

2: CIA to Review Iraq Intelligence; Questions of Accuracy, Bias Spur Studies

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The House intelligence committee, expressing concern about the failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, asked Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet yesterday "to reevaluate U.S. intelligence" used by the Bush administration before the war to describe Iraq's proscribed weapons programs and its links to terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda

The administration based its argument for going to war against Iraq on the dangers posed by Iraq's chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs and its alleged ties to al Qaeda.

The CIA, at the suggestion of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, has an unusual study underway that will compare intelligence given to President Bush and other policymakers before the war to information now being gathered in Iraq from the ousted Iraqi government's files and interrogations of former Iraqi government personnel, according to senior intelligence officials.

The CIA review, coupled with the letter sent to Tenet by the House intelligence panel, follows criticism that the Defense Department, particularly a new Pentagon intelligence office, and other parts of the Bush administration manipulated intelligence to make the case for war in Iraq. Some members of Congress and intelligence officials are questioning the accuracy of the intelligence describing Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction and connections to al Qaeda.

Four retired senior CIA analysts conducting the study, which was first reported in yesterday's New York Times, have completed a 100-page draft review of analyses put out by the CIA before the war as well as estimates produced by the National Intelligence Council (NIC), a group made up of representatives of the 12 U.S. intelligence agencies. The senior analysts are now reviewing reports produced by the Defense Intelligence Agency.

There is some question of how long it will take to complete the internal study since the Pentagon is in the process of sending out a 2,000-man Iraq Survey Group whose job is to gather intelligence not only on weapons of mass destruction, but also on al Qaeda connections and other areas of interest. "It could be months before we can draw conclusions," said an intelligence official involved in the process.

One official who has read a draft of the NIC and CIA prewar studies said, "There is no question there was a lot of pressure on analysts to support preconceived judgments." But, he added, "the analysts' record is not bad when you consider you have strong policymakers pushing analysts for information that supports their specific views."

Neither the agency's study nor the committee's request addresses how accurately top policymakers, in particular Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, portrayed the classified intelligence and advice they received before making their public statements.

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"Since some questions have been raised and it is taking a long time to find out the WMD (weapons of mass destruction), we think this is prudent to ask for," said Rep Jane Harman (Calif.), the panel's ranking Democrat. "This could conceivably be the greatest intelligence hoax of all time I doubt it, but we have to ask "

The letter, signed by Harman and Rep. Porter J. Goss (R-Fla.), the committee chairman, states that their goal is "to ensure that the intelligence analysis relayed to our policymakers from the intelligence community was accurate, unbiased, and timely -- in light of new information resulting from recent events in Iraq." Both lawmakers are ardent supporters of the CIA.

The committee wants to know "how the intelligence picture regarding Iraqi WMD was developed" and asks the CIA to answer questions on issues such as the amount and quality of the information provided to administration officials and whether "dissenting views" were "properly weighed " The committee, which oversees the intelligence budget and operations, asked for a report from Tenet by July 1.

Sen. John D. Rockefeller IV (W.Va.), ranking Democrat on the Senate intelligence committee, called the CIA's estimates about possible weapons of mass destruction "wholly unimpressive " Rockefeller is asking the inspector general's offices of the CIA and the Pentagon to investigate the fact that documents the CIA suspected to be forged were used by administration officials to claim that Iraq had tried to purchase uranium oxide from Niger for use in weapons production .

In October, Rumsfeld first suggested that Tenet conduct an inquiry because of the disagreements between the Pentagon, the CIA and the State Department over intelligence on Iraq.

"I'm sure a lot of people in the Defense Department see this as a scorecard, but Secretary Rumsfeld believed it was a way to learn about the (intelligence) process, including the policymaker's role in it," said one official aware of the details of the study. "He (Rumsfeld) wanted to compare what we find there (in Iraq) and see what we got right and wrong," another official said

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