

Senate Democratic Policy Committee

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

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Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Senator Bingaman, Senator Feinstein, and others.

Unlike some others testifying today, I come before this group having had far less involvement in some of the more notorious pre-Iraq War intelligence issues.

Nonetheless, I believe I have some insights worth sharing in the context of this hearing relating to several important areas.

One key point that must be noted concerning pre-war decision-making is not only that it was made by a group of policymakers who often turned a blind eye to intelligence inconsistent with their Middle East agenda. Equally disturbing is that the most senior officials involved—the President, the Vice-President, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, and then-NSC Director Rice--had relatively little past experience with the complex politics of the Middle East region, let alone Iraq—a MAJOR impediment to sound policymaking if one already does not have an open mind and one is agenda-driven.

Clearly, as is strongly implied above, it is my belief that some officials did intervene in the process of intelligence analysis in order to shape it to serve a regional agenda.

The harassment of a friend, Bureau of Intelligence & Research (INR) analyst Christian Westermann, by State Department Undersecretary Bolton was just one example of this broader problem. Mr. Westermann told me back in 2003 that it was his belief that some other intelligence community analysts who denied, at least early on, as having been pressured to produce analysis more supportive of the Administration’s agenda were, in fact, almost certainly pressured.

How much difference that made in what was actually produced by these intelligence professionals is another issue. But even at this late date, public admissions that pressure was involved are probably running far behind the full measure of pressure actually applied.

Another example of undue (and damaging) interference was, of course, the creation of Doug Feith's intelligence shop in the Pentagon, almost certainly in an effort to end-run established—and far more professional--intelligence channels. The extent of this operation's overall influence within senior echelons of the Administration also probably is not fully appreciated, even today.

Warning signs also were ignored or belittled. The INR/Energy Department footnote in the Fall 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq WMD stating that there was little or no evidence that Iraq had an active nuclear weapons program was either ignored or allegedly, repeat allegedly, not read by at least one key decision-maker. To have shoved aside the Energy Department's views, in the face of its well-known technical capabilities with which to assess intercepted Iraqi-bound aluminum tubes, for example, is deeply disturbing and indicative of the atmosphere prevailing in 2002 and early 2003.

My own formal February 2003 INR Analysis "Iraq, the Middle East and Change: No Dominoes" warned that even a successful effort in Iraq, both militarily and politically, would not only fail to trigger a tsunami of democracy in the region, but potentially could endanger longstanding U.S. allies in the Middle East, like Jordan, not the region's anti-U.S. autocrats.

I must add that the conclusions of this study were not all that extraordinary, for decision-makers with open minds, that is. Polling for a number of years and by a variety of polling sources had revealed clearly that the region's populations were (and are) predominantly more anti-American, anti-Israeli, and militantly Islamic than their existing governments.

So, even if democracy had taken hold in various Middle East states, the result would have been governments more anti-American, anti-Israeli and militantly Islamic than those previously in power, as with Hamas in the Palestinian context.

In other states viewed as candidates for democratization, ethno-sectarian strife is either well under way (Iraq) or looming (Lebanon). And, finally, with respect to Egypt, a state initially--and naively--showcased by the Administration as a promising case related to emerging democracy, heavy-handed Egyptian government obstructionism has become a serious impediment.

I should make clear that I have nothing against increased Islamic activism per se, but, to cite just one aspect of the American political agenda around the world, women's rights, Islamist regimes have demonstrated far less interest in this issue than their secular counterparts. To cite another downside, Islamists also often tend to be somewhat more anti-Israeli and anti-American than their secular counterparts.

Something else should be added about my February 2003 assessment. Its existence was almost certainly known to Administration policymakers because, although

not the result of any action on my part, its contents were leaked to the Los Angeles Times in early March 2003, causing a bit of an embarrassing public stir.

Another issue I should touch upon is that of pre-war preparedness. The Administration consistently denies charges that forces allotted to the Iraqi campaign were insufficient. This is false. I would like to provide just one example I believe not previously aired that strongly suggested to me that resources were stretched terribly thin.

I should digress a bit and explain that until December 2002, my Office Director and our veteran Iraq Analyst in INR's Office of Analysis for the Near East & South Asia dealt with virtually all Iraq-related matters. As Deputy Director, I was asked to concentrate on most other office issues, especially the region more broadly. I was generally aware of what was going on with respect to Iraq, but not, as they say, "in the flow."

Only when the Iraq workload began to overwhelm these two officials was I asked to attend some significant meetings related to Iraq. One was a forum for largely operational political-military issues, with CENTCOM playing the lead role--a perfect fit for a military buff like myself with considerable prior experience in Iraqi affairs.

To my shock, I discovered that CENTCOM was hoping to rely on NGO's (Non-Government Organizations, like the Red Cross) for the treatment of Iraqi military and civilian wounded. In two separate meetings, I reminded CENTCOM officers in no uncertain terms of their responsibilities under the 2nd and 4th Geneva Conventions of 1949 regarding these duties and that NGO's almost never operate on active battlefields in any case.

In retrospect, I cannot bring myself to believe that CENTCOM was thoroughly unaware of its responsibilities under international law, but instead probably was stretched so thin because of the limited U.S. military resources assigned to the Iraq campaign that officers were desperately casting about for ways in which to pass along to others certain basic duties.

As requested, I also will touch upon both intelligence and policy perceptions of the Iraq insurgency in 2003. It was my overall impression that most of those within the Administration and the Intelligence Community initially dismissed the emerging insurgency as being comprised of only so-called "Former Regime Elements," plus some so-called "Foreign Fighters." The thinking was to hunt down and destroy "Former Regime Elements" and close the Syrian border to "Foreign Fighters," destroying those who had already entered the country, after which the insurgency should diminish in strength.

This analysis was one-dimensional and badly flawed. I encountered this line of thinking among virtually all around the table in the first meeting to coordinate what would become three months of deliberations over a National Intelligence Estimate on this issue requested by CENTCOM in July 2003. I argued that the insurgency had deep roots

in generic opposition to foreign occupation among a very proud people, broad-based Sunni Arab anger over being disenfranchised, joblessness, lack of public services, and, what I termed “Pissed Off Iraqis,” or POI’s, for lack of a better term.

POI’s are people who lost relatives in the war, whose relatives were arrested and taken away to Abu Grhaib and other military holding areas, those imprisoned and released (many of whom were innocent), those whose property had been destroyed or damaged by Coalition action during the war or in the course of anti-insurgency operations, etc., etc. In other words, the insurgent recruiting pool was (and is) not only potentially vast, but renewable.

I was pessimistic as early as late April 2003 about our chances for success in Iraq. As a matter of fact, I personally came to believe at that time that our chances for success in Iraq already might have been reduced to little more than 50/50.

That conclusion was grounded on the tremendous impact of the devastation wrought by widespread looting that Coalition forces did virtually nothing to stop—something fairly consistently belittled. The looting utterly devastated Iraq’s power grid, government ministries, the educational system, state industries, etc. Simply getting the country back to where it was just before the war would prove, even now in certain sectors, a mission impossible. As a result the supply of so-called “Pissed-Off” Iraqis would be that much more plentiful and continuous.

The Administration continues to claim that the appalling state of Iraq’s basic infrastructure is largely the result of 12 years of UN sanctions. In reality, much of what severely damaged Iraq’s infrastructure was looting and subsequent, ongoing sabotage on the part of insurgents or criminal elements, direct consequences of the 2003 war, not sanctions.

In addition, few people are aware that when Ambassador Bremer made one of his early 2003 mistakes, the wholesale dismissal of the Iraqi Army, he also effectively demobilized Iraq’s border brigades. They were an element of the Iraqi army. Their absence helped open the door to hordes of “Foreign Fighters.”

In closing, let me mention a factor—a major blind-spot of sorts--that bears on so much of what has happened and is happening today. As I have noted, Iraqis are an extraordinarily proud people. They also are very disciplined and tough, sometimes dubbed the “Prussians” of the Arab world by other Arabs.

In the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq was largely a pushover militarily, something played out weekly on the Military and History Channels. But that was only true because the average Iraqi soldier recognized that fighting the U.S., U.K., many European powers, and a vast and truly united global coalition under the aegis of the United Nations was clearly hopeless.

Too many of our military people (and others) took the poor showing of Iraqi soldiers in that war—and the relatively ineffective conventional Iraqi resistance in the 2003 campaign (for similar reasons)--as the true measure of the average Iraqi war-fighter.

What Iraqis are really capable of militarily man per man was demonstrated in the 8-year Iran-Iraq War in which Iraqis largely stood their ground despite horrific losses. They did so because they knew they had a very real chance of winning, and did.

At the very beginning of the 2003 War, British forces were compelled to repeatedly re-take the fairly small, largely Sunni Arab port city of Umm Qasr just over the Kuwaiti border from Iraqis fighting as guerrillas. I knew then and there that we could have a serious problem on our hands.

These first insurgents, fighting out of uniform from windows, behind corners, and on their home turf had discovered that they had a chance to inflict significant damage on a technologically far superior foe. I quickly warned around the first week or 10 days of the war, in a formal INR Assessment, that this spelled danger as we moved farther north, especially into Iraq's Sunni Arab heartland.

Nonetheless, probably because of all that “shock and awe,” Umm Qasr (and one or two other problem towns along the way) became the exception. Only in the first months after the end of the conventional campaign did the broader Sunni Arab insurgency begin to take shape and gain momentum.

My warning was accurate, but just a tad premature.

I would like to thank you all so much for your time, and I would be delighted to respond to any questions you might have.