that the intelligence on this point is not “clear-cut” – and he said that he is mindful of the mistakes made in the build-up to the Iraq war.

So there is value in taking a good look at the mistakes involving pre-war intelligence. Today, we have a panel of witnesses who have invaluable perspectives in this regard. This is the first time that they have publicly testified about these matters before Congress, and we thank them for coming forward.

- ✓ Larry Wilkerson was the Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell from 2002 to 2005.
- ✓ Paul Pillar was the CIA official responsible for coordinating intelligence on Iraq from 2000 to 2005.
- ✓ Carl Ford was Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research from 2001 to 2003.
- ✓ Wayne White was the State Department’s principal Iraq analyst from 2003 to 2005.

- ✓ Rod Barton was a Senior Advisor to the Iraq Survey Group from 2003 to 2004.
- ✓ Michael Smith is a reporter for the Sunday Times of London, and was the first to report the existence of the so-called “Downing Street Memo.”
- ✓ Joseph Cirincione is the co-author of WMD in Iraq: Evidence and Implications.

Before I turn to the witnesses, let me make a couple of other observations.

We must never forget that America has thousands of dedicated, hard working, patriotic intelligence officers serving throughout the world. They make incredible sacrifices to protect our country. We owe it to them to make sure that their work gets full and fair consideration and that they are never pressured or politicized.

In the wall of the main lobby at the CIA headquarters, there is a very apt verse from the New Testament: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

As we navigate the dangerous waters that lie ahead, let’s remember that the ultimate aim of good intelligence is to arrive at the truth.