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Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Wed, 09/19/2012 - 11:53

Paper No. 698

26/05/2003

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James Risen of the "New York Times" reported on May 21, 2003, that a review has begun to determine whether the US intelligence community erred in its pre-war assessments of Saddam Hussein's government and Iraq's weapons programmes. According to his report, George J. Tenet, Director, CIA, in his capacity as the Director, Central Intelligence (DCI) has ordered the review. It would be based on an examination by a team of retired intelligence officers of all the reports sent by the CIA and other agencies to the various departments of the Government before the war on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and its alleged links with Al Qaeda in order to see how many of those reports proved to be correct and, if they did not, why.

2. Tenet wears two hats. As the Director, CIA, he supervises the day-to-day functioning of the agency and as Director, Central Intelligence (DCI), he acts as the intelligence adviser to the President and as the co-ordinator of the functioning of all the agencies of the US intelligence community, civilian as well as military.

3. Such reviews, called retrospective analysis in the intelligence jargon, are normal in all intelligence agencies after any war or conflict or after any serious breach of national security. They help the agencies not only to identify gaps in intelligence coverage, but also to assess the performance of individual sources and their handling officers and the analysts of the agencies. Often, sources, which are thought of highly, prove to have been giving incorrect information and sources, which were not taken seriously, prove to have been giving valuable intelligence, which was not acted upon. Similarly, how good is an analyst could be determined only by re-visiting his past reports in the light of what actually happened subsequently on the ground. Reputations of many sources and analysts are often damaged by such re-visits to their past reports.

4. The fact that Tenet has ordered such a review should not, therefore, be a matter of great surprise, but what has imparted unusual significance to the review is the embarrassing (to the US) fact that much of the so-called intelligence regarding Iraq's WMD capability and its links with Al Qaeda, which Gen. Colin Powell, the US Secretary of State, placed before the UN Security Council has proved to have been wrong.

5. How did this happen? Did the sources, many of them anti-Saddam political exiles from Iraq leading luxurious lives in the West at US expense, plant spurious reports of an alarming nature on the CIA and the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA)? Such intelligence peddlers often think---not incorrectly--- that the more alarming their reports, the greater their importance in the eyes of their controlling agency.

6. Did the CIA analysts, under constant pressure from their political masters to produce more and more tar with which the latter could blacken the face of Saddam Hussein, uncritically accept, against their better judgement, all the trash coming from their sources?

7. Before the war, not only the CIA and the DIA, but also the MI-6, the British external intelligence agency, disseminated not only to the people of Iraq and other countries, but even to their own people disinformation meant to over-demonise Saddam. The purpose was to overcome the opposition to the war. Since the agencies strictly follow the principle of restrictive security under which they do not admit to each other their authorship of such disinformation, did each agency believe the disinformation disseminated by others as credible information and allow it to influence its analysis?

8. The media has highlighted the failure of the US-UK invaders to find any WMD or Saddam-bin Laden links so far, but has not drawn attention to another intriguing aspect. The US made two so-called decapitation attacks to kill Saddam and his close associates---on the opening day of the war and again on the penultimate day. We were told that the CIA had received "time-sensitive information" about their presence at two places, which were attacked.

9. One would have expected that immediately after occupying Baghdad, the Americans would have rushed to those spots and searched the rubble in order to look for the bodies of Saddam and others. Did they do so? If they did, whose bodies they found there? There is total silence on this, giving rise to the suspicion that the information from the so-called mole which led to the decapitation attacks was wrong. Who was that mole? Did he deliberately take the CIA for a ride? If so, why?

10. There is another aspect, which is equally murky. What was the respective role of the CIA and the DIA in intelligence collection and covert action not only in Iraq, but also in Afghanistan? The CIA has the exclusive responsibility for the recruitment and running of human sources and for covert actions. However, the DIA is also permitted to do this in areas of conflict or war, where US troops are sent into action. Thus, both the CIA and the DIA can run source operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

11. There are reasons to believe that while the CIA was more professional in its intelligence coverage of Iraq before and during the war and resisted pressure from Donald Rumsfeld, the Defence Secretary, to produce evidence which would justify the invasion and occupation of Iraq, the DIA had no qualms about obliging Rumsfeld. Many anti-Saddam exiles such as Ahmed Chalabi, who were tried and discarded by the CIA on grounds of unreliability, were taken on its pay roll by the DIA, allegedly on the orders of Rumsfeld.

12. During his press briefings relating to Afghanistan as well as Iraq since October 7, 2001, Rumsfeld often could not conceal his disappointment over what he apparently perceived as the unsatisfactory performance of the CIA. Once he remarked that he got so many conflicting reports about the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden that he had stopped taking them seriously.

13. Since the middle of last year, there have been reports in the US media that he has been urging that the DIA should be given the same powers as the CIA for the recruitment and running of human agents anywhere in the world outside the USA, in peace time as well as during conflicts and wars.

14. That Rumsfeld cannot escape some responsibility for the poor performance of the agencies in Iraq is also hinted at in the N.Y. Times report. Risen says: "One intelligence official said Mr. Rumsfeld had become irritated by disagreements within the intelligence community over the possible links between Iraq and the Qaeda network. Before the war, some Pentagon officials expressed frustration over what they perceived to be excessive caution on the part of CIA analysts who found scant Qaeda-Iraqi connections, according to several intelligence officials."

15. Another complaint, which has surfaced in this connection, relates to the politicisation of the intelligence collection and analysis process under the present Bush Administration. Such complaints were heard frequently during the presidency of Ronald Reagan when William Casey was the Director of the CIA and DCI. In testimonies before the Congressional intelligence oversight committees, serving and retired officers of the CIA accused Robert Gates, then the head of the Analysis Division of the CIA who subsequently became the Director of the CIA, of pressurising them to produce the kind of reports that Casey and Reagan wanted, even if they went contrary to established facts.

16. Such allegations disappeared during the tenure of the father of the present President and the Clinton Administration. They have re-surfaced again since Bush took over in January, 2001. In a reference to this, Risen says: "The review comes at a time of increasing tension between the Pentagon and CIA over the handling of intelligence. Intelligence officials said that several CIA analysts had quietly complained that senior Defense Department officials and other Bush administration officials sought to press them to produce reports that supported the administration's positions on Iraq. In addition, several current and former CIA officers who have been upset about what they believe has been the politicization of intelligence concerning Iraq were the first to disclose the existence of the new CIA review."

17. The US media has not escaped this controversy either. Before the war, many retired CIA officers, who have constituted themselves into a group called the Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), accused the American print and electronic media of declining to provide them with space or time to voice their concerns over the way the Bush Administration was manipulating public opinion by distorting the reports of the CIA on Iraq. They said in a statement: "Some of us have had the extraordinary experience of being erased at the last minute from the op-ed page of the Wall Street Journal and invited-then-disinvited to/from TV programs like Jim Lehrer and Fox News. Ordinarily, we would not mind being marginalized; we are used to it. But our country seems to be just days away from a fateful decision to go to war. And many of our former colleagues and successors are facing a dilemma all too familiar to intelligence veterans--the difficult choices that must be faced when the demands of good conscience butt up against deeply ingrained attitudes concerning secrecy, misguided notions of what is true patriotism, and understandable reluctance to put careers--and mortgages--on the line. In the face of impending catastrophe we feel a responsibility to speak out--if only to remind the present generation of intelligence officers that they do have choices and that in the longer run their consciences will rest easier if they face squarely into those choices."

18. Finding themselves informally barred from the US media, two of them---Ray McGovern and David MacMichael--- appeared on the Panorama programme of Channel One of German TV on March 6, 2003, to discuss the use/abuse of intelligence to support the US administration's case for attacking Iraq. They narrated instances of how the Bush Administration allegedly distorted reports sent by the CIA that there was no evidence of Iraqi involvement in the 9/11 terrorist strikes and that the evidence regarding its links with Al Qaeda was weak in order to project to the public that the evidence against Iraq was strong. According to them, there was similar distortion of the CIA's reports relating to WMD.

19. It is doubtful whether the truth regarding the use or misuse of the intelligence agencies by the Bush Administration for building up a case for attacking and occupying Iraq would ever come out since the US media itself appears to be disinterested in it in the name of patriotism. Unless the truth is brought out and corrective action taken, not many outside the US may, in future, take seriously even correct US

intelligence reports relating to nuclear and missile proliferation by North Korea and Iran and the activities of Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda and International Islamic Front.

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