

## **Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing**

### **“An Oversight Hearing on Pre-War Intelligence Relating to Iraq”**

**Paul R. Pillar**

Visiting Professor, Georgetown University

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the invitation to meet with this committee to discuss questions concerning the use of intelligence prior to the initiation of Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003. Much has been said and written, especially during the past few years, about how to make U.S. intelligence better. Far less has been said about the equally important issue of the intelligence-policy relationship, and how intelligence is—or is not—used. Much of the considerable public expenditures on intelligence would be wasted if the intelligence product does not serve to inform the making and execution of U.S. foreign and security policy.

The decision to go to war in Iraq exhibited serious problems in the intelligence-policy relationship. Though not entirely unprecedented, these problems were so severe in the Iraq case that I would describe the relationship as broken. I wish to highlight three respects in which this was true.

The first was the non-use of intelligence and intelligence assessments in making the decision to go to war in Iraq. Although the flawed assessments about Iraqi unconventional weapons programs have received enormous attention, they were not the driving force behind that decision—as indicated by the fact that many, both in the United States and abroad, who shared the same erroneous perceptions about those programs favored policies toward Iraq that were much different from the one adopted. The National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iraqi weapons programs that would receive so much notoriety was requested not by the administration but by members of Congress. I was the National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia from 2000 to 2005, and the first request my office received from any administration policymaker for any Intelligence Community assessment on any aspect of Iraq was not until about a year into the war.

Even the flawed NIE about weapons contained important judgments that clearly were not driving the rush to war. The Intelligence Community assessed that Iraq probably was several years away from development of a nuclear weapon—a judgment at variance with, for example, the publicly expressed view of the Vice President that Saddam Hussein was fairly close to getting such a weapon. The Estimate assessed that

Saddam was unlikely to use any weapons of mass destruction he did have against the United States or to give them to terrorists, except perhaps in the extreme case in which we tried to overthrow his regime, as with an invasion.

On the issue of the Saddam regime's relations with terrorist groups, the Intelligence Community, in the assessments it produced on this subject, never judged that there was anything close to an alliance with Al Qaeda.

And on the situation that would be faced in post-Saddam Iraq, the Intelligence Community produced on its own initiative its assessment of the likely challenges there. It presented a picture of a political culture that would not provide fertile ground for democracy and foretold a long, difficult, and turbulent transition. It projected that a Marshall Plan-type effort would be required to restore the Iraqi economy. It forecast that in a deeply divided Iraqi society, there was a significant chance that the sectarian and ethnic groups would engage in violent conflict unless an occupying power prevented it. And it anticipated that an occupying force would itself be the target of resentment and attacks—including by guerrilla warfare—unless it established security and put Iraq on the road to prosperity in the first few weeks or months after the fall of Saddam. It also assessed that war and occupation would boost political Islam, increase sympathy for terrorists' objectives, and make Iraq a magnet for extremists from elsewhere in the Middle East.

Clearly little, if any, of this influenced the decision-making on going to war.

The second major problem area involved the administration's aggressive use of intelligence to build public support for the war. The textbook model of intelligence-policy relations was turned upside down. Instead of intelligence being used to inform policy decisions, it was used primarily to justify a decision already made.

The administration's public case sometimes included the use of raw reporting without reference to—and in some cases in contradiction with—the intelligence community's judgments about the reporting. The best-known case was the use in a presidential speech of a spurious report about purchases of uranium ore, despite the intelligence community's judgment and advice that the report's credibility was too questionable to warrant public use.

But the practice was more frequent with regard to the alleged links between the Iraqi regime and Al Qaeda. The administration made great efforts to uncover every scrap of reporting that suggested such links. Indeed, it created a unit within the Office of the Secretary of Defense devoted to that effort. And with enough such effort, it is possible to "link" almost anyone in the shadowy world of international terrorism to anyone else. But by presenting only the scraps that suggested a relationship while disregarding everything that pointed in the opposite direction, an impression was left with the public that was at odds with the Intelligence Community's judgment—its correct judgment—that there was no alliance, sponsorship, or patron-client relationship between the Saddam regime and Al

Qaeda. As such, the public's understanding of Al Qaeda's true sources of strength was impaired rather than enhanced.

The third problem area was the possible politicization of the Intelligence Community's own judgments. Unfortunately, this issue has been reduced in some of the post-mortem inquiries to a question of whether policymakers twisted analysts' arms. That question is insufficient. Such blatant attempts at politicization are relatively rare, and when they do occur are almost never successful. It is more important to ask about the overall environment in which intelligence analysts worked. It is one thing to work in an environment in which policymakers are known to want the most objective analysis, wherever the evidence may lead. It is quite another thing to work in an environment in which the policymaker has already set his course, is using intelligence to publicly justify that course, will welcome analysis that supports the policy, and will spurn analysis that does not support it. The latter environment was what prevailed on Iraq in the year before the war.

Intelligence analysts being human, such an environment has subtle but significant effects on the shape of the intelligence product. With analysts throughout the community feeling a policy wind always blowing in one direction, there is a bias in the way countless calls about ambiguous evidence are made, caveats are strengthened or weakened, and judgments are worded. As the Silberman-Robb commission observed about work on the Iraqi weapons programs, draft assessments that conformed with the administration's picture of Iraq had an easier time making it through the process of coordination and review than draft assessments that did not. And just through sheer repetition of the demands and requests the administration placed on the Intelligence Community to support certain lines of argument, such as the one about alleged links between Iraq and Al Qaeda, a further bias is introduced into the direction of the Community's work.

Mr. Chairman, the problems in the intelligence-policy relationship I have highlighted, although especially acute in the case of policy on Iraq, are not entirely confined to any one issue or one administration. They do not have an obvious and easy fix. There are organizational issues relevant to this topic, and I hope the Congress will keep these problems in mind when it readdresses—as it eventually will have to—Intelligence Community organization. But the first step is to recognize that there is indeed a problem. I commend the Committee for providing a forum in which to raise the matter.