

## Intelligence in Preventive Military Strategy

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*I would never advise Your Majesty to declare war forthwith, simply because it appeared that our opponent would begin hostilities in the near future. One can never anticipate the ways of divine providence securely enough for that.*

– Chancellor Otto von Bismarck to Kaiser Wilhelm I in 1875

Accurate intelligence is important. In-depth understanding of current realities and foreknowledge of how events are likely to unfold have always been major assets in the execution of foreign and military affairs. In the modern era, the detailed demands of government on intelligence services have mushroomed along with the technical capacity of the intelligence collectors. Particularly in the United States, the Intelligence Community's 15 agencies devour a significant (and still classified) share of the national budget.

This American commitment to the intelligence function is partly the result of national traumas induced by instances of failed warnings. Pearl Harbor helped to create a national obsession with receiving advance warning of foreign aggression. The Cuban Missile Crisis engraved on our collective consciousness the importance of hyper-vigilance in matters involving nuclear weapons; it may also have bequeathed the public an excessive confidence in the ability of the Intelligence Community to monitor events. The 9/11 attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. dramatically demonstrated the dangers posed by non-state actors. In light of the destructive potential of organized foreign terrorists willing to commit suicide, it became obvious that major intelligence assets would need to be focused on the murky world of international terrorism.

Just as the threat of terrorism has redirected the intelligence enterprise in the 21st Century, the development and deployment of intercontinental ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads had a powerful effect on establishing the primacy of intelligence as a component of national defense during the Cold War. Strategists worried that the power, range, size and speed of modern weapons might foreclose the option of waiting for a putative threat to be actualized. However improbable the notion that any state would contemplate a nuclear attack on the United States, there was (and remains to this day) no reliable means of thwarting an



attack by intercontinental ballistic missiles once they are launched.<sup>1</sup> This was a particularly uncomfortable realization for the United States, which matured on the notion that it was protected by two broad oceans.

Preventive war is not new to the cogitations of national security managers and other strategic thinkers. It was in response to the new dynamic of the nuclear threat that some Americans called for preventive war against the Soviet Union in the 1950s—and some Soviets used a similar rationale in calling for preventive war against China during the 1960s.<sup>2</sup> In his seminal 1959 book, *Strategy in the Missile Age*, Bernard Brodie described preventive war as “a live issue [in the early 1950s] among a small but important minority of American citizens.”<sup>3</sup> Even then, it never received sufficient backing to become part of US national security doctrine. Henry Kissinger referred to preventive war as: “contrary to the sense of country and the constitutional limits within which American foreign policy must be conducted.”<sup>4</sup> By the end of that decade, Brodie commented that: “The ranks of the preventive war advocates appear now to be practically deserted.”<sup>5</sup> And yet, as a deterrent to Soviet nuclear attack, the United States retained the preemptive options of launching on warning—before any enemy weapons were fired, or launching under attack – before any weapons reached their targets on US territory.

It is a relatively new feature of American political dialogue to hear preventive war justified as a formula for defeating non-state actors. The application of this doctrine should not be confused with the US attack on Afghanistan, which was undertaken *after* al-Qaida’s 11 September 2001 attacks on American citizens (and bears some resemblance to the US Army’s pursuit into Mexico of Pancho Villa’s forces in 1916 *after* Villa’s attack on a US town in New Mexico). This most recent rationale for making war *before* being attacked was

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<sup>1</sup> Neither the nuclear-based defenses of the extensive and long-lasting Moscow ABM system, nor the short-lived U.S. Safeguard/Sprint ABM system were considered capable of assuring that the offensive missiles of the other superpower would not penetrate their shields. There is so far little reason to believe that the untested developmental ABM system recently deployed in Alaska could reliably counter even the most rudimentary potential threat from North Korea.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Harrison Salisbury’s *War Between Russia and China* (New York: Norton, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Brodie, *War and Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 227-228.

<sup>4</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, “Military Policy and the Defense of ‘Gray Areas,’” *Foreign Affairs* 33 (April 1955): 416.

<sup>5</sup> Brodie, *War and Strategy*, 228.



spawned by the past successes of al-Qaida terrorists and nourished by the particular fear of terrorists acquiring and using “weapons of mass destruction” in the future against urban civilian targets. Harkening back to the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush offered the following dark vision in his State of the Union Address on 28 January 2003: “[I]magine those 19 hijackers with other weapons and other plans, this time armed by Saddam Hussein.”<sup>6</sup> Americans feel particular vulnerability to nuclear terrorism from non-state groups, which achieve global reach operating out of sanctuaries in hostile or chaotic states. This anxiety is likely to grow—at least until the international community gets much better control over nuclear warheads and fissile material. Advocates of preventive war doctrine argue that civilized nations cannot allow legal niceties to block them from taking prompt military action against terrorist cells wherever those cells can be found.

Intelligence gathering and analysis are at the heart of implementing any doctrine of preemptive/preventive war, since such a doctrine presumes the ability to know both the intentions and capabilities of potential enemies. It is therefore necessary to take a close look at the nature of strategic intelligence—particularly as it has evolved in the post-World War II era—so that its contributions and limitations can be fully understood. In the following analysis, part one places the capabilities and limitations of strategic intelligence in historical context, elucidating key episodes and salient trends that shape the backdrop for contemporary discussions of preventive war. Part two looks at how interactions between the realms of intelligence and policy complicate efforts to institutionalize preventive war as military doctrine. Part three contributes to the ongoing dialogue on intelligence reform by proposing several policy recommendations that follow from the paper's findings.

### **WHY INTELLIGENCE FALLS SHORT**

Even a cursory review of the way intelligence has been formulated and used during the last half-century shows that it has not been a consistently accurate indicator of the capabilities and intentions of foreign governments. Notable blunders range from overestimating the size of the Soviet bomber force in the late 1950s and underestimating the

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<sup>6</sup> George W. Bush, “President Delivers ‘State of the Union,’” 28 January 2003, 8, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html>>.



staying power of the North Vietnamese in the face of American intervention in the 1960s, to overestimating the range of the Soviet Backfire medium-range bomber in the 1970s and exaggerating the motives for and significance of the Soviets' illegal construction of a large-phased array radar at Krasnoyarsk, Siberia in the 1980s.

As the United States enters a period conducive to intelligence reform, it is tempting to believe that, whatever its past failings, the Intelligence Community can adjust to the more demanding requirements of preventive war doctrine. It will be my contention that such an expectation cannot be fully met because, while the doctrine demands clairvoyance, intelligence assessments will always be subject to incomplete information and flawed interpretations.

To acknowledge the weaknesses of many past intelligence assessments is not to belittle the role of intelligence or to deny the contributions it has made to US security, for it has been an indispensable tool of government. Intelligence does not need to be infallible to be valuable, but neither should it be pushed beyond its natural limits. For intelligence analysts to overstate their confidence level is to set up the policymaker for disaster, and for the political leadership to exaggerate the precision of estimates is to break trust with the public. Further examination of the historical record elucidates this delicate dynamic.

#### **INTELLIGENCE EXAGGERATES THREATS**

– *By emphasizing warning over prediction.* Intelligence serves several functions: warning of what could happen; predicting what is likely to happen; and analyzing why things happen the way they do. Ever since the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, US intelligence at the strategic level has put a premium on the warning function. The loss of a major portion of the US Pacific Fleet in a single attack was so dire, dramatic, and avoidable that being able to warn in advance of a similar catastrophic event quickly became enshrined as the holy grail of US intelligence efforts. The vast Cold War intelligence bureaucracy was principally focused on providing warning of Soviet strategic attack and gauging the capability of Soviet offensive forces to carry out such an attack.

The detection of Soviet efforts to deploy nuclear-tipped missiles to Cuba in 1962 was the most conspicuous post-WWII triumph of the intelligence warning function. But even in



its most triumphant manifestation, the limits of intelligence can be perceived. The reading of intentions in Moscow and Washington was done through a glass darkly. US intelligence did not receive timely information when the Soviet and Cuban governments decided on the deployments; it only detected the deployments once they were underway. Moreover, intense US scrutiny of the island during the crisis missed entirely the nuclear capability of Soviet tactical missiles deployed there.

One of the most serious limitations on confidently predicting hostile action by another state is that governmental leaders themselves may not know their mind or may not be in complete control of events. We are now well aware of how much trouble Washington was having discerning Soviet intentions during the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis. That Moscow was having similar difficulty assessing whether the Kennedy administration intended to invade Cuba was at least partly a consequence of mixed signals being sent by a government, which had not yet decided itself what its course of action would be. Both Kennedy and Khrushchev had concerns about provocative military actions being taken without their specific authorizations.<sup>7</sup> The world is indeed fortunate that the United States chose a naval quarantine and diplomacy rather than a preventive attack. The Cuban Missile Crisis should stand as “Exhibit A” in making the case that intelligence will be insufficient to justify attacking first.

Recent episodes reveal other limitations of the intelligence function. Failures to provide warning—for example, of Indian nuclear testing in May of 1998 or of the 9/11 attacks in 2001—were occasions for severe criticism of the CIA and the other intelligence agencies. Partly as a consequence of such reactions, the Intelligence Community has preferred to warn of improbable events or sensationalize relatively insignificant developments than to risk a failure to warn against the unexpected. Following pointed criticism of US assessments of foreign ballistic missile threats as too sanguine by the Rumsfeld Commission and the Republican leadership in Congress during 1998, the Intelligence Community essentially adopted the hyped rhetoric and inflated criteria of the Rumsfeld Commission Report in subsequent yearly estimates. The US Intelligence

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example Anatoli I. Gribkov and William Y. Smith, *Operation ANADYR: U.S. and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Chicago: Edition Q, Inc., 1994).



Community thereby presented the nation with a series of implausible timelines and unrealistic threat scenarios that proved very wide off the mark in predicting actual missile deployments. The prognostication record was particularly lacking concerning those countries, which had been the documents' principal focus – North Korea, Iran, and Iraq.<sup>8</sup>

– *By being susceptible to deception by hostile states.* It is bad enough that the United States has a habit of embellishing threats to the nation. But the states that the US is monitoring also have an incentive to exaggerate their own capabilities, particularly those states which fear intervention from stronger powers. Such self-aggrandizement can be motivated by a leader's desire to claim credit domestically for defense efforts and/or to increase the deterrent effect of military forces against potential aggressors. While China was quietly pursuing its own nuclear weapons program in the 1950s, it publicly disparaged the effectiveness of nuclear weapons and declared itself immune to intimidation and threats by the nuclear powers because of its large population and revolutionary zeal. It can also simply be a manifestation of national pride. North Korea has exaggerated its scientific and military capabilities to bolster pride and to intimidate the United States, claiming, for example, that it succeeded in launching a satellite on 31 August 1998, even though US intelligence declared the Taepo Dong 1 space launch attempt a failure.<sup>9</sup> Even the United States, in announcing that its inadequately tested strategic ballistic missile interceptors in Alaska would be “operational” in 2004, seems willing to play the exaggeration game.

The incentive states have for exaggerating their capabilities are matched by the incentives intelligence agencies have for believing them. While intelligence analysts are trained to recognize both “denial” and “deception,” they are professionally inclined toward concentrating on the former—uncovering the secrets that could save the nation from a disastrous surprise (and burnish the reputation of the sleuthing analysts in the process). To argue that a hostile state is less threatening than it appears, is to risk being labeled as “naïve.”

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<sup>8</sup> Greg Thielmann, “Rumsfeld Reprise? The Missile Report that Foretold the Iraq Intelligence Controversy,” *Arms Control Today* (July/August 2003).

<sup>9</sup> United States, National Intelligence Council, National Intelligence Estimate, “Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States Through 2015,” September 1999 (Unclassified Summary), 9.



Few intelligence analysts have gained glory and institutional reward from finding that foreign capabilities are less alarming than previously believed.

Political and military leaders prefer that the Intelligence Community err on the side of warnings that are too many or too strident rather than too few or too ambiguous. For example, they judge it far better for the US to deploy a military force trained and equipped to operate in a chemical weapons (CW) environment that does not materialize than to deploy a less encumbered military force more quickly, which is then surprised by CW use.

Even though it is understandable and relatively common for states to exaggerate their capabilities, foreign intelligence organizations often fall for it anyway. Ironically, tactical success at exploiting the “worst-case” bent of most intelligence services can lead to counterproductive and catastrophic results over the longer term. Moscow’s bravado over Soviet military capabilities and the secrecy shrouding its military and scientific activities in the late fifties helped spur the United States to launch the largest nuclear modernization program in history—excessive when measured retrospectively against the actual threat. It is likely that the more convincing the Pentagon is in convincing the world of its missile defense capabilities, the more countries like Russia and China will improve their offensive strategic deterrents—doing so at much less cost than what the United States spends on deploying its defensive systems.

– *By politicians stretching intelligence.* The problem with intelligence goes beyond the inability of the intelligence services to get everything right every time. Whatever the good faith findings of the intelligence services, the political leadership choosing to pursue war will be tempted to misrepresent the actual evidence to the public. There is ample evidence of such misrepresentation in past US military interventions. One can go back to the erroneous claim that the U.S.S. Maine had been attacked in Havana Harbor in 1898—or turn to the much more recent example of the 1964 Tonkin Gulf Affair, when the Johnson Administration requested a Congressional resolution authorizing a military response to the second of two “unprovoked” attacks on US warships “on routine patrol” in international waters. In the latter case, neither the US Congress nor the public at large had any idea that the US Navy had been backing up clandestine raids on North Vietnam by South Vietnamese



commandos (“Operation Plan 34A”).<sup>10</sup> They were also unaware of the emerging doubts within the US military at the time that a second attack had actually occurred, because President Johnson had described the evidence as “unequivocal.”<sup>11</sup> Yet the resulting Tonkin Gulf Resolution served for years as the constitutional equivalent of a congressional declaration of war.

Dire warnings based on exaggerated depictions of the threat have become standard fare in political campaigns. Alarming descriptions of Soviet strength during the Cold War fueled the political success of John Kennedy in the 1960 election and Ronald Reagan in the 1980 and 1984 elections. Inflated estimates of the foreign ballistic missile threat contributed to the election of George W. Bush and the demise of the ABM and START Treaties. Indeed before the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War, there appeared to be little penalty attached to either the Intelligence Community or the political leadership for excessive warning.

#### **IRAQ AS HARBINGER?**

If the Cuban Missile Crisis is “Exhibit A” in the intelligence case against preventive war, “Exhibit B” is provided by a more recent case. The implications of intelligence geared only to warning are just beginning to be understood as the facts of the Iraqi “WMD” fiasco begin to sink in. In many ways, the Iraqi example stands as a harbinger of a grim alternative future when inherently imperfect intelligence combines poisonously with an aggressive approach to war. In examining the Iraqi threat, the intelligence community again assigned *warning* top priority, arriving at a classical “worst case” assessment. The Key Judgments of the classified October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Iraqi WMD were full of frightening scenarios that, even at the time, many analysts regarded as either unlikely or possibly relevant to some more distant future.

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<sup>10</sup> See Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* (New York: Viking, 2002), 7-20; *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: New York Times Co., 1971), 234-306.

<sup>11</sup> See Ellsberg, *Secrets*, 7-20, *Pentagon Papers*, 234-306.



Later, the 2004 report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence<sup>12</sup> and the findings of the Iraq Survey Group<sup>13</sup> both provided conclusions significantly at odds with the official estimates of the US Intelligence Community and the statements of senior Bush administration officials immediately prior to the Iraq War. The October 2002 NIE claimed high confidence in asserting that Iraq "had chemical and biological weapons," and moderate confidence that Iraq was "likely to have a [nuclear] weapon by 2007 to 2009."<sup>14</sup> The NIE also warned that Iraq "could make a nuclear weapon within several months to a year."<sup>15</sup> The Senate Select Intelligence Committee Report delivered a blunt verdict on the quality of these assessments: "the major key judgments in the (October 2002 NIE) . . . were either overstated, or were not supported by, the underlying intelligence reporting."<sup>16</sup>

The conventional wisdom about the dearth of reliable intelligence on Iraq prior to the 2003 invasion refers mostly to the poor quality and quantity of human intelligence (HUMINT). However, the US Intelligence Community actually knew a great deal about the history of Iraqi programs for unconventional weapons as a result of the 1991 Gulf War, the subsequent activities of United Nations inspectors, and intense ongoing scrutiny of Iraq through national technical means. Considerably more was known at that time about Iraq than about North Korea and Iran, the other two charter members of President Bush's "Axis of Evil." Indeed the US probably knew much more about the specific capabilities of the Iraqi military prior to the 2003 war than the US knew about the Japanese and German militaries prior to entering World War II in 1941. The discovery that the US Government had

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<sup>12</sup> United States, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq*, 7 July 2004, <<http://www.intelligence.senate.gov/iraqreport2.pdf>>.

<sup>13</sup> United States, Central Intelligence Agency, "Statement by David Kay on the Interim Progress Report on the Activities of the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) Before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, The House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Defense, and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence," 2 October 2003, <[http://www.cia.gov/cia/public\\_affairs/speeches/2003/david\\_kay\\_10022003.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/speeches/2003/david_kay_10022003.html)>; "Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD," 30 September 2004, <[http://www.cia.gov/cia/reports/iraq\\_wmd\\_2004](http://www.cia.gov/cia/reports/iraq_wmd_2004)>.

<sup>14</sup> United States, National Intelligence Council, October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate: "Iraq's Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction," declassified excerpts, 18 July 2003, 4, <<http://www.fas.org/irp/cia/product/iraq-wmd.html>>.

<sup>15</sup> US NIC, October 2002 NIE on Iraqi WMD, declassified excerpts, 1.

<sup>16</sup> US Senate Select Intelligence Committee, *Prewar Intelligence Assessments*, 14.



significantly misassessed the unconventional weapons capabilities of Iraq prior to the US-British invasion therefore raises an especially troubling issue for those who expect the intelligence community to provide the kind of information requisite to waging preventive war. The case of Iraq should constitute a sobering wake-up call on the dangers of expecting too much from intelligence. Specifics of this cautionary tale can be gleaned by reviewing key dimensions of the intelligence failure that took place prior to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

*Warning of the worst . . . in the worst way.* Nuclear weapons are so much more destructive than the other categories of “weapons of mass destruction” that intelligence analysts, members of the press, and politicians should resist the temptation to use “WMD” as a collective in referring to chemical and biological weapons. In the case of Iraq, what was for government officials and the press mostly a stylistic convenience, was for some politicians a mechanism for spreading and harnessing fear. The President and his advisors reported that intelligence showed Iraq possessed “weapons of mass destruction,” conjuring up images of mushroom clouds, but the already thin evidence pointed to non-nuclear stockpiles or “WMD-related program activities.” For example, when Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz claimed in a May 2003 interview that: “There’s been very little dispute about the WMD, except for some of the borderline issues,”<sup>17</sup> he was referring to chemical and biological weapons. Yet the public had been conditioned to think of nuclear weapons, the most destructive unconventional weapons category by far, whenever it heard “WMD.”

When senior intelligence figures summarized the detailed and comprehensive analyses of intelligence on the Iraqi nuclear program, they consistently featured worst case scenarios, and did so prominently—giving greater credibility to supporting evidence and dismissing contrary evidence. As a result, the timetables of concern were advanced.<sup>18</sup>

In forecasting how soon Iraq could acquire its first nuclear weapon, the NIE concluded: “probably . . . during this decade.”<sup>19</sup> Little noticed was the qualifier for this projection: “if left unchecked.” “Unchecked” could mean either “not blocked” or “not

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Wolfowitz, “Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz Interview with Karen DeYoung, *Washington Post*, May 28, 2003,” US Department of Defense News Transcript, <<http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprin.cgi?>>.

<sup>18</sup> See also Rodger Payne’s description in Chapter five of this volume of how inflation of the nuclear threat distorted the public debate.

<sup>19</sup> US NIC, October 2002 NIE on Iraqi WMD, declassified excerpts, 1.



examined.” The former meaning would constitute a very pessimistic assessment of the effectiveness of the stringent arms embargo then in force, along with the US-British enforcement of no-fly zones. The latter meaning may have been intended to reflect the absence of UN inspectors at that time, but it would seem to be an inaccurate reflection of the intense international scrutiny to which Iraq was being subjected. And if the important qualifier was the absence of inspectors, then it is remarkable that the return of inspectors in November 2002 had no discernable impact for the administration on judging the urgency of military action.

Later in the NIE's Key Judgments, an even more alarming timeline for development of the first Iraqi nuclear weapon appeared: “*several months to a year.*”<sup>20</sup> Curiously, when DCI Tenet tried to justify the CIA’s pre-war estimates on the nuclear issue in July 2003, he referred to sensitive foreign intelligence reports indicating that Saddam had specifically instructed his nuclear scientists to reconstitute the nuclear program.<sup>21</sup> In the same account, which Tenet cited for its credibility, he mentioned that one scientist told Saddam it would be possible to have a bomb within *18-24 months* of getting sufficient fissile material.<sup>22</sup> This boast was more than twice as long as the NIE said would be required. Yet the shorter, more alarming time frame was retained in the published estimate.

Moreover, the context for the “several months to a year” scenario was acquisition from abroad by Iraq of sufficient fissile material. There was no indication of any evidence that Iraq was seeking a foreign source of enriched uranium or plutonium. Without it, the NIE predicted that at least 5-7 years would be required—and only based on the assumption that Iraq was already reconstituting its own uranium enrichment effort.<sup>23</sup> This latter judgment was vigorously challenged by the State Department’s intelligence bureau (INR), citing the Energy Department’s analysis of the unsuitability of the intercepted aluminum tubes as the most critical flaw in the reconstitution theory. In a separate section of the document, the careful reader could discover that the Intelligence Community had only “moderate confidence” in

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<sup>20</sup> US NIC, October 2002 NIE on Iraqi WMD, declassified excerpts, 1.

<sup>21</sup> George Tenet, “Transcript of Tenet address on WMD intelligence,” 5 February 2004, 7, <<http://www.cnn.com/2004/US/02/05/tenet.transcript.ap/index.html>>.

<sup>22</sup> Tenet, “Transcript of Tenet address,” 8.

<sup>23</sup> US NIC, October 2002 NIE on Iraqi WMD, declassified excerpts, 1.



even the 5-7 year projection. When used by key policy makers and members of Congress, however, the shorter timelines were headlined and the careful qualifications of the analysts were ignored. After its exhaustive review of the evidence, the Senate Select Intelligence Committee bipartisan report later agreed with the State Department's dissenting view in the October 2002 NIE that the available evidence did not "add up to a compelling case for reconstitution."<sup>24</sup>

The front-loading of alarming timelines and subtle obfuscations of the uncertainty and fragility on which the projections were made misled even some who were conscientiously seeking answers. However, for an administration that already had its answers long before the questions were posed to the Intelligence Community, there was no interest in ensuring that the Congress and the public got a faithful rendition of expert opinion.

- *What kind of a threat without delivery vehicles?* The NIE's treatment of vehicles capable of delivering unconventional weapons followed a similar pattern. The classified Key Judgments of the NIE included the statement, "Gaps in Iraqi accounting to UNSCOM suggest that Saddam retains a covert force of up to a few dozen Scud-variant SRBMs with ranges of 650 to 900km."<sup>25</sup> This was one of the most important assessments relating to any determination of imminent threat posed by Iraq, because these missiles would have been the only means Iraq might have had available in 2003 for effectively threatening population centers in Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. According to the Senate Select Intelligence Committee report, the UN inspectors had been able to account for the destruction of all but two of the Scud missiles previously acquired from the Soviet Union and all but seven of the indigenously produced al Husayn, Scud-type, missiles.<sup>26</sup> The SSCI reported that it was "unclear" how the Intelligence Community established the higher ("up to a few dozen") figure, since "the IC had no estimate of the number of components that may have been withheld from inspectors."<sup>27</sup> DCI Tenet implied a slightly less imposing and more justifiable quantity — "a small number of SCUD missiles" — in testimony to the Senate on February 11,

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<sup>24</sup> US Senate Select Intelligence Committee, *Prewar Intelligence Assessments*, 129.

<sup>25</sup> US NIC, October 2002 NIE on Iraqi WMD, declassified excerpts, 2.

<sup>26</sup> US Senate Select Intelligence Committee, *Prewar Intelligence Assessments*, 217.

<sup>27</sup> US Senate Select Intelligence Committee, *Prewar Intelligence Assessments*, 218.



2003.<sup>28</sup> However, by stating flatly that: "Iraq *retains* a small number of" these missiles, and dropping the explanation of how the estimate was derived—i.e., "Gaps in Iraqi accounting . . . suggest . . . that Saddam retains"<sup>29</sup>—he misled the Congress and the public about the confidence intelligence experts had in the accuracy of this assessment. He implied that an educated guess was a statement of fact, neglecting to acknowledge that there was no hard evidence that even a single Scud missile remained in the Iraqi inventory. And he did so almost three months after the UN inspectors had regained the opportunity to search for covert inventories.

Both the classified NIE of October 2002 and the unclassified summary of the NIE referred to another category of delivery vehicles for "WMD" – unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). The Key Judgments cited one type of UAV as "probably intended to deliver biological warfare agent," but identified it as a "developmental" program rather than an operational system.<sup>30</sup> The unclassified version did not reveal that the intelligence entity most qualified to comment on its intended use, Air Force Intelligence, believed that this UAV was intended primarily for reconnaissance rather than for weapons delivery. Nor was the public informed when DIA and the Army joined the Air Force in dissenting from the majority view on the issue during the coordination of another National Intelligence Estimate on "Nontraditional Threats to the U.S. Homeland Through 2007" in January 2003.<sup>31</sup> That majority view was: "Baghdad's UAVs could threaten Iraq's neighbors, U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf, *and if brought close to, or into, the United States, the U.S. Homeland.*" Since the UAVs were not yet operational, the "could" referred to a future contingency rather than a present capability. Moreover, the judgment of Air Force Intelligence about the primary purpose of the UAVs appears to have been vindicated by the Iraq Survey Group after Iraq was occupied. The contingent clause about threatening the US homeland (*highlighted in italics*) had turned sober weapons intelligence analysis into farce. The casual reader was thereby led to the conclusion that a platform, which was probably not even designed to

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<sup>28</sup> George Tenet, "The Worldwide Threat in 2003: Evolving Dangers in a Complex World," DCI's Worldwide Threat Briefing, 11 February 2003, 2, <[http://www.cia.gov/cia/public\\_affairs/speeches/dci\\_speech\\_02112003.html](http://www.cia.gov/cia/public_affairs/speeches/dci_speech_02112003.html)>.

<sup>29</sup> US NIC, October 2002 NIE on Iraqi WMD, declassified excerpts, 2.

<sup>30</sup> US NIC, October 2002 NIE on Iraqi WMD, declassified excerpts, 2.

<sup>31</sup> US Senate Select Intelligence Committee, *Prewar Intelligence Assessments* 230.



deliver chemical or biological agents as a tactical battlefield weapon, might be an active threat to the American homeland 8000 km away. The Senate Select Intelligence Committee report took the Intelligence Community to task for: “overstating” what was known and what was judged about the mission of the UAVs,<sup>32</sup> “failing to discuss” the conventional missions most analysts believed were primary,<sup>33</sup> and describing a mission, attacking the US homeland, which was not supported by intelligence.<sup>34</sup> It also criticized the CIA for failing to share with other agencies details of the dubious intelligence on alleged attempts to acquire US mapping software.<sup>35</sup>

These were consequential failings. The Senate report itself judges that the lack of information sharing by the CIA on planning to use UAVs against the United States “may have led some analysts to agree to a position they otherwise would not have supported.”<sup>36</sup> A more faithful rendering to the public on the dearth of hard evidence concerning the existence of delivery vehicles for the “WMD” agents of concern would almost certainly have affected public willingness to wage war. At least one member of Congress, Florida Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL), has said that the statements about the alleged evidence of Iraqi attempts to acquire mapping of the US homeland for targeting was instrumental in convincing him that Iraq posed an imminent threat.<sup>37</sup>

- *The double game of deception.* Iraqi deception further reduced the likelihood of accurate intelligence analysis. At the same time Saddam Hussein was pleading to the world that Iraq had no illicit weapons and that sanctions should therefore be removed to spare the Iraqi people from further suffering, he was publicly awarding medals to his “nuclear mujahideen” and refusing to cooperate fully with UN inspectors. Saddam appears to have been trying to convince US intelligence and the Iraqi people that Iraq did have some chemical and biological weapons capability—to avoid a sense of national humiliation and to dissuade foreign intervention. The former head of the UN inspection mission, Hans Blix,

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<sup>32</sup> US Senate Select Intelligence Committee, *Prewar Intelligence Assessments*, 235.

<sup>33</sup> US Senate Select Intelligence Committee, *Prewar Intelligence Assessments*, 236.

<sup>34</sup> US Senate Select Intelligence Committee, *Prewar Intelligence Assessments*, 236

<sup>35</sup> US Senate Select Intelligence Committee, *Prewar Intelligence Assessments*, 237

<sup>36</sup> US Senate Select Intelligence Committee, *Prewar Intelligence Assessments*, 237

<sup>37</sup> Senator Bill Nelson, Statement, *Congressional Record* (28 January 2004): S311.



explained the latter possibility in the following way: “Yet like someone who puts up a sign warning BEWARE OF DOG without having a dog, perhaps the Iraqi regime did not mind inspiring in others the thought that it had weapons of mass destruction and was still dangerous.”<sup>38</sup> This was a delicate double game, which succeeded as deception, but failed to have its intended policy effect. Saddam underestimated international support for the return of inspectors and overestimated the ability of presumed possession of chemical and biological weapons to deter US and U.K. military action.

- *Stretching already thin data.* A close reading of pre-Iraq War statements by President Bush, Vice President Cheney, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz shows a consistent pattern of exaggerating what the Intelligence Community was reporting about operational ties between Iraq and al-Qaida and about the prospects for an early nuclear weapons capability by Iraq. Wolfowitz acknowledged after the invasion that the links to terrorism was one of “three fundamental concerns,” the one “about which there’s the most disagreement in the bureaucracy.”<sup>39</sup> Yet, the rhetorical drumbeat in the speeches and interviews of senior officials asserting a close association between Saddam and al-Qaida carried no hint of this disagreement in the months leading up to the invasion.

The Bush administration’s 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS 2002) promised that: “The reasons for our actions (using military forces) will be clear.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the pre-invasion statements of senior Administration officials did make clear that the reason for war with Iraq was to counter the urgent threat posed by Saddam’s “weapons of mass destruction.” Yet the post-invasion statements of President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and National Security Advisor Rice constitute reluctant witness that the danger from Iraqi “weapons of mass destruction” was either a spurious or incomplete rationale for war. Each of these officials has denied that foreknowledge of the absence of unconventional weapons in Iraq would have changed the substance or timing of the administration’s decision to invade the

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<sup>38</sup> Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 265-266.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Wolfowitz, Department of Defense Transcript of Sam Tannenhaus interview with Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz, 10 May 2003, <<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030510>>.

<sup>40</sup> United States, White House, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” September 2002, 16, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf>>.



country. In other words, they have inadvertently conceded that there were compelling reasons for going to war in March 2003 other than the officially stated *casus belli*. The rhetorical approach of the Bush Administration before the war (exaggerating Iraq's "WMD" capabilities and conflating Iraq with al-Qaida) was carefully constructed and consistently followed.

### **IS IRAQ THE EXCEPTION OR THE RULE?**

Most of the intelligence dynamics described so far will not change. The intelligence process will continue to manifest a bias toward warning. Thus the most salient political criticism of the Intelligence Community will continue to be: "Why did you not warn us of an attack before it was too late?" rather than: "Why did you imply that an attack was coming that never materialized?" Homeland Security's color-coded public alert system, of little use to the common citizen, is a recent example of how eager political authorities are to protect themselves against charges of culpability in not warning of any future terrorist attack. History will judge that the Intelligence Community provides far more instances of false alarms than missed alarms. The larger US intelligence entities, like CIA, DIA, and NSA, will continue to prioritize the goal of warning against military surprise and will make every effort to avoid underestimation. The efforts of INR to emphasize predictions of the probable over warnings of the improbable, will often be drowned out.

So it is that some continued exaggeration of foreign threats by the US Intelligence Community is nearly inevitable. And the larger the intelligence gaps are, the greater will be the tendency to assume the worst. For those states labeled as "rogues" by our political leadership, sinister motives will be assumed and it will be judged prudent not to regard the lack of solid evidence as exculpatory. Such states may be just as likely to encourage US exaggerations of their capability as to disabuse us. As the post-World War II era repeatedly demonstrated in the cases of the Soviet Union and China, and as the Iraq case has recently demonstrated once again, the perceived need of foreign states to deter US attack or intimidation can tempt them into claiming capabilities they do not have.

One does not have to assume a capacity for malfeasance on the part of future presidents, however, to recognize an inherent problem with the use of intelligence.



Democratic societies do not go to war easily – even with the wolf at the door. In making the case for war, it is natural to simplify the evidence and remove qualifiers. The issues are complicated; many of the details are classified; and the qualifications attached by professional analysts are tedious. Yet gaining sufficient popular support is critical. So it is not surprising that American political leaders from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the modern era have engaged in striking discourse to call the nation to war—sometimes embellished the facts in the process.

If democratic governments have a tendency to exaggerate present facts, the temptation to exaggerate future dangers is even greater. The rationale for preemptive war extends only from the present to the immediate future; preventive war can be justified by engaging the most imaginative speculations about an eventual future. Moreover, since the future has infinite possibilities, it is difficult to persuasively refute the claim that something *could* happen.

#### **HOW INTELLIGENCE AND PREVENTIVE WAR DOCTRINE WILL INTERACT**

Pursuit of a preventive war doctrine will increase the need for highly accurate, definitive intelligence, even though the Intelligence Community will often fail to deliver it. The influence of those organizations that possess military or paramilitary capabilities—the Defense Department and the CIA—will be expanded; the influence of those which specialize in non-violent methods—the State Department, *et al.*—will be reduced. The gap between what intelligence is needed and what is provided will make matters worse, since pressure will increase on intelligence agencies to make actionable assessments, whether or not they have sufficient information. There will be a tendency to ignore or suppress efforts by intelligence professionals to hedge their estimates or accurately label the low confidence levels of their judgments. Bottom line judgments of the Intelligence Community will be conveyed to the public and tailored for policy advocacy. This will increase the chance that public manifestations of classified intelligence judgments bear low fidelity to the actual evidence. For those cases where the evidence is ambiguous or otherwise unsuitable for making a convincing public case, the national security leadership will consider more seriously



clandestine operations, which do not arouse public opposition and which do not require Congressional sanction.

In an atmosphere tolerant of preventive war, even more energy would be devoted by the Intelligence Community to detecting foreign military capabilities than uncovering political intentions, since the former are more subject to discovery by technical means and the latter are very difficult to discern with high confidence. There would be a greater incentive to focus on short-term intelligence rather than underlying dynamics and long-term trends. Preventive war implies a resort to immediate, unilateral, and violent solutions rather than multifaceted efforts through multilateral fora to achieve more gradual change in fundamental economic and political trends. The ongoing trade-off between defense intelligence most relevant to the “warfighter” and strategic intelligence most relevant to the political leadership would be further tipped in the direction of the former.

#### **THE NATURE OF THE DILEMMA**

The virtual impossibility of achieving near-certain confidence in the accuracy of intelligence confronts us with a paradox and a dilemma. The paradox is found in the logic of NSS 2002: the United States must be ready to wage war in order to prevent the more dangerous war, which is bound to come. “We cannot let our enemies strike first.”<sup>41</sup> The dilemma in such a doctrine is that the self-evident value of preventing damage from a possible future attack may not outweigh the certain negative consequences of declaring and implementing a preventive war doctrine. These consequences will include, at the very least, de-legitimization of the US military action in the eyes of many countries, and probably increasing the number of wars initiated by the US on the basis of erroneous information or unnecessarily provoked by the posture of US military forces.

Choosing to strike first in the face of a “gathering danger” means adopting the traditional logic of the aggressor—i.e., if eventual war is considered necessary or inevitable, it is better to attack than be attacked. In this way, the anticipated victim of aggression becomes the actual aggressor. If the United States proclaims and exercises a right of preventive war, the international community is likely to identify it as the aggressor, even if

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<sup>41</sup> US White House, “National Security Strategy,” 15.



the circumstances prompting US military action would otherwise generate sympathy and support. Even accurate intelligence on preparations for war by an enemy of America could fall short of the demonstrable proof necessary to maintain the high moral ground in the court of public opinion. The legal and moral responsibility for the brutal business of war will still be assigned to the party which launches it. And if the most powerful country in the world deems it unacceptable to wait until there is unimpeachable evidence of an attack before striking back, the constraints on much smaller and more vulnerable states will be considerably weakened.

The first negative consequence of preventive war doctrine is definitional and straightforward—being blamed for breach of the peace. A second negative consequence derives directly from the first. Countries that disagree with preventive war doctrine or fear its application may become less likely to cooperate with US intelligence services. A third negative consequence is ironically and integrally connected with the intelligence function. Preventive war doctrine will orient intelligence toward providing early and definitive judgments of malevolent intent. Because the NSS 2002 doctrine itself implies a lower tolerance for risk, the intelligence agencies will also accept less risk in their identification of danger. It is likely, therefore, that there will be more occasions when warning-focused intelligence finds threatening situations. Just as history provides spectacular examples of strategic surprise, it is also replete with instances of intelligence organizations exaggerating threats and assessing erroneously that neighboring states harbored aggressive intent when they were, in fact, only preparing to defend themselves from aggression. Thus the NSS 2002 doctrine will stimulate more occasions for putting troops on alert, forward-deploying ships and aircraft and interdicting suspicious movements of ships and aircraft from hostile states. The preparations consistent with such doctrine will then result in a more provocative posture, which will then be interpreted in turn by other parties as evidence of malevolent US intent, engendering political opposition and inhibiting the flow of intelligence. A vicious cycle will thus be created.

**PREVENTIVE WAR DOCTRINE FURTHER INCREASES COSTS OF ACTING ON EXAGGERATED THREATS**



Some Americans argued for preventive war against the Soviet Union during the 1950s when the United States enjoyed overwhelming superiority, just as preventive war against China was advocated by members of the Soviet military during the 1960s. However, the sobering realities of the nuclear age eventually prevailed over the hardliners in both countries. While America's long and painful involvement in Vietnam could be considered a kind of preventive war against the spread of Communist insurgency in Southeast Asia, the introduction of a preventive war doctrine is a relatively new phenomenon for the United States.

Until the Bush Administration incorporated preventive war into US military doctrine, the primary consequence of precipitous and exaggerated warnings from intelligence was unnecessary defense spending and missed opportunities for negotiated security arrangements. The cost was in the form of money and aggravated risk of war. We are now entering an era in which the existing emphasis on warning may lead not only to undertaking unnecessary and expensive defense measures, but to waging unnecessary and expensive wars against other countries. As a result, friends and allies may be alienated and the proliferation of unconventional weapons to hostile states may be exacerbated.

#### **WHAT WARS MIGHT WE HAVE MISSED?**

It is instructive to contemplate alternative histories that could have resulted if a muscular policy of preventive war had been practiced in years past. A review should be prefaced with a reminder about imperial Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. The decision to launch preventive war was a logical one from Tokyo's perspective. It followed two decades of hostile acts by the United States: the 1924 Exclusion Act; the US Navy's war planning to contest control of the western Pacific, the US oil-embargo imposed after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, and finally the 1941 freezing of Japanese assets in the United States. The Japanese Government had no trouble "connecting the dots" to convince itself about America's hostility and the inevitability of war. The Japanese military's tactical intelligence was also impressive, even considering the lack of information about the location of the Pearl Harbor-based US aircraft carriers on 7 December. The fatal flaw was in the strategic analysis



of American intentions and the underestimation of the effect of a surprise attack on America's will and determination.

Our world would have certainly been altered if American advocates of preventive war against the Soviet Union had been more persuasive. Provocations like the Berlin Blockade in 1948-49, the crushing of the 1956 Hungarian revolt by Soviet tanks, and the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 would have provided ample opportunities to rally the American people behind an attack.

During the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, active consideration was given to a preventive attack on the island. With the accumulation of personal interviews by participants and the opening of important archives, it has become increasingly obvious that the preventive war option against Cuba was actively considered. The provocation was clear and the "window of opportunity" was fleeting. The brevity of MRBM flight times and the days-and-hours estimates of the time before the missiles would become operational made a strong argument for a US attack under a preventive war rationale – even though strategic intelligence on Soviet intentions was almost completely lacking. Fortunately for the world, President Kennedy rejected preventive war and chose a quarantine instead.

#### **HOW NON-STATE ACTORS CHANGE THE EQUATION**

The Bush Administration contends that, in a post-9/11 world, the potential interaction between "rogue states" developing unconventional weapons and non-state actors with global reach has fundamentally altered the strategy and tactics required to protect the United States. However, contrary to the insinuations of the President and his Vice President, the comprehensive research of the bipartisan 9/11 Commission found no evidence of a collaborative operational relationship between Iraq and al-Qaida.<sup>42</sup> To date the Intelligence Community has offered little empirical backing for the plausibility of asserting a close connection developing between organizations like al-Qaida and the governments of states possessing or seeking to possess nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. Such states are usually loath to transfer sensitive technologies to non-state actors outside their direct control.

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<sup>42</sup> United States, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2004).



Not only might such transfers strengthen domestic opponents of the regime, but they could also lead to US retaliation for any use against US territory or US forces.

It is reasonable to assume that there are limits to the risk states are willing to run. Even North Korea's desperation to raise revenue through the sale of missiles and missile technology did not induce Pyongyang to respond favorably to Iraqi expressions of interest in purchasing missiles. A greater concern regarding the supply of sensitive technologies to terrorists arises from the operations of non-state entities like the enterprises of A. Q. Kahn. The US-led attack on Afghanistan to remove the Taliban and pursue al-Qaida provided ample evidence that sponsorship of an organization responsible for attacking the United States was hazardous to the survival of any regime sponsoring such a group. In the event that the government of a country possessing unconventional weapons fell to radical fundamentalists – a fundamentalist Pakistan is one of the worst such eventualities—that country would still have to consider the reaction of the United States to any aid offered to terrorist groups. Intelligence thus plays an increasingly important role in maintaining the credibility of the US deterrent, for it is important to convince foreign governments that the US would detect significant covert assistance flowing to terrorist groups. While there is no assurance US intelligence would be able to prove such a connection, successful investigation of past terrorist incidents like the sabotage by Libyan agents of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, deprive conspirator states of confidence that they could keep such involvement hidden.

In spite of increasingly imaginative terrorist attack scenarios under discussion involving chemical, biological, or radiological weapons, the threat posed by nuclear weapons use dwarfs all others. Fortunately, identifying the sources of existing nuclear weapons or nuclear weapons-related technology is not a new challenge for the Intelligence Community. And in many respects, it is less demanding than penetrating the terrorist cells, which might be interested in obtaining nuclear technology or material. Because nuclear weapons require an extensive national infrastructure to develop and produce, and because technical means of detection are growing ever more sophisticated, intelligence services have multiple opportunities for tracking progress among proliferators. Multilateral organizations like the International Atomic Energy Agency have won new arrangements to safeguard the use of



nuclear energy and prevent nuclear proliferation. The increase in the ability of the IAEA to monitor nuclear activities increased dramatically between the first and second Iraq wars. Negotiated agreements like the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the proposed Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty hold the potential for further increases in our ability to contain the threat of nuclear terrorism. Following the sources of fissile material, nuclear weapons-related technology and the activities of key experts will continue to be a high-priority task for intelligence agencies. US intelligence can make an enormous contribution as well to effective enforcement of international nonproliferation regimes.

While it may be hotly contested which lessons for national doctrine should be drawn from contemporary circumstances, there is little doubt about the implications for intelligence of the quantum leaps in weapons lethality, speed of employment, and capabilities of non-state terrorist groups. More than ever, intelligence must be fast and reliable if it is to be actionable.

These increasing demands on intelligence providers have exacerbated the long-standing challenge of trying to understand the intentions and capabilities of potential enemies—whether foreign governments or non-state entities. Requiring the intelligence community to provide the kind of high confidence and rapid assessments needed to launch preemptive/preventive war goes a large step beyond the previous challenges of warning, prediction, and evaluation – in my view, from difficult to virtually impossible.

### **WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US?**

With the end of the Cold War, the consequences of an enemy attack are no longer a matter of national survival. The need to act with haste militarily in advance of an attack is much less critical than before. While a well-honed warning capability retains value for the nation, it no longer assumes an existential role in national defense. A surprise biological attack by terrorists or chemical weapons use against US troops is more likely to result in a localized catastrophe or temporary setback to American forces in the field than to the destruction of the nation or the end of life on earth as we know it. In the long run, the United States is better off using its resources cooperatively to detect and prevent an attack in the first place, or to mitigate the lethality of any attack that does occur, than lashing out unilaterally at



all enemies real and imagined. The breathing space provided by the end of the Cold War calls for exploiting the opportunity to retool intelligence and reinvigorate cooperation with the international community, which overwhelmingly opposes the activities of international terrorists.

#### **REFORMING OUR INTELLIGENCE STRUCTURE**

Although I have argued that the quality of intelligence required for preventive war cannot be reliably attained, this realization should not preclude efforts to improve the intelligence on which the nation continues to rely. Indeed, the better the intelligence, the more likely we will be able to avoid attack and to minimize damage from any attacks that do occur. More successful intelligence along with more intelligent foreign policy would make the radical and counterproductive doctrine of preventive war even less attractive.

A number of serious recommendations for reforming our post-World War II intelligence structure have been made in recent years by high-level commissions and study groups. The unusual circumstances leading to the 9/11 Commission Report and the unanimous, bipartisan nature of the report's recommendations led Congress to make significant statutory changes in December 2004. It would be wise also to incorporate lessons from misassessing Iraq—the other significant US intelligence failure of the new century—in any reform effort. The Senate Select Intelligence Committee Report has already provided an unusually comprehensive, insiders' perspective on the performance of the Intelligence Community in assessing Iraqi unconventional weapons programs and alleged Iraq-al-Qaida connections. The Robb-Silberman Commission (on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction) has been charged with reporting on the broader issue of proliferation intelligence overall. These results should be equally relevant to reaching decisions on reform of the US Intelligence Community.

#### **FORMULAS FOR CHANGE**

While recommendations here for specific changes in intelligence structure risk being overtaken by swiftly moving events, several broad principles of reform to enhance the quality of intelligence assessment can be safely asserted:



- 1) *The positions of the Central Intelligence Agency Chief and Director of Central Intelligence must be separated.* This will be accomplished under the provisions of the 2004 intelligence Reform Bill. Ever since the inception of the CIA, the two jobs have been performed by the same individual. In practice, the job of coordinating all 15 intelligence agencies and representing their collective judgment to the President has been subordinated to the institutional or personal interests of the head of the CIA. By the time of the Iraq War, not only was the Presidential Daily Brief being drafted by the CIA with no coordination by other intelligence agencies; the final product was not being shown to the heads of those other agencies. When the PDB carried the headline, “Bin Ladin Determined To Strike in US,” on August 6, 2001, that brief was not shared with the FBI’s Director of Intelligence, the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, or the State Department’s Assistant Secretary for Intelligence and Research. When the CIA informed the White House that Iraqi purchases of high-strength aluminum tubes were going into Baghdad’s nuclear weapons program, there was no one around from the two dissenting agencies (the Department of Energy and the State Department’s intelligence bureau) to make the case for the contrary explanation which ultimately proved correct. Moreover, DCI (and CIA Chief) Tenet, along with the National Intelligence Council reporting to Tenet, minimized this interpretation in statements to the public and the Congress.
- 2) *The organization responsible for producing Intelligence Community assessments, currently the National Intelligence Council, should be truly independent.* It should be headed by someone who is not responsible for running individual intelligence agencies or defending any particular policies, but is instead free of pressure from political, operational, and resource concerns. This goal would suggest that the head of the Intelligence Community’s assessment function should be appointed by the President and subject to Congressional confirmation, but not be part of the White House. If the new National Intelligence Director is located in the White House and identified as the president’s principal advisor on intelligence, it is even more important to retain a separate, apolitical source for assessments.



- 3) *The sources of human intelligence must be more rigorously evaluated.* More information on the sources should be made available to those with the proper clearances. If trustworthy reliability labeling cannot be achieved under the existing structure, as appeared to be the case with so much of the human intelligence relating to Iraqi biological and chemical weapons, then an evaluative mechanism needs to be established outside of the CIA's Directorate of Operations.
- 4) *The analytical integrity of individual Intelligence Community agencies must be maintained.* Each of the 15 separate agencies and entities of the US Intelligence Community have a unique institutional mission and perspective. Some are oriented around the means of collecting information – e.g., NSA specializes in signals intelligence. Others perform all-source analysis, but are oriented around the specialized needs of a particular customer – e.g., DIA serves the Defense Department. Interagency discussions of complicated issues serve as a form of peer review when hypotheses are suggested to explain evidence. While consensus is sought when the Intelligence Community produces an estimate, conclusions dissenting from the majority view are permitted, if not always encouraged. The failure to take published dissents seriously on Iraqi “WMD” led to serious consequences. The most conspicuous examples of such dissents were DOE/INR views on the non-nuclear use of the aluminum tubes, and Air Force Intelligence on the non-weapons delivery mission of UAVs. In these cases, the appropriate level of attention was never extended to the agencies, which commanded the greatest technical expertise on the matter under investigation. That said, a more centralized and tightly controlled intelligence directorate might never have allowed the dissenting views to surface in the first place.
- 5) *Congressional oversight needs to be strengthened.* In recent years, there appears to have been little Congressional scrutiny of how the Intelligence Community “sanitizes” classified information for public consumption or how it reaches its conclusions on complicated issues. In the case of Iraq, this situation allowed the CIA's leadership to present information to the public (and to Members of



Congress not on the intelligence committees) in a manner that was not faithful to the detailed analyses in highly classified documents. In many cases, this seems to have been done not to protect sensitive sources and methods, but to make a more persuasive political case for the policies being pursued. The magnitude of the Intelligence Community's failure and the misuse by senior administration officials of the Intelligence Community's findings also bespeaks a failure in Congressional oversight. Yet only the Senate has so far taken steps to reform its procedures and structure in parallel with the statutory measures of the Intelligence Reform Bill.

#### **CONCLUSION: RENOUNCING PREVENTIVE WAR, A HOUSE BUILT ON SAND**

In 2002, President George W. Bush introduced preventive war doctrine into the National Security Strategy of the United States for the first time. In order to be morally justifiable, preventive war must be based on the firm knowledge of a hostile opponent's capabilities and intentions. Yet the Bush Administration has twice demonstrated convincingly within a short period of time that the elaborate intelligence services of the United States could not be relied upon to deliver definitive and timely knowledge of opponents' capabilities – first al-Qaida and then Iraq. Discerning the exact intentions of Saddam Hussein proved even more elusive than smoking out his unconventional weapons capabilities.

Preventive war is not a feasible formula for addressing the urgent security challenges facing the nation, because it would unleash problems even worse than those it was intended to remedy. Preventive war doctrine should, therefore, be explicitly rejected. Doing so would not preclude all military action against terrorists, although police action would be the principal tool. Military actions would carry the presumption that they had been authorized either by the governments of the territories on which they occurred or by the United Nations.

While improving US intelligence collection and analysis is desirable and possible, the intelligence services cannot be expected to deliver the quality of information needed to merit preventive war. To initiate war without such certain knowledge of intentions and capabilities is a prescription for ignominy – and an invitation to join the multitudinous ranks of



aggressors throughout history. If even Bismarck, as Chancellor of the German Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, could foreswear preventive war because of the inherent limits of strategic intelligence, it is not asking too much for the president of the world's most powerful democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to do the same.



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## About the Ridgway Center

The Ridgway Center for International Security Studies at the University of Pittsburgh is dedicated to producing original and impartial analysis that informs policymakers who must confront diverse challenges to state and human security. Center programs address a range of security concerns—from the spread of terrorism and technologies of mass destruction to genocide, failed states, and the abuse of human rights in repressive regimes. This working paper is one of several outcomes of the Ridgway Working Group on Preemptive and Preventive Military Intervention, chaired by Gordon R. Mitchell.