

British American Security Information Council

# **BASIC SPECIAL REPORT**

## **See, Speak, and Hear No Incompetence:**

### **An Analysis of the Findings of The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction**

David Isenberg

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## **British American Security Information Council**

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### **Author**

David Isenberg is a senior analyst at BASIC. His research interests include combating and controlling the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, especially biological weapons, the role of the U.S. intelligence community in contemporary security, and the conventional arms trade.

He has been widely published and has lectured at U.S. military schools and overseas; and been a frequent commentator on numerous radio and television shows.

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## Executive Summary

It is often said that the road to recovery begins with admitting one has a problem. If so, then the release of the report of **The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction** on March 31, 2005, is a sobering, long overdue wake-up call to both the U.S. intelligence community and the executive branch.

But it is only a first step. At this point in time it is far from clear if the U.S. intelligence community and its overseers in the legislative branch can muster the willpower to adapt to meet the key challenges of the twenty first century: combating and preventing the proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and tracking down Islamic and other terrorists.

The world may be more interconnected thanks to globalization trends, but in many respects this has made the post-Cold War security challenges even more difficult, as unconventional weaponry has become yet another commodity on the global black market. And, to speak bluntly, currently the U.S. intelligence community does not appear to be up to the challenge. Whatever else one might say about the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq we now know, as the Commission put it, that the intelligence community was “dead wrong in almost all of its pre-war judgments about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction.” Right now the intelligence community, to paraphrase Voltaire’s *Candide*, finds itself in the worst of all possible worlds. It is both politicized and incompetent.

This is not to say that the intelligence community does not have gifted and dedicated men and women working for it. It clearly does. Rather, it is just the obvious and long overdue admission that the framework in which it operates is deficient. A framework that allows intelligence analysts to prepare estimates based on unverified assumptions and nonexistent evidence is, in reality, a rotting edifice, as opposed to the solid foundation needed to deal with twenty-first century challenges.

Even if the intelligence community was in far better shape, its analysis would still be imperiled because of the ease with which the executive branch, centered in the White House, can pressure the intelligence community to say something other than the truth.

Unfortunately, the Commission avoided dealing with the ‘politics of intelligence’ and it is a problem that is likely to continue to fester. It is also likely that, in the future, U.S. policymakers will again make statements that are neither factually based or in tune with what the intelligence community is actually saying. The fact that the *Washington Post* reported on August 2, 2005, that a new National Intelligence Estimate on Iran, in sharp contrast with past forceful public statements by the White House, has projected that Iran is about a decade away from manufacturing the key ingredient for a nuclear weapon, roughly doubling the previous estimate of five years, is a case in point.

In its report the Commission called for 74 changes, most of which can be implemented without legislation. Among those considered most important are:

*Giving the Director of National Intelligence power, and backing, to match his responsibilities;*

*Bringing the FBI all the way into the intelligence community;*

*Demanding more of the intelligence agencies by pressing analysts to explain how much they don't know; and*

*Establishing a National Counter Proliferation Center similar to the National Counterterrorism Center, recommended by the 9/11 Commission, which is already up and running.*

On June 29, 2005, the Bush administration announced that it had endorsed 70 of the 74 recommendations and was still studying three of the remaining recommendations. A single classified recommendation will not be implemented.

But it is unclear whether these changes will constitute a great improvement. Had all the proposed reorganizations been in place four years ago, there is nothing to suggest that the intelligence agencies or the Bush administration would have reached more accurate conclusions.

Overall, the Commission's recommendations are not particularly impressive. Most involve initiatives that were already in the works before the Commission released its report, and doubts remain about how effective they will be.

More significantly, however, the recommendations completely ignore arguably the most important aspect of the problem. Intelligence is inevitably murky and uncertain. Rather than simply focusing upon changes to the hierarchy, the Commission could have explored how to encourage dissenting voices and diverse opinions within the intelligence community, in order to prevent bias and distortion, or what some have referred to as 'groupthink' within the intelligence community.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose and structure of this report

This BASIC report provides an analysis of the findings of the report released on March 31, 2005 of “The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction” (called the Silberman-Robb Commission after its co-chairmen).

It does so in the context of over three years of effort by BASIC in monitoring the performance of the U.S. and British intelligence communities in regard to the issue of proliferation of unconventional weaponry such as nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons. BASIC recognizes that such weaponry is a serious international security concern and merits a high priority in terms of policymakers’ attention and governmental resources devoted to securing stockpiles, dismantling surpluses and preventing proliferation. Regardless of the validity of the U.S-led invasion of Iraq and the rationale for it (i.e., Iraq’s presumed NBC programs), proliferation in particular, remains an enormously important issue.

Given also the crucial role that intelligence plays in both non-proliferation and counter-proliferation, the efficacy or otherwise of the intelligence community in the United States and elsewhere within the transatlantic community is also therefore an issue of great public concern.

Indeed, the need for sound intelligence gathering and analysis and dissemination is, and should be to anyone who thinks about it, self-evident. Survival, whether at the individual or the nation state level, requires accurate awareness of what goes on around us. To the extent that the United States and its allies can look at and decipher the numerous physical, social, political, and economic aspects of the world the better prepared they will be to deal with the unanticipated and unforeseen events, or actually prevent them.

One past U.S. study noted:

*New forces are at work and new dynamics at play. The Government must understand them in order to respond to them. Often the options available to it will depend upon how early problems are identified. Choosing the right option, in turn, will depend upon knowing what the consequences are apt to be. Once a course is chosen, it becomes important to know what the effects of the decision have been so that adjustments can be made if necessary. In every instance, making the right choice will hinge upon the quality of the information available.<sup>1</sup>*

Given the changed security environment after the 9/11 attacks, BASIC has been concerned about the quality of intelligence and its subsequent use by policymakers. In an April 2003 pre-invasion of Iraq report we noted:

*Reports have started to emerge in the media that the statements made by officials immediately before the war that suggested a far more advanced and*

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 1, “The Need to Maintain an Intelligence Capability,” [Preparing for the 21st Century: An Appraisal of U.S. Intelligence](http://www.access.gpo.gov/int/int005.html), Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the U.S. Intelligence Community, March 1, 1996, <http://www.access.gpo.gov/int/int005.html>

*extensive program are having to be reassessed. The previous confidence in Iraq's possession of advanced WMD could have been based on U.S. intelligence misjudgments or the result of distortion by members of the Bush administration.<sup>2</sup>*

And in a January 2004 post-invasion report we said:

*It must also be acknowledged that because "raw" intelligence data cannot normally be disclosed or explained in full, there will always be a requirement to turn such data into a document or information for public consumption. Thus, in one sense all intelligence assessments are doctored to some extent for public consumption. It is also self-evident that in editing and shaping raw intelligence data there will be a tendency to present the case in the best possible light for the government of the day. In the case of Iraq, the requirement to persuade clearly took precedence over the requirement to be objective. In future, therefore, public information that draws on intelligence data should have more health warnings and should clearly set out the context for and motives behind publication.<sup>3</sup>*

And again, in July 2004, we explored the findings of the Butler inquiry into British intelligence, which found intelligence evidence stretched to the "outer limits" and (like the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee) attributed failings to "group think" rather than individuals. Our recommendations in the wake of that inquiry included:

- Acknowledging past mistakes;
- Learning the right lessons;
- Reviewing the role of intelligence;
- Bringing the 'spooks' out of the shadows; and
- Re-examining the doctrine of pre-emption.<sup>4</sup>

This latest report is an assessment of the critical findings and limitations of the Silberman-Robb Commission (hereafter referred to as 'the Commission'). It begins in Section 2 with a description of the main findings and the Commission's acknowledgment of serious problems within the U.S. intelligence community. It also analyzes the resistance, both within the community and the executive branch, to the Commission's findings. It emphasizes the preference of the intelligence community to filter out uncertainties in order to please its primary client, the President.

Section 3 focuses on the Iraq-related findings of the Commission report. Areas of particular concern include: incompetent analysis and tradecraft by intelligence analysts; the failure of the Commission to deal with the issue of intelligence politicization; the significant distorting role that the use of Iraqi defectors had on intelligence analysis; and a number of other significant issues that the Commission avoided dealing with.

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<sup>2</sup> David Isenberg, Ian Davis and Paul Ingram, "Matters of Emphasis: The Hunt for Chemical and Biological Weapons in Iraq," *BASIC Special Briefing*, April 30, 2003, p. 11, <http://basicint.org/pubs/HuntforChemWIraq.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> David Isenberg and Ian Davis, "Unravelling the Known Unknowns: Why no Weapons of Mass Destruction have been found in Iraq," *BASIC Special Report*, January 2004, pp. 56-57, <http://www.basicint.org/pubs/Research/2004WMD.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ian Davis and Andreas Persbo, "After the Butler Report: Time to Take on the Group Think in Washington and London," *BASIC Paper* No. 46, July 2004, <http://www.basicint.org/pubs/Papers/BP46.htm>.

Section 4 looks at the Commission recommendations and finds that they are likely to be insufficient to prevent a reoccurrence of the problems that have recently afflicted the U.S. intelligence community.

## **1.2 The make-up of the U.S. intelligence community**

The goals, direction, duties, and responsibilities with respect to national intelligence efforts are set forth by Executive Order 12333.<sup>5</sup> The departments and agencies cooperating to fulfill the goals of EO 12333 constitute the U.S. Intelligence Community.

Currently, these include Air Force Intelligence, Army Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Coast Guard Intelligence, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Department of Energy, Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, Department of the Treasury, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Marine Corps Intelligence, National-Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, National Reconnaissance Office, National Security Agency (NSA), and Navy Intelligence.<sup>6</sup>

## **1.3 Background and remit of Silberman-Robb report**

The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction was established by Executive Order 13328 and signed by President George W. Bush on February 6, 2004. The Commission was charged with “assessing whether the Intelligence Community is sufficiently authorized, organized, equipped, trained, and resourced to identify and warn in a timely manner of, and to support United States Government efforts to respond to, the development and transfer of knowledge, expertise, technologies, materials, and resources associated with the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, related means of delivery, and other related threats of the 21st Century and their employment by foreign powers (including terrorists, terrorist organizations, and private networks).” The Commission ceased operations and closed its office on May 27, 2005. After a year of study the Commission presented its report to the President on March 31, 2005.<sup>7</sup>

The Commission had nine members. The two Co-chairman were Charles S. Robb and Laurence H. Silberman. Robb, a Democrat, is a former Virginia Governor and U.S. Senator. He was a marine officer and commanded an infantry company in combat in Vietnam. Silberman, a Republican, is a senior circuit judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. He was a member of the U.S. Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court of Review. From 1981 to 1985 he was a member of both the General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and the Department of Defense Policy Board.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The provisions of Executive Order 12333 of Dec. 4, 1981, appear at 46 FR 59941, 3 CFR, 1981 Comp., p. 200, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.intelligence.gov/1-members.shtml>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.wmd.gov/about.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Source: <http://www.wmd.gov/about.html>. Bios of the other commission members as well as that of the staff can also be found here.

## 2. The U.S. Intelligence Community

### 2.1 Acknowledging the problem

It is often said that the road to recovery begins with admitting one has a problem. If so, then the release of the unclassified<sup>9</sup> version of the report of “**The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction**” (a.k.a. the **Silberman-Robb report**) on March 31, 2005, is a sobering, long overdue, wake-up call to both the U.S. intelligence community and the executive branch.<sup>10</sup>

The report lays out very clearly that the United States has a dysfunctional and inadequate intelligence gathering and analysis system.<sup>11</sup> In the post 9/11 age where connecting the dots has become a virtually existential obligation, the United States finds itself with an intelligence system that is worse than politicized; it is in certain critical areas, incompetent.

As the Commission noted in its transmittal letter:

*We conclude that the Intelligence Community was dead wrong in almost all of its pre-war judgments about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction. This was a major intelligence failure. Its principal causes were the Intelligence Community’s inability to collect good information about Iraq’s WMD programs, serious errors in analyzing what information it could gather, and a failure to make clear just how much of its analysis was based on assumptions, rather than good evidence... On a matter of this importance, we simply cannot afford failures of this magnitude.*

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<sup>9</sup> Deleted from the commission's public report were 91 additional pages that appear in a classified version, mostly a discussion of the nuclear programs in Iran and North Korea, and of covert operations. According to officials who have reviewed the commission's 11 specific findings about those two nations, which Judge Silberman and Mr. Robb declined to discuss even in general terms, the classified version includes a review of the parallel pitfalls that could affect judgments of how many nuclear weapons North Korea has built, or how long it will be until Iran can manufacture its own uranium weapons. Source: Scott Shane and David E. Sanger, “Bush Panel Finds Big Flaws Remain In U.S. Spy Efforts,” *New York Times*, April 1, 2005, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> For details on the report, see Walter Pincus and Peter Baker, “Dissent On Intelligence Is Critical, Report Says,” *Washington Post*, March 30, 2005, p. 1; Jonathan S. Landay and John Walcott, “Old Woes Dog U.S. Intelligence Gathering,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 30, 2005, p. 1; David Johnston and Scott Shane, “Study Faults Response To Outlawed Arms,” *New York Times*, March 31, 2005; Walter Pincus and Peter Baker, “Data On Iraqi Arms Flawed, Panel Says,” *Washington Post*, April 1, 2005, p. 1; Scott Shane and David E. Sanger, “Bush Panel Finds Big Flaws Remain In U.S. Spy Efforts,” *New York Times*, April 1, 2005, p. 1; Dafna Linzer and Barton Gellman, “Doubts On Weapons Were Dismissed,” *Washington Post*, April 1, 2005, p. 1; and Dana Priest, “Panel Warns Of 'Headstrong Agencies',” *Washington Post*, April 1, 2005, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Analyses of problems in the intelligence community and proposals for reform are an endless cottage industry, dating back at least to the beginning of the Cold War. See for example: [Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the United States Intelligence Community; Preparing for the 21st Century: An Appraisal of U.S. Intelligence: IC21 -- The Intelligence Community in the 21st Century;](#) [Proposals for Intelligence Reorganization, 1949-2004; A Framework for Reform of the U.S. Intelligence Community;](#) [Making Intelligence Smarter: the Future of U.S. Intelligence;](#) and [Modernizing Intelligence: Structure and Change for the 21st Century.](#)

Nor was this a matter of being wrong in just a few particulars. The Commission Report stated:

*In October 2002, at the request of members of Congress, the National Intelligence Council produced a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE)—the most authoritative intelligence assessment produced by the Intelligence Community—which concluded that Iraq was reconstituting its nuclear weapons program and was actively pursuing a nuclear device. According to the exhaustive study of the Iraq Survey Group, this assessment was almost completely wrong. The NIE said that Iraq's biological weapons capability was larger and more advanced than before the Gulf War and that Iraq possessed mobile biological weapons production facilities. This was wrong. The NIE further stated that Iraq had renewed production of chemical weapons, including mustard, sarin, GF, and VX, and that it had accumulated chemical stockpiles of between 100 and 500 metric tons. All of this was also wrong. Finally, the NIE concluded that Iraq had unmanned aerial vehicles that were probably intended for the delivery of biological weapons, and ballistic missiles that had ranges greater than the United Nations' permitted 150-kilometer range. In truth, the aerial vehicles were not for biological weapons; some of Iraq's missiles were, however, capable of traveling more than 150 kilometers. The Intelligence Community's Iraq assessments were, in short, riddled with errors.<sup>12</sup>*

*The [NIE] title, Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction, foretells the conclusion: that Iraq was still pursuing its programs for weapons of mass destruction (WMD).<sup>13</sup>*

And these errors were longstanding:

*Contrary to what some defenders of the Intelligence Community have since asserted, these errors were not the result of a few harried months in 2002. Most of the fundamental errors were made and communicated to policymakers well before the now-infamous NIE of October 2002, and were not corrected in the months between the NIE and the start of the war. They were not isolated or random failings. Iraq had been an intelligence challenge at the forefront of U.S. attention for over a decade. It was a known adversary that had already fought one war with the United States and seemed increasingly likely to fight another. But, after ten years of effort, the Intelligence Community still had no good intelligence on the status of Iraq's weapons programs.<sup>14</sup>*

This has, of course, long been known. An analysis released March 31, 2004, by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace found:

*A close comparison of the unclassified version (CIA White Paper: "Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs," published in October 2002) and the original classified NIE (parts of which were declassified and released after the war), reveals striking differences. In addition to changes presumably made to protect sensitive sources and methods, the differences are of two types. Some convey the impression that the intelligence community was much more confident*

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<sup>12</sup> WMD Commission report, pp. 8-9.

<sup>13</sup> Report of The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction (Hereafter the WMD Commission report), p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

*and more united in its views than it actually was. Others appear designed to portray a sense of heightened threat, and particularly of a threat that could touch the U.S. homeland. Sentences and phrases in the classified NIE expressing uncertainty were deleted while new formulations alluding to gathering danger were added.*<sup>15</sup>

Elaborating on why the intelligence community got it so wrong, Commissioner Silberman said on television:

*It happened because the intelligence community operated based on assumptions, without good evidence to support those assumptions. It was not unreasonable to suspect that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. The unfortunate thing is that reasonable assumption became a hard conviction. And there was very little evidence to support it. And the unfortunate thing on top of that is the intelligence community did not report to policy makers in the executive branch and in to Congress that they really did not know.*<sup>16</sup>

Bear in mind that the Commission itself did not have as much expertise as it should have had. Only three of its 60 staff members had identifiable expertise in nonproliferation and none had nonproliferation policy experience. Why was that?

The President, in appointing the Commission, wanted it to focus upon intelligence, not policy failures. A nonproliferation expert would have seen the distractions and holes in the intelligence analysis. For example, such an expert would have realized that the intelligence on Iraq obtaining uranium ore from Niger was irrelevant, as there was already plenty of natural and low-enriched uranium within Iraq; it was the lack of unsafeguarded highly-enriched uranium available to Saddam that mattered. The expert would also have shown that there was no evidence for the CIA's mantra that Iraq was reconstituting its cadre of nuclear weapons personnel.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2 Mistakes have consequences

Yet it would be a mistake to dismiss this report as nothing new. Intelligence mistakes have consequences. As Sen. Jay Rockefeller said in July 2004:

*There is simply no question that mistakes leading up to the war in Iraq rank among the most devastating losses and intelligence failures in the history of the nation. The fact is that the Administration at all levels, and to some extent us, used bad information to bolster its case for war. And we in Congress would not have authorized that war -- we would NOT have authorized that war -- with 75 votes if we knew what we know now.*

*Leading up to September 11th, our government didn't connect the dots. In Iraq, we are even more culpable because the dots themselves never existed. Tragically, the intelligence failure set forth in this report will affect our national*

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<sup>15</sup> Jessica T. Mathews and Jeff Miller, *A Tale of Two Intelligence Estimates*, March 31, 2004, <http://www.ceip.org/files/nonprolif/templates/article.asp?NewsID=6178>.

<sup>16</sup> "Inaccurate Intelligence," March 31, 2005, "The Newshour with Jim Lehrer," [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle\\_east/jan-june05/wmd\\_report\\_03-31.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/jan-june05/wmd_report_03-31.html).

<sup>17</sup> David Corn, "WMD Commission Stonewalls," *The Nation*, April 1, 2005, <http://www.thenation.com/capitalgames/index.mhtml?bid=3&pid=2300>.

*security for generations to come. Our credibility is diminished. Our standing in the world has never been lower. We have fostered a deep hatred of Americans in the Muslim world, and that will grow. As a direct consequence, our nation is more vulnerable today than ever before.*<sup>18</sup>

Weapons of mass destruction, code for nuclear, biological, chemical and radiological weapons, are a real threat. The proliferation risks associated with such weapons continue to grow. Two states of particular concern are North Korea and Iran. The former is now assumed to have at least a couple of nuclear weapons and the latter has a program that could be used in the future to develop them. Yet the United States is ill prepared to gather and analyze information about these two countries. The Commission acknowledges this when it says that, "the bad news is that we still know disturbingly little about the weapons programs and even less about the intentions of many of our most dangerous adversaries."<sup>19</sup> It concludes that the same weaknesses they identify continue to prevent the collection of accurate intelligence on Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs. Lacking American spies in either country's top leadership or weapons programs, U.S. intelligence is over reliant upon satellite photos and communications intercepts, and on foreign intelligence services, exiles and defectors. As a result, officials continue to extrapolate from outdated information to make estimates about current nuclear and other weapons programs.<sup>20</sup>

The problems also apply to intelligence predictions of the Iraqi insurgency. According to a *USA Today* article in June 2004 Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., a member of the Intelligence Committee, said:

*at the time of the invasion, we were given nothing but rosy scenarios" about the postwar period. The optimistic predictions came not only from invasion advocates within the administration such as Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, but also from career intelligence professionals who are expected to give unbiased assessments, regardless of the policy implications.*<sup>21</sup>

## **2.3 The President still doesn't get it!**

If admitting there is a problem is the first step on the road to recovery, the United States still has a long road to travel. In commenting on the report, President Bush implies that the danger lies simply in underestimating the threat:

*Our collection and analysis of intelligence will never be perfect, but in an age where our margin for error is getting smaller, in an age in which we are at war, the consequences of underestimating a threat could be tens of thousands of innocent lives.*<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> At the press conference when the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence released its report.

<sup>19</sup> *The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction*, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan S. Landay and John Walcott, "Old Woes Dog U.S. Intelligence Gathering," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 30, 2005, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> John Diamond, "Panel to probe CIA failure to predict extent of insurgency," *USA Today*, June 9, 2004, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2004-06-09-cia-probe\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2004-06-09-cia-probe_x.htm).

<sup>22</sup> White House News Release, March 31, 2005, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/03/20050331.html>.

But as Steve Aftergood, director of the Project on Government Secrecy at the Federation of American Scientists points out, "The whole impetus for the Commission was the fact that intelligence had **overestimated** the threat from Iraq, not underestimated it." Thousands of Americans and many more thousands of innocent Iraqis lost their lives or were seriously injured as a result of the ensuing war.<sup>23</sup>

We have, of course, been here before. President Bush failed to admit fault in his prewar rhetoric accusing Iraq of presenting an 'immediate', 'direct', and 'gathering' threat, despite the release of the report of the Iraq Survey Group in October 2004 confirming that there were no WMD in Iraq, and therefore no threat. David Corn of *The Nation* wrote:

*Bush noted that the report concluded that Hussein was "systematically gaming the system," using the oil-for-food program in an "effort to undermine sanctions." Pointing to the report, Bush declared that Hussein had the "intent of restarting his weapons programs once the world looked away." Well, no shit, Mr. President. But at the time Bush ordered U.S. forces to invade and occupy Iraq, the world was not looking away. In fact, the world was quite engaged. The inspections process was under way. U.N. inspectors had gained access to suspicious sites. They had discovered a few missiles that were prohibited. Hussein had begrudgingly agreed to destroy these weapons. The nuclear inspectors had declared they had found no evidence of a revived nuclear weapons program. (Bush and Dick Cheney had repeatedly claimed Iraq had revved up its nuclear weapons program.) And at the United Nations, countries looking to prevent a war were discussing even more intrusive inspections and other means to hold Hussein accountable and to force him to heed U.N. resolutions. So it's disingenuous to state that the war was justified because Hussein could have kick-started WMD programs once the world got off his back.<sup>24</sup>*

Unsurprisingly, Vice President Dick Cheney, rallied behind the President:

*We know now that the NIE was only partially correct. It wasn't totally incorrect... They clearly did have capability, they clearly had the technology, they clearly had people who had done it before, they had a lot of the basic preliminary feedstocks you'd need. For example, they still had a number of labs operated by the intelligence service. All of the evidence points in the direction that if Saddam H'ussein had been able to undermine or get the sanctions lifted, he would have been back in business, once again.<sup>25</sup>*

Even those supportive of the President's 'War on Terror' have been shaken by the intelligence failures. Literary editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Benjamin Schwarz, defended President Bush from the charge of duplicity on the basis that all presidents hype and stretch the truth. Even so he notes:

*Congress and the public will most likely have to grant to this and future Administrations vast and unprecedented latitude to take pre-emptive paramilitary and military measures--measures that may even appear to be in violation of*

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<sup>23</sup> "WMD Commission: U.S. Intel on Iraq Was 'Dead Wrong', *Secrecy News*, Volume 2005, Issue No. 30, March 31, 2005.

<sup>24</sup> David Corn, "Earth to Bush, Earth to Bush," *The Nation*, October 7, 2004, <http://www.thenation.com/blogs/capitalgames?bid=3&pid=1887>.

<sup>25</sup> Interview on "Fox News Sunday," February 6, 2005.

*international law. The public may well have to accept a large degree of ignorance regarding such actions and the reasons behind them. This Administration has not misled or distorted more than have most previous ones. But it is operating in a new world, and it has squandered the trust that we are called upon to give it.*<sup>26</sup>

## **2.4 The Intelligence Community doesn't get it either**

*We had twenty commissions over the last twenty years look at the intelligence community after various failures. They've all come to the conclusion it's got a broken culture, the analytical trade craft is in decline, the clandestine human service is no longer effective and functioning. We need to repair the identifiable mistakes immediately and have a culture of holding people responsible for failure.* David Kay, former head of the Iraq Study Group.<sup>27</sup>

The Commission's report makes it clear that a hidebound bureaucracy will make needed changes only if pushed. This reminds one that you can't teach an old dog new trick. In the words of the Commission:

*The CIA and NSA may be sleek and omniscient in the movies, but in real life they and other intelligence agencies are vast government bureaucracies. They are bureaucracies filled with talented people and armed with sophisticated technological tools, but talent and tools do not suspend the iron laws of bureaucratic behavior. Like government bodies everywhere, intelligence agencies are prone to develop self-reinforcing, risk averse cultures that take outside advice badly. While laudable steps were taken to improve our intelligence agencies after September 11, 2001, the agencies have done less in response to the failures over Iraq, and we believe that many within those agencies do not accept the conclusion that we reached after our year of study: that the Community needs fundamental change if it is to successfully confront the threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

*We are not the first to say this. Indeed, commission after commission has identified some of the same fundamental failings we see in the Intelligence Community, usually to little effect. The Intelligence Community is a closed world, and many insiders admitted to us that it has an almost perfect record of resisting external recommendations.*<sup>28</sup>

However, the intelligence community rejects much of this criticism for not giving proper context. After the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence released its report, Acting Director of Central Intelligence John E. McLaughlin asserted, for example, "there are a multitude of reasons why the American people should have confidence in their Intelligence Community and confidence when we say that there is a serious threat."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Schwarz, "Clearer Than The Truth," *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 2004, <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200404/schwarz>.

<sup>27</sup> Speaking with host Wolf Blitzer on CNN's "Late Edition," August 22, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> WMD Commission report, p.6.

<sup>29</sup> Interviewed by Steve Roberts on National Public Radio's "Diane Rehm Show" on July 14, 2004. See also McLaughlin's appearances on July 14, 2004 on "Wolf Blitzer Reports" CNN and the July 18, 2004 "Fox News Sunday" program.

The CIA does, internally at least, acknowledge that there are some problems that need to be addressed. A confidential internal review identified serious weaknesses in analytical work on Iraq but continued to hold that its prewar conclusion (that Iraq possessed illicit weapons) was reasonable, based on the information available at the time. This classified CIA document, dated August 2004, was obtained by *The New York Times*, which said that it:

*[describes] "imprecise language" and "insufficient follow-up" as well as "sourcing problems" in the prewar intelligence on Iraq, including "numerous cases" in which analysts "misrepresented the meaning" of intelligence reports about Iraq's weapons... [It] found the agency's analytic judgments to have been reasonable, but it also described the C.I.A.'s analytical branch as having "never been more junior or more inexperienced" than it is now and said that some of the "systemic problems" uncovered might reflect more general "tradecraft weaknesses" across the branch, known as the Directorate of Intelligence.<sup>30</sup>*

Analysts and officials responsible for the intelligence failures in Iraq have been rewarded handsomely. The two Army analysts whose work lay behind the claim that aluminum tubes sought by the Baghdad government were most likely meant for a nuclear weapons program rather than for rockets, have received job performance awards in each of the past three years.<sup>31</sup> David Kay, in revealing evidence to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on August 18, 2004, talked of his most frustrating moment in Iraq, when he was told that higher performance bonuses had been given to the analysts within the CIA nuclear team than to the chem-bio analysts. This, despite the fact that the nuclear team abused its authority and failed to use other expertise available.

The Commission report claims that the government has failed to respond to the dire threat posed by unconventional weapons with the urgency and national purpose displayed after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. While there have, for example, been many changes implemented within the FBI since September 11, 2001, with some significant structural reforms geared towards efficient processing of terrorism intelligence information, the Commission says that the efficacy of those reforms has frequently been negated by inertia within the bureaucratic culture.<sup>32</sup>

## **2.5 The buck rests with the President**

Just how far did the Commission go to avoid asking tough questions of the administration? At a press conference on March 31, 2005, in an exchange with a reporter, Silberman admitted that the Commission had not interviewed the President or his Vice-President.<sup>33</sup>

Yet, as George Bush pointed out in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, in the end it is the President that has to answer for the actions of his Administration. Fred C. Ikle, a longtime conservative hardliner reinforces this point in relation to intelligence:

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<sup>30</sup> *The New York Times* report, September 22, 2004. BASIC attempted via the Freedom of Information Act to obtain a copy of the "Tradecraft Review" but the request was denied by the CIA, even after appeal.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Pincus, "Analysts Behind Iraq Intelligence Were Rewarded," *Washington Post*, May 28, 2005; p. A1.

<sup>32</sup> WMD Commission report, p. 452

<sup>33</sup> Derrick Z. Jackson, "A Faulty Intelligence Report," *Boston Globe*, April 1, 2005.

*In any event, whether under the influence of hope or fear, the buck stops not with the intelligence community but with the policy makers. It is the President and Congress who must decide to take costly and dangerous actions, or accept the risks of inaction. It is these elected policy makers who must rally the people to give first priority to the survival of our country.*<sup>34</sup>

The CIA is directly answerable, and is responsive to, the President. Over a year ago Thomas Powers, a veteran writer on intelligence issues, wrote:

*When presidents don't like what they are being told they ignore it. When they want something done they press until it happens. As a disciplined organization the agency does not complain about the one, or long resist the other. In a word, it is responsive.*

*Understanding this general rule opens a useful window onto American behavior in the world. Presidents generally make no secret of what's on their minds—Kennedy loudly worried about Fidel Castro's plan to export the Cuban revolution in the 1960s, Nixon and Reagan urgently warned of Soviet missile building in the 1970s and 1980s, Bush worries openly about Iranian efforts to develop atomic bombs now. Knowing what's item number one on the agency's agenda is readily learned from what presidents and their advisers say, a street that runs both ways: if you know what the CIA is doing, you know what the president wants done.*<sup>35</sup>

There is widespread agreement among many observers that presidents have traditionally sought to pass the blame for their riskier failures upon their subordinates. Such buck-passing also appears to be a fundamental cause of so much that is dysfunctional within the intelligence community. Powers explains the impact on the CIA, before going on to predict the Silberman-Robb Commission would be deliberately mired in detail and fuzzy evidence.

*This pattern of blaming the CIA for what presidents have ordered it to do is the single most important cause of the emergence within the agency of a "risk-averse" culture—a learned caution about undertaking operations of the sort CIA officers have later been required to explain or deny under oath on the witness stand. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright once told Richard Clarke that it was not hard to explain the passive-aggressive behavior of the CIA. "It has battered child syndrome." The agency's operational timidity beginning in the mid-1980s is one reason efforts to kill or kidnap Osama bin Laden failed in the years leading up to September 11—a reluctance to act frequently cited by Clarke in *Against All Enemies*. But Clarke credits the CIA with issuing frequent urgent warnings over the summer of 2001, and reserves his most pointed criticism for two failures of the Bush White House—its inability to grasp the urgency of the danger posed by al-Qaeda before September 11, and its folly later in going to war with Iraq. Clarke's strongest passages are reserved for the consequences of this mistake, which diverted American resources and the attention of the White House from the real threat, al-Qaeda, at the very moment when victory in Afghanistan offered an opportunity to deal the terrorist organization a fatal blow. Instead, while the*

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<sup>34</sup> Fred C. Ikle, "WMD Redux," *Wall Street Journal*, April 1, 2005, p. 10.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Powers, "The Failure," *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 51, No. 7, April 29, 2004, [http://www.nybooks.com/articles/article-preview?article\\_id=17050](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/article-preview?article_id=17050).

*Bush administration busied itself going to war to "disarm Saddam Hussein," al-Qaeda was given a year to recover, reorganize, and carry out many new acts of terrorism. But it appears that the established pattern is repeating itself in the investigation of the CIA's alleged intelligence "failure" while the White House fixation on Iraq, vividly described by Clarke, is ignored.<sup>36</sup>*

With the advantage of hindsight, Powers was right. The effort by the Bush administration to shift the blame for its own policy decisions has been aided by the fact that Congress is dominated by Republicans who seek to protect President Bush. This was evident in the behavior of the Senate Select Committee, which never did issue a report on the use by executive branch policymakers of intelligence community analysis, as it originally promised to do.

Similarly the Commission report took 618 pages to detail myriad shortcomings of the intelligence community, such as lack of human intelligence, problems with sharing information, sloppy tradecraft on the part of analysis et cetera but studiously avoided dealing with a crucial issue: that the intelligence community largely produced analysis that conformed to the preferences and expectations of the administration.

The Senate Intelligence Committee inquiry headed by its Chairman, Pat Roberts (R-KS), was supposed to be devoted to precisely the question of the administration's use of intelligence, but the relevant phase of that report was deferred until after the election, and then put on the "back burner." On March 31, Sen. Roberts told the Associated Press, "We have now heard it all regarding prewar intelligence," adding it would be a "monumental waste of time" to investigate further.<sup>37</sup> Earlier U.S. inquiries into intelligence failures in Iraq are listed in Box 1.

## **2.6 Black and white only; no room for shades of gray**

Even with a strict mandate to avoid examining the executive branch, the Commission's criticisms reached close to the President. One section criticized the President's Daily Brief (PDB), the super-secret intelligence document that Mr. Bush and his predecessors have received each morning, complaining that its "attention-grabbing headlines and drumbeat of repetition" left misleading impressions, and no room for shadings. "In ways both subtle and not so subtle, the daily reports seemed to be 'selling' intelligence," the Commission found, "in order to keep its customers, or at least the First Customer, interested."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Powers, "The Failure," *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 51, No. 7, April 29, 2004, [http://www.nybooks.com/articles/article-preview?article\\_id=17050](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/article-preview?article_id=17050).

<sup>37</sup> No Free Pass For First Customer," The Progress Report, <http://www.americanprogressaction.org/site/pp.asp?c=kLWJcP7H&b=489137#1>.

<sup>38</sup> Todd S. Purdum, "The Intelligence Critique: News Analysis; Final Verdict Is Still Elusive," *New York Times*, April 1, 2005. See also Scott Shane and David Sanger, "Daily Intelligence Briefings Are Vague, Officials Say," *New York Times*, April 3, 2005.

• **Box 1: U.S. Inquiries Relevant to Intelligence Failings in Iraq**

**Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq**

Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, July 7, 2004

Conclusion 1. Most of the major key judgments in the Intelligence Community's October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), *Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction*, either overstated, or were not supported by the underlying intelligence reporting.

**Iraq Survey Group Final Report**, Central Intelligence Agency, Sept. 30, 2004

Among its main points:

Iraq's WMD programs had decayed significantly since the end of the first Gulf War.

Iraq had no deployable WMD of any kind as of March 2003 and had no production since 1991.

**WMD in Iraq: evidence and implications**, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 2004.

Iraq's WMD programs represented a long-term threat that could not be ignored. They did not, however, pose an immediate threat to the United States, to the region, or to global security.

This is not the first time the PDB has been criticized for being insufficient. The conservative Heritage Foundation's *Policy Review* noted:

*Iconoclastic views that challenge conventional wisdom are very likely to have their edges substantially smoothed in the laborious review process... Even uncontroversial analysis suffers from pronounced dumbing-down effects as it passes up and through the chain of command. More often than not, policymakers are substantially more conversant with international issues than CIA managers, who in the review act more as overpaid editors — without the technical expertise of professional editors — to make analysis more understandable for themselves rather than the far more expert consumers in the policy community.*<sup>39</sup>

## 2.7 Accountability

The Commission did call for accountability for those responsible for intelligence failures, but not in the body of their report. In subsequent remarks to the media, Commission co-

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<sup>39</sup> Richard L. Russell, "Intelligence Failures," *Policy Review*, February-March 2004, No. 123, [http://www.policyreview.org/feb04/russell\\_print.html](http://www.policyreview.org/feb04/russell_print.html).

chairman, Senator Charles S. Robb, said that John D. Negroponte, the incoming Director of National Intelligence, should take action against agencies, and perhaps individuals, who were responsible for the worst of the failures. Sen. Robb also said:

*“Wrong calls and failures to correct the record we believe were so serious that the DNI ought to look at those institutions and decide specific remedies.”*<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Walter Pincus, “Panel Seeks Intelligence Culpability,” *Washington Post*, April 2, 2005; p. A08.

### 3. Iraq

While it has been known for some time that Iraq did not have WMD in 2003, the Commission report sheds some new light into why the Intelligence Community failed so badly.

*The failure was in large part the result of analytical shortcomings; intelligence analysts were too wedded to their assumptions about Saddam's intentions. But it was also a failure on the part of those who collect intelligence—CIA's and the Defense Intelligence Agency's (DIA) spies, the National Security Agency's (NSA) eavesdroppers, and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency's (NGA) imagery experts. In the end, those agencies collected precious little intelligence for the analysts to analyze and much of what they did collect was either worthless or misleading. Finally it was a failure to communicate effectively with policymakers; the Intelligence Community didn't adequately explain just how little good intelligence it had—or how much its assessments were driven by assumptions and inferences rather than concrete evidence.<sup>41</sup>*

It was also a matter of ignoring conflicting evidence from U.N. inspectors, who disproved some of the most sensational charges: the secret purchases of uranium ore from Niger; mobile biological weapons laboratories; and pilotless planes that could disperse anthrax or sarin gas into the air above U.S. cities.<sup>42</sup>

#### 3.1 Slipping Standards

Mistakes are inevitable. But the Commission was particularly critical of the way the intelligence agencies have let their standards slip:

*During the Cold War, the Intelligence Community built up an impressive body of expertise on Soviet society, organization, and ideology, as well as on the Soviet threat. Regrettably, no equivalent talent pool exists today for the study of Islamic extremism. In some cases, the security clearance process limits the Intelligence Community's ability to recruit analysts with contacts among relevant groups and with experience living overseas. Similarly, some security rules limit the ways in which analysts can develop substantive expertise. Finally, poor training or bad habits lead analysts to rely too much on secret information and to use non-clandestine and public information too little. Non-clandestine sources of information are critical to understanding societal, cultural, and political trends, but they are insufficiently utilized.<sup>43</sup>*

It was incredible, for example, that the intelligence community ignored warnings from external analysts that the Iraqi chemical weapons from the late 1980s could not have survived prolonged storage. Jay Davis, a veteran weapons inspector, physicist and

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<sup>41</sup> WMD Commission report, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Dafna Linzer, "Panel: U.S. Ignored Work Of U.N. Arms Inspectors," *Washington Post*, April 3, 2005, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> WMD Commission report, pp. 12-13.

former head of the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency was quoted in a *San Francisco Chronicle* article:

*In an interview, Davis said he had no doubts at the time. "I would have bet my house on it, that we would have found chemical weapons... I didn't think it through," Davis admits. "It was a damned discoverable thing that other people brighter than I should have known."<sup>44</sup>*

### **3.2 Political influence: the dog that didn't bark**

Intelligence is shaped and influenced by policy and bad policy sets the stage for bad intelligence. As columnist David Ignatius wrote:

*If there's one thing that has become clear in the history of U.S. intelligence over the past 50 years it is that the CIA is not in fact a rogue agency. It is shaped, often to a fault, by the priorities and pet projects of whoever is in the White House. Intelligence supports policy, but it doesn't make it.<sup>45</sup>*

However, the Commission chose to overlook the role of political influence in shaping intelligence on Iraq. A report authored by Congressman Henry Waxman,<sup>46</sup> ranking member of the House Government Reform Committee, provides a comprehensive examination of the statements on Iraq made by President George W. Bush, Vice President Richard Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice.<sup>47</sup> His website includes a database that identifies 237 specific misleading statements about the threat posed by Iraq made by these five officials in 125 public appearances in the time leading up to and after the commencement of hostilities in Iraq.

This criticism is not confined to liberals or anti-war critics. On July 29, 2004, Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies updated his previously released analysis, "Comparing the Senate Select Committee, Butler and Flood Reports." He noted:

*The Senate Intelligence Committee report has serious failures. The most glaring such failure is its inability to detect and describe the level of indirect political and policy level pressure on the intelligence community to reach the "right" conclusions.*

*The report may well be right in concluding that senior officials never interfered directly or acted to politicize intelligence. However, it fails to address the climate of policy-level expectations that indirectly demand one type of answers, the impact of repeated searches for revised analysis, the staff and higher level*

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<sup>44</sup> Keay Davidson, "Intelligence failure, misinterpretation or deceit? Missing weapons of mass destruction force experts to re-examine prewar assumptions," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 17, 2004, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/03/17/MNG2N5MBB51.DTL>.

<sup>45</sup> David Ignatius, "Fooling Ourselves," *Washington Post*, April 1, 2005, p. 27.

<sup>46</sup> <http://democrats.reform.house.gov/IraqOnTheRecord/>.

<sup>47</sup> [http://www.house.gov/reform/min/pdfs\\_108\\_2/pdfs\\_inves/pdf\\_admin\\_iraq\\_on\\_the\\_record\\_rep.pdf](http://www.house.gov/reform/min/pdfs_108_2/pdfs_inves/pdf_admin_iraq_on_the_record_rep.pdf)

*questions searching for the “right” answers, and the knowledge that policy level recognition affects intelligence careers.*

*The report also creates an artificial decoupling of intelligence from the policy maker and user. It does not examine what was done with intelligence products or informal intelligence inputs and support. ... The issue of what policy level staff did with intelligence and classified information is just as important as any failings in the intelligence community.*

Ashton Carter, a former assistant secretary of defense in the Clinton administration, wrote in the *Washington Post* that, “there is almost never such a thing as a pure intelligence failure. Intelligence failure is usually linked to policy failure.” He noted:

*Bush has since made it clear that even if he knew then what we know now -- that the information on Hussein's weapons was “nearly worthless,” in the words of the Robb-Silberman commission -- he would have invaded anyway... Future historians will decide whether his policy was a failure or a success, but they will know from his own testimony that the CIA's “intelligence failure” was not the determining factor.<sup>48</sup>*

As *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd noted, “It is laughable that the report offers its most scorching criticism of the C.I.A. when the C.I.A. was simply doing what the White House and Pentagon wanted. Isn't that why Mr. Tenet was given the Medal of Freedom? (Freedom from facts.)”<sup>49</sup>

Joe Cirincione of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said of the Commission report in an interview, “I think the White House got what they carefully designed: a report that sets up the intelligence community as a fall guy... Our senior leadership made statements repeatedly and consistently that simply weren't true, and those statements went way beyond what the intelligence community was saying.”<sup>50</sup>

Acting CIA Director John E. McLaughlin gave a pep talk to CIA staffers on July 16, 2004:

*But one thing I won't accept from anyone is the suggestion that we somehow pulled our punches, or distorted the evidence, on Iraq. It simply isn't true. And if you look at the Senate report, you will see that we get credit for, among other things, our assessment of Saddam's links to international terrorism—a subject of enormous contention.<sup>51</sup>*

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<sup>48</sup> Ashton B. Carter, “A Failure Of Policy, Not Spying,” *Washington Post*, April 3, 2005, p. B7.

<sup>49</sup> Maureen Dowd, “I Spy a Screw-Up,” *New York Times*, March 31, 2005. See also editorial, “A Profile In Timidity,” *New York Times*, April 1, 2005, editorial “What The Report Didn't Say...,” *USA Today*, March 31, 2005, p. 12.; editorial “Oh, That Politicization,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Joe Fiorill, “U.S. Intelligence Agencies Need Reform, Resist Change, Presidential Commission Says,” *Global Security Newswire*, [http://www.nti.org/d\\_newswire/issues/2005\\_3\\_31.html#9A94EA76](http://www.nti.org/d_newswire/issues/2005_3_31.html#9A94EA76).

<sup>51</sup> Remarks by the Acting Director of Central Intelligence John E. McLaughlin to the Central Intelligence Agency Workforce, July 16, 2004, [http://www.cia.gov/cia/public\\_affairs/speeches/2004/adci\\_speech\\_07162004.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/speeches/2004/adci_speech_07162004.html).

### 3.3 No political pressure? Surely you jest!

That something happened to intelligence analysis between the time it was sent by the intelligence community to policymakers and the time it was released to the public in sanitized form has long been obvious. Sen. Carl Levin, in a congressional hearing in 2004, said:

*Some of the public pronouncements of the Intelligence Community before the war were actually inconsistent with its own underlying classified documents. Compare, if you will, the unclassified October 2002 white paper on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs and the classified October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate or NIE on which the white paper's key judgments were based.*

*For instance, one paragraph in the now-declassified portion of the NIE states the judgment of the Intelligence Community that Iraq is capable of quickly producing and weaponizing a variety of such [BW] agents, including anthrax, for delivery by bombs, missiles, aerial sprayers, and covert operatives.*

*However, in the unclassified white paper issued at the same time, the clause including potentially against the U.S. Homeland was added at the end of the paragraph. That clause wasn't in the then-classified NIE on which it was presumably based.*

Indeed, former Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) George Tenet said at a March 9, 2004, congressional hearing that he had privately intervened on several occasions to correct what he regarded as public misstatements on intelligence by Vice President Dick Cheney and Pentagon official Douglas Feith.<sup>52</sup>

Truth was being stretched for political goals. For example the *New York Times* reported on March 16, 2004, that Hans Blix said, "They wanted to come to the conclusion that there were weapons. Like the former days of the witch hunt, they are convinced that they exist, and if you see a black cat, well, that's evidence of the witch." He also said, "The C.I.A. certainly is very used to debriefing defectors, so they must have had a critical mind," he said, "but they also knew what they wanted to hear at the top."<sup>53</sup>

In fact, not only were policymakers less than truthful, they were in denial. In an interview with *Arms Control Today* in April 2004, David Kay, former lead inspector of the Iraq Survey Group, pointed to Vice-President Dick Cheney's call to hold judgment as inevitably delaying any efforts to resolve the policy information problems.<sup>54</sup>

Aside from denial, policymakers could also be vengeful against those who weren't with the program. An article in the March 25, 2004 *New York Review of Books* reviewed recent literature on the threat posed by Iraqi unconventional weapons prior to the war. Among many interesting tidbits it notes:

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<sup>52</sup> Douglas Jehl, "C.I.A. Chief Says He's Corrected Cheney Privately," *New York Times*, March 24, 2004, p. A1. For a review of some of the Bush administration officials dire prognostications about probable Iraqi WMD capabilities, see the March 5, 2004 Foreign Policy Address by Sen. Edward Kennedy before the Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/publication.php?id=6834>.

<sup>53</sup> Warren Hoge, "Ex-U.N. Inspector Has Harsh Words for Bush," *New York Times*, March 16, 2004, p. A3

<sup>54</sup> "Searching for the Truth About Iraq's WMD: An interview with David Kay," *Arms Control Today*, April 2004, <http://www.armscontrol.org/aca/midmonth/2004/March/Kay.asp>.

*If further proof of antipathy to UNMOVIC was needed, The Washington Post reported that Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz had requested a CIA investigation of Blix's performance at IAEA and had "hit the ceiling" when nothing could be found to undermine Blix and the inspection program. According to the Post, Wolfowitz allegedly feared that the inspections could "torpedo" plans for military action against Saddam Hussein.<sup>55</sup>*

In the same hearing Tenet revealed that the special intelligence unit [Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group] run by Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith had given briefings to Vice President Cheney's office and the National Security Council on the Iraq-al Qaeda connection - without the DCI's knowledge.<sup>56</sup> The briefing came shortly before a major speech by President Bush in which he said, "Iraq and al Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back a decade."

Senator Jay Rockefeller, vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, speaking on *Meet the Press* pointed out the contradiction:

*This study... has a conflict in it. It says there wasn't any pressure put on analysts, but then later in a footnote it says that 7 percent of all of those people in WINPAP (sp), which is kind of the weapons of mass destruction and nuclear proliferation, that kind of thing in the CIA felt that they had had to change their intelligence to suit the customer, i.e., the executive branch.<sup>57</sup>*

All of this aforementioned political context was excluded from the Silberman-Robb report. But perhaps one of the report's most extraordinary omissions was the failure to acknowledge the existence of the highly political Office of Special Plans within the Pentagon that sought to discredit any intelligence that did not support a neo-conservative agenda. The Center for American Progress pointed out that the Commission report:

*does not so much as mention the "Office of Special Plans" (OSP), the agency of Pentagon analysts staffed by "ideological amateurs to compete with the CIA and its military counterpart, the Defense Intelligence Agency." State Department officials claimed the OSP pressured them to "shape intelligence to fit policy," particularly with regard to "the al Qaeda connection and nuclear weapons issue[s]." Silberman's report claims to have found "no evidence to dispute that [analysts came to] their own independent judgments." Perhaps they didn't talk to the two State Department officials who told Mother Jones that OSP officials "routinely pushed lower-ranking staff around on intelligence matters." Or former CIA official and intelligence specialist Melvin Goodman, who said, "People were being pulled aside [and being told], 'We saw your last piece and it's not what we're looking for'...It was pretty blatant."<sup>58</sup>*

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<sup>55</sup> Brian Urquhart, "Hidden Truths," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 51, No. 5, March 25, 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Alexis Orton, "Tenet: On the Record," March 10, 2004, <http://www.ceip.org/files/nonprolif/templates/article.asp?NewsID=6088>.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Senators Pat Roberts and Jay Rockefeller, "Meet The Press," NBC TV, April 10, 2005.

<sup>58</sup> "Intelligence: No Free Pass For First Customer," *Progress Report*, Center for American Progress, April 1 2005, <http://www.americanprogressaction.org/site/pp.asp?c=kLWJcP7H&b=489137#1>.

### 3.4 Crazy Curveball

One of the most egregious flaws of U.S. intelligence was its dependence upon accounts from a defector, codenamed Curveball, for claims that Iraq was producing biological weapons. Curveball was described as "crazy" by his intelligence handlers and a "congenital liar" by his friends.<sup>59</sup>

It is difficult to ascertain whose error this was. George Tenet has tried to distance himself from the accusation that doubts over the voracity of Curveball's intelligence were well known. In April 2005 he claimed that he had never been told of a foreign intelligence service's grave doubts about the reliability of Curveball.<sup>60</sup> This despite the fact that several senior C.I.A. officials have claimed they took their concerns to the CIA's top leadership.<sup>61</sup>

In fact, James L. Pavitt, the CIA's former operations chief and one of his top lieutenants, Tyler Drumheller, insisted in interviews that debates had raged inside the CIA about Curveball's credibility, even as then-Secretary of State Colin L. Powell used the defector's descriptions of mobile weapons laboratories in his crucial address to the U.N. Security Council on the eve of war.<sup>62</sup> Curveball was handled by German intelligence; U.S. intelligence had little information on him.

The Curveball case also contradicts the Commission assertion that there was no politicization of the intelligence process. As Joe Cirincione pointed out:

*buried deep inside the report is evidence that contradicts the commission's own conclusions and raises serious questions about their recommendations. Most damning is the tale of two CIA analysts who were removed from their positions for "causing waves" when they questioned the reliability of the defector known as "Curveball." This story only appears 200 pages into the report. It is at the very end of the Iraq section (pg. 192) after Conclusion 26 that finds no evidence of politicization of the intelligence.*

*An analyst with WINPAC (the CIA's Weapons Intelligence, Nonproliferation and Arms Control Center) was in Iraq in the summer and fall of 2003 and reported serious doubts about the reliability of Curveball's claims that Saddam built mobile biological labs and conducted biowarfare experiments... the analyst was 'read the riot act' by his office director who accused him of 'making waves' and being 'biased'. He was kicked out of WINPAC. The same punishment was meted out*

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<sup>59</sup> Greg Miller and Bob Drogin, "Intelligence Analysts Whiffed On A 'Curveball'," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 2005, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Scott Shane, "Ex-C.I.A. Chief Denies Knowing of Doubt About Defector's Word," *New York Times*, April 2, 2005. In an April 1 letter, Tenet wrote, "At no time did anyone in the analytic or operational chain of command come forward to tell me of the specific information imparted by the representative of a foreign service to the CIA division chief in late September or October of 2002." Source: *Statement of George J. Tenet, Former Director of Central Intelligence*, April 1, 2005, [http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/wmd\\_tenet.pdf](http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/wmd_tenet.pdf).

<sup>61</sup> David Barstow, "Doubts on Source for Key Piece of Data Were Suppressed, Report Says," *New York Times*, April 1, 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Bob Drogin and Greg Miller, "'Curveball' Debacle Reignites CIA Feud," *Los Angeles Times*, April 2, 2005, p. 1. Mark Hosenball and Richard Wolffe, "Intel: The CIA vs. the DIA," *Newsweek*, April 19, 2004, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4711076/>.

*to a chemical weapons analyst in Iraq who pressed for a reassessment of the CIA's claims of a large-scale CW program.*<sup>63</sup>

When the one U.S. intelligence agent who had met Curveball warned the CIA that he was unreliable, a senior official replied (by e-mail): "Let's keep in mind the fact that this war's going to happen regardless of what Curveball said or didn't say, and the powers that be probably aren't interested in whether Curveball knows what he is talking about."<sup>64</sup> The Silberman-Robb report conspicuously omits that e-mail (it had already appeared in a Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report), laying open the Commission to the charge that it cherry-picked evidence to exclude anything politically embarrassing to the Administration.<sup>65</sup>

Iraqi defectors had in fact played an important role in providing unfounded 'evidence' to both officials and media in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia for Iraqi WMD. The Knight Ridder news service conducted a review on media use of information from the Iraqi National Congress and reported on March 16, 2004 that there was little substance to claims reported at the time.

Media reliance on defectors served to bolster erroneous reports from the intelligence community.<sup>66</sup> On May 26, 2004, the *New York Times* published an Editors Note "The Times and Iraq" that reviewed its past coverage on decisions that led the United States into Iraq. It found:

*a number of instances of coverage that was not as rigorous as it should have been. In some cases, information that was controversial then, and seems questionable now, was insufficiently qualified or allowed to stand unchallenged...*

*The problematic articles varied in authorship and subject matter, but many shared a common feature. They depended at least in part on information from a circle of Iraqi informants, defectors and exiles bent on "regime change" in Iraq, people whose credibility has come under increasing public debate in recent weeks... Complicating matters for journalists, the accounts of these exiles were often eagerly confirmed by United States officials convinced of the need to intervene in Iraq. Administration officials now acknowledge that they sometimes fell for misinformation from these exile sources. So did many news organizations - in particular, this one.*<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Joseph Cirincione, "You Can't Handle the Truth," <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=16731>.

<sup>64</sup> Noted in a report by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Trudy Rubin, "Iraq Spy Story Is Destined For Sequel," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 3, 2005.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Isikoff, "A Wicked Curveball," *Newsweek*, April 11, 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7369843/site/newsweek>.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Michael Massing, "Iraq: Now They Tell Us': An Exchange," *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 51, No. 6, April 8, 2004, [http://www.williambowles.info/media/massing\\_media.html](http://www.williambowles.info/media/massing_media.html). See also Chris Mooney, "The Editorial Pages and the Case for War," *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April 2004 issue, which examines the largely uncritical acceptance of administration claims about Iraq by the editorial writers of six major U.S. papers, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, <http://www.cjr.org/issues/2004/2/mooney-war.asp>.

<sup>67</sup> The Times and Iraq, *New York Times*, May 26, 2004, [http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/26/international/middleeast/26FTE\\_NOTE.html?ex=1118376000&en=9e0bf1837cf5b932&ei=5070](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/26/international/middleeast/26FTE_NOTE.html?ex=1118376000&en=9e0bf1837cf5b932&ei=5070).

You can find a sampling of articles published by *The Times* about the decisions that led the United States

It is worth noting the editor's reference to U.S. officials giving weight to informants' views, despite obvious politicization of those officials. Traditional media skepticism of the government line has clearly been weak at a time when it needed to be strong. This was hardly a problem limited to the *New York Times*. Writing in *Slate*, Jack Shafer reminds us that:

*The journalistic community has known for almost three months, thanks to a Knight Ridder Washington Bureau story, that the INC claimed to have placed its "product" in 108 articles and broadcasts between October 2001 and May 2002. The Great 108 list is a who's who of American and world media: The Times, the Washington Post, CNN, the Weekly Standard, the Associated Press, Fox News Channel, Agence France-Presse, the Economist, and more.*<sup>68</sup>

An article in the July/August 2004 issue of the *Columbia Journalism Review* provides a detailed examination of the now infamous memo provided by the Iraqi National Congress to the U.S. Congress in June 2002. The memo outlined something called the Information Collection Program, an INC operation that now appears to have provided bogus information about Saddam Hussein's weapons and terrorist connections to the American government and to the press in the run-up to the Iraq war. The Information Collection Program succeeded in heavily influencing coverage in the Western press in the run-up to the war.<sup>69</sup>

Soon after the Knight Ridder report, Jason Vest wrote in *American Prospect*:

*If the intelligence community wasn't giving the White House what it needed to attack Iraq, someone else was. Ahmad Chalabi and members of his Iraqi National Congress had long asserted that they had networks and human intelligence that no one else had, especially about Iraq's weapons-of-mass-destruction programs and ties to al-Qaeda. Many in the intelligence community -- in particular the CIA and the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research -- had long held serious doubts about the reliability of INC intelligence, as well as related intelligence analysis produced by the Pentagon's highly ideological and very low-profile Office of Special Plans. The Pentagon, however, made it policy to exalt whatever "intelligence" came from Chalabi. Not only did Chalabi regularly visit with Pentagon officials in the months leading up to war, bearing ostensibly useful information, the Pentagon also oversaw the INC's Intelligence Collection Program and ordered the Defense Intelligence Agency to debrief "defectors" produced by the INC.*<sup>70</sup>

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into the war in Iraq, and especially the issue of Iraq's weapons at <http://www.nytimes.com/ref/international/middleeast/20040526CRITIQUE.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Jack Shafer, "Previously Thought To Be True: A modest proposal for the *New York Times* and other media," *Slate*, June 4, 2004, <http://slate.msn.com/id/2101754/>. See also "Hindsight," "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/july-dec04/wmd\\_8-18.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/media/july-dec04/wmd_8-18.html), August 18, 2004.

<sup>69</sup> Douglas McCollum, "The List: How Chalabi Played The Press," *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 2004, <http://www.cjr.org/issues/2004/4/mccollam-list.asp>.

<sup>70</sup> Jason Vest, "The Wrong Target: The intelligence commission wants to focus on the spooks. The real culprits are the pols," *American Prospect*, April 1, 2004, <http://www.prospect.org/web/page.wv?section=root&name=ViewPrint&articleId=7375>.

Note: Writing in *Slate Magazine* on April 13 2004, Jack Shafer noted that:

CBS's "60 Minutes" last month disowned part of a two-year-old story. On March 3, 2002, the newsmagazine profiled Ahmad Chalabi and his Iraqi National Congress. In the broadcast, correspondent Lesley Stahl meets an unnamed defector billed by the INC as a former major in the

There were only three INC defectors, and their evidence was never corroborated. Yet their evidence, alongside that of the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans, formed the backbone of the administration's case for war. A former intelligence official quoted by Jason Vest, outlined his preferred mandate for the Silberman-Robb Commission:

*I personally would like to see a full disclosure of the INC's sources and methods, who their 'intelligence' went to in the administration, and how it was processed and analyzed and conveyed by and to those outside the CIA.*<sup>71</sup>

### 3.5 Issues untouched

Examples of issues that remain untouched by the Silberman-Robb report and require further investigation include:

- The use by former CIA Director R. James Woolsey of his Pentagon contacts to bypass the CIA and arrange the debriefing of an Iraqi defector who falsely claimed that Iraq had biological-warfare laboratories disguised as yogurt and milk trucks.<sup>72</sup>
- The Bush administration's promotion of the claims of an Iraqi defector months after he showed deception in a lie-detector test and had been rejected as unreliable by U.S. intelligence agencies.
- The claims of the defector, Adnan Ihsan Saeed al Haideri, that he worked at illegal chemical, biological and nuclear facilities around Baghdad. These claims looked increasingly weak when, after the war, he could not identify a single site associated with illegal weapons. The White House prominently used Saeed's claims in a crucial background paper released on September 12, 2002, nine months after CIA and DIA officers had dismissed him as unreliable, and in conjunction with a speech Bush delivered at the U.N. General Assembly.<sup>73</sup>

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Iraq military. He tells Stahl about how Saddam Hussein evaded weapons inspectors by placing mobile biological-weapons laboratories in seven trucks that he, the defector, personally purchased from Renault.

Now that many of the defectors from the Chalabi stable have been exposed as exaggerators or fabricators, Stahl revisited her defector story March 7 to eat a little crow. Stahl reported with some chagrin that at the time of her first broadcast, the U.S. government "had already concluded that Chalabi's defector was unreliable, and the CIA now admits it made a mistake in allowing his information to be included in [Secretary of State Colin] Powell's U.N. speech."

Ironically, in May 2004 *Vanity Fair* ran an article "Iraq's Arsenal of Terror" by David Rose, supposedly detailed Iraq's progress toward truly frightening capabilities: "dirty" bombs that spew radioactivity, mobile bio-weapons facilities, and a new long-range ballistic missile that was unconvincing, the "defector" who is the source of Rose's story is the same man that "60 Minutes" relied on in a piece it previously did, which it subsequently repudiated. Source: Jack Shafer, "Dealing With Defective Defectors: '60 Minutes' shows *Vanity Fair* and the *New York Times* how it's done," *Slate*, April 13, 2004, <http://slate.msn.com/id/2098558/>; and David Rose, Iraq's Arsenal of Terror, *Vanity Fair*, May 2004, <http://www.ucsf.edu/its/listserv/emed-l/7339.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Jason Vest, "The Wrong Target."

<sup>72</sup> Jonathan S. Landay and Warren P. Strobel, "Former CIA director used Pentagon ties to introduce Iraqi defector," July 15, 2004, *Knight Ridder*, <http://www.realcities.com/mld/krwashington/9165361.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> "Defector cited on arms had doubters. The Iraqi, whose claims were used to rally war support, was rejected by intelligence agents," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 18, 2004, p. A1.

- The failure by the CIA to pass on to the President its interviews with relatives of Iraqi scientists before the war that suggested that Baghdad's programs to develop unconventional weapons had been abandoned, even as he publicly warned of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein's illicit weapons.<sup>74</sup>
- The *New York Times* July 9, 2004 report on inconsistencies between the defectors' claims after they had been briefed by the INC and those they had previously related to Muhammad al-Zubaidi and his associates. Zubaidi is an Iraqi exile who served as a field leader for about 75 to 100 informants. He provided his handwritten diaries from 2001 and 2002, and his existing reports on the statements originally made by the defectors, that detailed precisely Iraqi conventional military facilities but left out any mention of WMD or links with Osama bin Laden.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> James Risen, "The Reach of War: Intelligence; C.I.A. Held Back Iraqi Arms Data, U.S. Officials Say," *New York Times*, July 6, 2004, p. A1.

<sup>75</sup> Jim Dwyer, "The Reach of War: The Weapons; Defectors' Reports on Iraq Arms Were Embellished, Exile Asserts," *New York Times*, July 9, 2004, p. A1.

## 4. Proposals for Change

In its report the Commission calls for 74 changes, most of which can be implemented without legislation. These are the recommended changes that the report identifies as the most important:

- ***The President must give the Director of National Intelligence power, and backing, to match his responsibilities.*** The report points out that the final version of the legislation that established this position, passed and signed into law in December 2004, watered down the DNI's abilities.
- ***The FBI must be brought all the way into the intelligence community.*** The report recommends pulling all the bureau's intelligence capabilities into one place, a National Security Service inside the FBI, much like Britain's MI5, and under the direction of the DNI.
- ***Officials must demand more of the intelligence agencies.*** Analysts must be pressed to explain how much they don't know... Collection agencies must be pressed to explain why they don't have better information on key topics.
- ***The President must establish a National Counter Proliferation Center.*** This would be similar to the National Counterterrorism Center, recommended by the 9/11 Commission, which is already up and running. It would combine operatives and analysts from all 15 intelligence agencies and focus them on one threat.<sup>76</sup>

President Bush assigned his homeland security adviser, Frances Townsend, to oversee the implementation of these recommendations,<sup>77</sup> and on June 29, 2005, the Bush administration announced that it had endorsed 70 of the 74 recommendations and was still studying three of the remaining recommendations. A single classified recommendation will not be implemented.<sup>78</sup>

Specifically, the President:

- Directed the Attorney General to bring together the Justice Department's national security elements and directed the creation of a National Security Service within the FBI that will specialize in intelligence and other national security matters and respond to priorities set by the Director of National Intelligence.
- Directed the Program Manager for Information Sharing report to the Director of National Intelligence.
- Endorsed the establishment of a National Counter Proliferation Center. This will manage and coordinate the intelligence community's activities concerning

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<sup>76</sup> Faye Bowers and Peter Grier, "Major work left to fix U.S. intelligence: New study criticizes U.S. intelligence-gathering in Iraq, Korea, and Iran. It suggests 74 changes," *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 1, 2005, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0401/p01s03-usfp.html>.

<sup>77</sup> Scott Shane, "C.I.A. Answers Criticism With Pledge to Do Better," *New York Times*, April 2, 2005.

<sup>78</sup> "Bush Administration Implements WMD Commission Recommendations," June 29, 2005, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/06/20050629-2.html>.

proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, and their delivery systems.

- Signed an Executive Order to combat trafficking of weapons of mass destruction and proliferation-related materials by cutting off financing and other support for proliferation networks.

#### 4.1 Will the recommended changes make a difference?

But are these recommendations, focusing as they do upon organizational restructuring, sufficient? And do they, in fact, have any bearing upon the report's own analysis of the problem? Fred Kaplan of *Slate* notes:

*Had all [the report's] proposed reorganizations been in place four years ago, there's nothing that suggests the agencies or the Bush administration would have reached more accurate conclusions... The various agencies, the report states, "collected precious little intelligence for the analysts to analyze." Intelligence-gathering technology these days is "not cutting edge." The analytical branches "have suffered from weak leadership, insufficient training, and budget setbacks that led to the loss of our best, most senior analysts." They have difficulty recruiting and retaining people "with scientific and technical skills, diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, management experience, and advanced language capabilities." "Technical expertise, particularly relating to weapons systems, has fallen sharply in the past 10 years." As for human spies, "we simply need more people."....<sup>79</sup>*

Overall, the Commission's recommendations are not particularly impressive. Most involve initiatives that were already in the works before the Commission released its report, and doubts remain about how effective they will be. For example:

- The FBI's history of effectively cooperating with other intelligence agencies is poor, so setting up a new National Security Service within its structure is unlikely to have much of an impact.
- Having the Program Manager for Information Sharing report to the Director of National Intelligence is just John Negroponte's way of establishing his bureaucratic clout.
- After the August 2004 establishment of a National Counterterrorism Center, called for in the final report of the 9/11 Commission, the inevitable next step was the establishment of something similar on proliferation issues.
- It will be difficult to cut off financing and other support for proliferation networks given the ease of operating within the black market.

It also bears noting that proliferation can take place in different forms. A state, or increasingly a non-state actor, can either:

(a) develop a chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons program through the direct assistance of another state;

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<sup>79</sup> Fred Kaplan, "To Err Is Human: Organizational reforms can't prevent people from being wrong," *Slate*, March 31, 2005, <http://slate.msn.com/toolbar.aspx?action=print&id=2116017>.

(b) buy what it needs on the open market and assemble the weapons program on its own, either under the cover of a civilian program or covertly, or

(c) set up a black market network, possibly outside of a recognized state-centered network and sell the materials and expertise to the highest bidder.

While economic sanctions can make it more difficult in preventing the first two forms of proliferation, and it is now clear that sanctions did work better than generally given credit for in the case of Iraq (with side-effect of huge humanitarian consequences), they are of little or no use when dealing with a network of individuals.

More significantly, however, the recommendations completely ignore arguably the most important aspect of the problem. Intelligence is inevitably murky and uncertain. Rather than simply focusing upon changes to the hierarchy, the Commission could have explored how to encourage dissenting voices and diverse opinions within the intelligence community.

As BASIC noted previously, the intelligence community appears to suffer from the 'group think' phenomenon. The 'group think' theory of error defines a form of decision making characterized by uncritical acceptance of a prevailing point of view. Contradictory evidence is often discarded and the group's policies are rationalized collectively.<sup>80</sup>

The Commission's simple, anonymous, homogenized and tidy conclusions are dangerously misleading. David Brooks, the conservative columnist at the *New York Times* wrote:

*I'll believe it's been reformed when there's a big sign in front of C.I.A. headquarters that reads: Individuals think better than groups.*<sup>81</sup>

According to the testimony of former insiders, the strength of groupthink within the intelligence agencies has grown and is almost always present when policymakers get together for a meeting with 'the boss'. Generally, lower and middle-ranking staff are keen to please and will limit their suggestions or evidence to what they know will be perceived as acceptable. This was not always the case. A former defense intelligence officer at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) writes in the journal *Middle East Policy*, that traditionally, and throughout his career he would frequently hear colleagues challenging orders or lines they considered dishonest or wrong, saying "I will fall on my sword over that." He goes on to say that:

*This phrase is no longer widely in use. What has taken its place is far more sinister in its meaning and implications. "I drank the Kool-Aid" is what is now said. Those old enough to remember the Jonestown tragedy know this phrase all too well. Jim Jones, a self-styled "messiah" from the United States, lured hundreds of innocent and believing followers to Guyana, where he built a village, isolated from the world, in which his Utopian view of the universe would be played out. He controlled all news, regulated all discourse and expression of opinion, and shaped behavior to his taste. After a time, his paranoia grew unmanageable and he "foresaw" that "evil" forces were coming to threaten his "paradise." He decided that these forces were unstoppable and that death would be*

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<sup>80</sup> Ian Davis and Andreas Persbo, "After the Butler Report: Time to Take on the Group Think in Washington and London," *BASIC Paper* No. 46, July 2004.

<sup>81</sup> David Brooks, "The Art Of Intelligence," *New York Times*, April 2, 2005.

*preferable to living under their control. He called together his followers in the town square and explained the situation to them. There were a few survivors, who all said afterward that within the context of the "group-think" prevailing in the village, it sounded quite reasonable. Jim Jones then invited all present to drink from vats of Kool-Aid containing lethal doses of poison. Nearly all did so, without physical coercion. Parents gave their children the poison and then drank it themselves. Finally Jones drank. Many hundreds died with him.*

*What does drinking the Kool-Aid mean today? It signifies that the person in question has given up personal integrity and has succumbed to the prevailing group-think that typifies policymaking today. This person has become "part of the problem, not part of the solution."*

*What was the "problem"? The sincerely held beliefs of a small group of people who think they are the "bearers" of a uniquely correct view of the world, sought to dominate the foreign policy of the United States in the Bush 43 administration, and succeeded in doing so through a practice of excluding all who disagreed with them. Those they could not drive from government they bullied and undermined until they, too, had drunk from the vat...*

*What we have now is a highly corrupted system of intelligence and policymaking, one twisted to serve specific group goals, ends and beliefs held to the point of religious faith.<sup>82</sup>*

Tellingly, a terse statement released by the CIA and approved by the White House on the Commission recommendations made no mention of problems in the CIA. Its only acknowledgement was this, "In the 1990s, we suffered deep cuts in intelligence funding and investment. Now, we are rebuilding a system that includes more comprehensive global collection and more rigorous analysis."<sup>83</sup> Given that budget cuts were not one of the reasons cited by the Commission for problems within the intelligence community, such a statement can be seen as an indication of how far the intelligence community has to go in putting its own house in order.

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<sup>82</sup> W. Patrick Lang, "Drinking the Kool-Aid," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 11, Summer 2004, No. 2, [http://www.mepc.org/public\\_asp/journal\\_vol11/0406\\_lang.asp](http://www.mepc.org/public_asp/journal_vol11/0406_lang.asp).

<sup>83</sup> Statement by Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Porter J. Goss on the WMD Commission Recommendations, June 29, 2005, [http://www.cia.gov/cia/public\\_affairs/press\\_release/2005/pr04292005.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/press_release/2005/pr04292005.html).