

Growing Risk of U.S.-Iran Hostilities Based on False Pretexts, Intel Vets Warn

As President Donald Trump prepares to host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next week, a group of U.S. intelligence veterans offers corrections to a number of false accusations that have been levelled against Iran.

February 26, 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: War With Iran

INTRODUCTION

In our December 21st Memorandum to you, we cautioned that the claim that Iran is currently the world's top sponsor of terrorism is unsupported by hard evidence. Meanwhile, other false accusations against Iran have intensified. Thus, we feel obliged to alert you to the virtually inevitable consequences of war with Iran, just as we warned President George W. Bush six weeks before the U.S. attack on Iraq 15 years ago.

In our first Memorandum in this genre we told then-President Bush that we saw "no compelling reason" to attack Iraq, and warned "the unintended consequences are likely to be catastrophic." The consequences will be far worse, should the U.S. become drawn into war with Iran. We fear that you are not getting the straight story on this from your intelligence and national security officials.

After choosing "War With Iran" for the subject-line of this Memo, we were reminded that we had used it before, namely, for a Memorandum to President Obama on August 3, 2010 in similar circumstances. You may wish to ask your staff to give you that one to read and ponder. It included a startling quote from then-Chairman of President Bush Jr.'s Intelligence Advisory Board (and former national security adviser to Bush Sr.) Gen. Brent Scowcroft, who told the *Financial Times* on October 14, 2004 that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had George W. Bush "mesmerized;" that "Sharon just has him wrapped around his little finger." We wanted to remind you of that history, as you prepare to host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu next week.

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Rhetoric vs. Reality

We believe that the recent reporting regarding possible conflict with nuclear-armed North Korea has somewhat obscured consideration of the significantly higher probability that Israel or even Saudi Arabia will take steps that will lead to a war with Iran that will inevitably draw the United States in. Israel is particularly inclined to move aggressively, with potentially serious consequences for the U.S., in the wake of the recent incident involving an alleged Iranian drone and the shooting down of an Israeli aircraft.

There is also considerable anti-Iran rhetoric in U.S. media, which might well facilitate a transition from a cold war-type situation to a hot war involving U.S. forces. We have for some time been observing with some concern the growing hostility towards Iran coming out of Washington and from the governments of Israel and Saudi Arabia. National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster is warning that the “time to act is now” to thwart Iran’s aggressive regional ambitions while U.S. United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley sees a “wake-up” call in the recent shooting incident involving Syria and Israel. Particular concern has been expressed by the White House that Iran is exploiting Shi’a minorities in neighboring Sunni dominated states to create unrest and is also expanding its role in neighboring Iraq and Syria.

While we share concerns over the Iranian government’s intentions vis-à-vis its neighbors, we do not believe that the developments in the region, many of which came about through American missteps, have a major impact on vital U.S. national interests. Nor is Iran, which often sees itself as acting defensively against surrounding Sunni states, anything like an existential threat to the United States that would mandate the sustained military action that would inevitably result if Iran is attacked.

Iran’s alleged desire to stitch together a sphere of influence consisting of an arc of allied nations and proxy forces running from its western borders to the Mediterranean Sea has been frequently cited as justification for a more assertive policy against Tehran, but we believe this concern to be greatly exaggerated. Iran, with a population of more than 80 million, is, to be sure, a major regional power but militarily, economically and politically it is highly vulnerable.

Limited Military Capability

Tehran’s Revolutionary Guard is well armed and trained, but much of its “boots on the ground” army consists of militiamen of variable quality. Its Air Force is a “shadow” of what existed under the Shah and is significantly outgunned by its rivals in the Persian Gulf, not to mention Israel. Its navy is only “green water” capable in that it consists largely of smaller vessels responsible for coastal defense supplemented by the swarming of Revolutionary Guard small

speedboats.

When Napoleon had conquered much of continental Europe and was contemplating invading Britain it was widely believed that England was helpless before him. British Admiral Earl St Vincent was unperturbed: "I do not say the French can't come, I only say they can't come by sea." We likewise believe that Iran's apparent threat is in reality decisively limited by its inability to project power across the water or through the air against neighboring states that have marked superiority in both respects.

The concern over a possibly developing "Shi'ite land bridge," also referred to as an "arc" or "crescent," is likewise overstated. It ignores the reality that Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon all have strong national identities and religiously mixed populations. They are influenced – some of them strongly – by Iran but they are not puppet states. And there is also an ethnic division that the neighboring states' populations are very conscious of– they are Arabs and Iran is Persian, which is also true of the Shi'a populations in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates.

Majority Shi'a Iraq, for example, is now very friendly to Iran but it has to deal with considerable Kurdish and Sunni minorities in its governance and in the direction of its foreign policy. It will not do Iran's bidding on a number of key issues, including Baghdad's relationship with Washington, and would be unwilling to become a proxy in Tehran's conflicts with Israel and Saudi Arabia. Iraqi Vice President Osama al-Nujaifi, the highest-ranking Sunni in the Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi government, has, for example, recently called for the demobilization of the Shi'ite Popular Mobilization Forces or militias that have been fighting ISIS because they "have their own political aspirations, their own [political] agendas. ... They are very dangerous to the future of Iraq."

Nuclear Weapons Thwarted

A major concern that has undergirded much of the perception of an Iranian threat is the possibility that Tehran will develop a nuclear weapon somewhere down the road. We believe that the current Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, even if imperfect, provides the best response to that Iranian proliferation problem. The U.N. inspections regime is strict and, if the agreement stands, there is every reason to believe that Iran will be unable to take the necessary precursor steps leading to a nuclear weapons program. Iran will be further limited in its options after the agreement expires in nine years. Experts believe that, at that point, Iran is not likely to choose to accumulate the necessary highly enriched uranium stocks to proceed.

The recent incident involving the shoot-down of a drone alleged to be Iranian,

followed by the downing of an Israeli fighter by a Syrian air defense missile, resulted in a sharp response from Tel Aviv, though reportedly mitigated by a warning from Russian President Vladimir Putin that anything more provocative might inadvertently involve Russia in the conflict. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is said to have moderated his response but his government is clearly contemplating a more robust intervention to counter what he describes as a developing Iranian presence in Syria.

In addition, Netanyahu may be indicted on corruption charges, and it is conceivable that he might welcome a "small war" to deflect attention from mounting political problems at home.

Getting Snookered Into War

We believe that the mounting Iran hysteria evident in the U.S. media and reflected in Beltway groupthink has largely been generated by Saudi Arabia and Israel, who nurture their own aspirations for regional political and military supremacy. There are no actual American vital interests at stake and it is past time to pause and take a step backwards to consider what those interests actually are in a region that has seen nothing but disaster since 2003. Countering an assumed Iranian threat that is minimal and triggering a war would exacerbate instability, likely leading to a breakdown in the current political alignment of the entire Middle East. It would be costly for the United States.

Iran is not militarily formidable, but its ability to fight on the defensive against U.S. naval and air forces is considerable and can cause high casualties. There appears to be a perception in the Defense Department that Iran could be defeated in a matter of days, but we would warn that such predictions tend to be based on overly optimistic projections, witness the outcomes in Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, Tehran would be able again to unleash terrorist resources throughout the region, endangering U.S. military and diplomats based there as well as American travelers and businesses. The terrorist threat might easily extend beyond the Middle East into Europe and also the United States, while the dollar costs of a major new conflict and its aftermath could break the bank, literally.

Another major consideration before ratcheting up hostilities should be that a war with Iran might not be containable. As the warning from President Vladimir Putin to Netanyahu made clear, other major powers have interests in what goes on in the Persian Gulf, and there is a real danger that a regional war could have global consequences.

In sum, we see a growing risk that the U.S. will become drawn into hostilities on pretexts fabricated by Israel and Saudi Arabia for their actual common

objective (“regime change” in Iran). A confluence of factors and misconceptions about what is at stake and how such a conflict is likely to develop, coming from both inside and outside the Administration, has, unfortunately, made such an outcome increasingly likely.

We have seen this picture before, just 15 years ago in Iraq, which should serve as a warning. The prevailing perception of threat that the Mullahs of Iran allegedly pose directly against the security of the U.S. is largely contrived. Even if all the allegations were true, they would not justify an Iraq-style “preventive war” violating national as well as international law. An ill-considered U.S. intervention in Iran is surely not worth the horrific humanitarian, military, economic, and political cost to be paid if Washington allows itself to become part of an armed attack.

FOR THE STEERING GROUP, VETERAN INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS FOR SANITY

William Binney, former NSA Technical Director for World Geopolitical & Military Analysis; Co-founder of NSA’s Signals Intelligence Automation Research Center (ret.)

Richard Black, Virginia State Senator; former Marine officer in Vietnam, later Army Judge Advocate General officer, retiring as Colonel after 31 years

Kathleen Christison, CIA, Senior Analyst on Middle East (ret.)

Graham E. Fuller, Vice-Chair, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Matthew Hoh, former Capt., USMC Iraq; Foreign Service Officer, Afghanistan (associate VIPS)

Larry C. Johnson, former CIA and State Department Counter Terrorism officer

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF; ex-Master SERE Instructor for Strategic Reconnaissance Operations (NSA/DIA) and Special Mission Units (JSOC) (ret.)

John Brady Kiesling, Foreign Service Officer; resigned Feb. 27, 2003 as Political Counselor, U.S. Embassy, Athens, in protest against the U.S. attack on Iraq (ret.)

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Edward Loomis, Jr., former NSA Technical Director for the Office of Signals Processing (ret.)

David MacMichael, National Intelligence Council, National Intelligence Estimates Officer (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst; CIA Presidential briefer (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Near East (ret.)

Todd E. Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (ret.)

Greg Thielmann, former Director of the Strategic, Proliferation, and Military Affairs Office, State Department Bureau of Intelligence & Research (INR), and former senior staffer on Senate Intelligence Committee (ret.)

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA (ret.)

Lawrence Wilkerson, Colonel (USA, ret.), former Chief of Staff for Secretary of State; Distinguished Visiting Professor, College of William and Mary (associate VIPS)

Sarah G. Wilton, CDR, USNR, (ret.); Defense Intelligence Agency (ret.)

Robert Wing, former Foreign Service Officer (associate VIPS)

Ann Wright, Colonel, US Army (ret.); also Foreign Service Officer who, like Political Counselor John Brady Kiesling, resigned in opposition to the war on Iraq

Obama Urged to Fire DNI Clapper

Last March before Edward Snowden revealed the NSA's sweeping collection of phone and other data Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said no such operation existed. Now, a group of ex-national security officials urge President Obama to fire Clapper.

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Fire James Clapper

We wish to endorse the call by Rep. James Sensenbrenner Jr., Chair of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security, Committee on the Judiciary, that Director of National Intelligence James Clapper should be removed and prosecuted for lying to Congress. "Lying to Congress is a federal offense, and Clapper ought to be fired and prosecuted for it," the Wisconsin Republican said in an interview with The Hill. "The only way laws are effective is if they're enforced."

Sensenbrenner added, "If it's a criminal offense, and I believe Mr. Clapper has committed a criminal offense, then the Justice Department ought to do its job."

This brief Memorandum is to inform you that we agree that no intelligence director should be able to deceive Congress and suffer no consequences. No democracy that condones such deceit at the hands of powerful, secretive intelligence directors can long endure.

It seems clear that you can expect no help from Sen. Dianne Feinstein, chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, to which Clapper has apologized for giving "clearly erroneous" testimony, and who, at the height of the controversy over his credibility, defended him as a "direct and honest" person.

You must be well aware that few amendments to the U.S. Constitution are as clear as the fourth:

"The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."

Even the cleverest lawyers cannot square with the Fourth Amendment many of the NSA activities that Clapper and Feinstein have defended, winked at, or lied about.

Only you can get rid of James Clapper. We suspect that a certain awkwardness – and perhaps also a misguided sense of loyalty to a colleague – militate against your senior staff giving you an unvarnished critique of how badly you have been served by Clapper. And so we decided to give you a candid reminder from us former intelligence and national security officials with a total of hundreds of years of experience, much of it at senior levels, in the hope you will find it helpful.

Statements by DNI Clapper re Eavesdropping on Americans

March 12, 2013

Sen. Ron Wyden: "Does the NSA collect any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans?"

Clapper: "No, Sir."

Wyden: "It does not?"

Clapper: "Not wittingly. There are cases where they could inadvertently, perhaps, collect but not, not wittingly."

(7-minute segment of Clapper testimony; link below)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwiUVUJmGjs>

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June 6, 2013

In a telephone interview with Michael Hirsh of the National Journal:

Clapper: "What I said [to the Senate Intelligence Committee on March 12] was, the NSA does not voyeuristically pore through U.S. citizens' e-mails. I stand by that."

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June 8, 2013

Excerpt of interview with NBC's Andrea Mitchell:

Mitchell: "Senator Wyden made quite a lot out of your exchange with him last March during the hearings. Can you explain what you meant when you said that there was not data collection on millions of Americans?"

Clapper: "... in retrospect, I was asked 'When are you going to start- stop beating your wife' kind of question, which is meaning not - answerable necessarily by a simple yes or no. So I responded in what I thought was the most truthful, or least untruthful manner by saying No. ...

"And this has to do with of course somewhat of a semantic, perhaps some would say too too cute by half. But it is - there are honest differences on the semantics of what when someone says 'collection' to me, that has a specific meaning, which may have a different meaning to him."

(See link below to full NBC transcript)

<http://www.nbcuni.com/corporate/newsroom/nbc-news-exclusive-transcript-of-andrea-mitchells-interview-with-director-of-national-intelligence-james-clapper/>

(Full video 27 min.) <http://www.nbcnews.com/video/nightly-news/52158136> (27 min.)

(Most relevant segment) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZbZt1zLQ11E>

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June 9, 2013

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, chair of Senate Intelligence Committee on “This Week” with George Stephanopoulos (after he showed video of Clapper testimony on March 12, 2013, denying that NSA collects “any type of data” on Americans):

Stephanopoulos: “Senator Feinstein, I have to confess, I have a hard time squaring that answer with what we learned [from the Snowden disclosures] this week.”

Feinstein: “Well, I think this is very hard. There is no more direct or honest person than Jim Clapper. ... You can misunderstand the question.”

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/week-transcript-sen-dianne-feinstein-rep-mike-rogers/story?id=19343314&page=4>

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June 11, 2013

Sen. Ron Wyden issued the following statement regarding statements made by Clapper about collection on Americans:

“One of the most important responsibilities a Senator has is oversight of the intelligence community. This job cannot be done responsibly if Senators aren’t getting straight answers to direct questions.

“When NSA Director Alexander failed to clarify previous public statements about domestic surveillance, it was necessary to put the question to the Director of National Intelligence. So that he would be prepared to answer [in his testimony on March 12], I sent the question to Director Clapper’s office a day in advance.

“After the hearing was over my staff and I gave his office a chance to amend his answer. Now public hearings are needed to address the recent disclosures and the American people have the right to expect straight answers from the intelligence leadership to the questions asked by their representatives.”

<http://www.wyden.senate.gov/news/press-releases/wyden-statement-responding-to-director-clappers-statements-about-collection-on-americans>

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July 2, 2013

Clapper sends a letter to Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Dianne Feinstein, in which he refers to his March 12 testimony denying that NSA collects “any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans.”

Clapper: “My response was clearly erroneous for which I apologize.”

A spokesman for Wyden, Tom Caiazza, said that a staff member in the Senator’s office had asked Clapper to correct the public record after the March hearing, which he “refused” to do. Caiazza explained:

“Senator Wyden had a staff member contact the Office of the Director of National Intelligence on a secure phone line soon after the March hearing to address the inaccurate statement regarding bulk collection on Americans.

“The ODNI acknowledged that the statement was inaccurate but refused to correct the public record when given the opportunity. Senator Wyden’s staff informed the ODNI that this was a serious concern. Senator Wyden is deeply troubled by a number of misleading statements senior officials have made about domestic surveillance in the past several years.”

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Mr. President, are you not also troubled by those misleading statements? We strongly believe you must fire Jim Clapper for his lies to the Congress and the American people and that you must appoint someone who will tell the truth.

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

Coleen Rowley, retired FBI agent and former Minneapolis Division legal counsel

Daniel Ellsberg, former State and Defense Department official

Ray McGovern, retired CIA analyst

David MacMichael, Ph.D., former senior estimates officer, National Intelligence Council

Todd Pierce, MAJ, U.S. Army, Judge Advocate (ret.), Military Commissions Defense Counsel

Thomas Drake, Senior Executive, NSA (former)

William Binney, former technical director at NSA

Larry Johnson, CIA and State Department (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, former Deputy NIO for the Near East, National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Ann Wright, Retired US Army Reserve Colonel and former US Diplomat

An Unheeded Warning on Iraq

Ten years ago, as the clock was ticking down to George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq, a campaign of U.S. government lies and exaggerations had convinced many Americans that they were the ones under threat. A few U.S. intelligence veterans spoke up, but were heard mostly in Europe and on the Internet.

DATE: March 12, 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR: Confused Americans

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

SUBJECT: Cooking Intelligence for War

Two members of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) appeared on German TV's equivalent of "60 Minutes" on March 6, 2003, to discuss the use/abuse of intelligence to support the U.S. administration's case for attacking Iraq.

Ray McGovern and David MacMichael were among the former CIA officers interviewed by Channel One's "Panorama," whose interviewers were asking questions seldom heard in American media. As a service to confused Americans, we have translated the German portions of the program and append the complete transcript.

We would note that the interviews were taped before the latest indignities regarding U.S. intelligence came to light, the forged letters earlier adduced as proof that Iraq was seeking to obtain uranium from Africa for its nuclear program, for example.

Our embarrassment is actually too painful to dwell, at any length, on other recent indignities, UN inspector ElBaradei's preliminary finding that Iraq has no nuclear weapons program, the gaffes made by Secretary of State Colin Powell in his debut as imagery analyst before the UN Security Council, and his praising

as "exquisite" a graduate school paper masquerading as top secret intelligence from the UK, to name just a few.

Embarrassments of this kind receive little play among those American TV commentators who are helping the administration beat the drums for war. Such stories usually hit the cutting room floor.

Similarly, no airtime in this country is provided to veterans of the U.S. Intelligence Community, unless some can be ferreted out who march to the same drumbeat. Some of us have had the extraordinary experience of been 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.

As the transcript below indicates, the situation in the media is quite different in Europe, where TV is open and hospitable to various viewpoints, pointed questions, and rigorous analysis. We have no illusions that American TV would host a no-holds-barred discussion of U.S. intelligence performance regarding Iraq, or regarding September 11, for that matter.

We do sense, however, that there are millions who crave more than the mantras sung by the administration and, sadly, now echoed by the Director of Central Intelligence. It is primarily for them that we make available below the "Panorama" transcript.

We appeal to those still working inside the Intelligence Community to consider turning state's evidence. Daniel Ellsberg, one who knows, recently noted that truth telling, in time, can stop a misguided march to war.

Ellsberg and our former CIA colleague, Sam Adams, spoke out courageously to expose the lies of the Johnson administration and to put the brakes on the war in Vietnam, but, sadly, not in time. Sam is now deceased, but Ellsberg recently appealed to insiders at intelligence agencies "to tell the truth and save many,

many lives." We Veterans Intelligence Professionals for Sanity join in that urgent appeal.

We are encouraged to learn that just yesterday [March 11, 2003] a long-time Australian intelligence officer resigned in protest against the handling of U.S. intelligence and his government's support of U.S. policy on Iraq. So it is indeed possible for intelligence officers to join Foreign Service counterparts like John Brady Kiesling and John H. Brown who already put principle and conscience before obedience and personal advancement in choosing to resign from the Department of State.

Further encouragement is taken from FBI Special Agent Coleen Rowley's courageous decision to call public attention to the severe threat to domestic security that would inevitably come in the wake of a U.S. attack on Iraq, a threat involving critical dangers that have been soft-pedaled by the administration. Ms. Rowley is less than two years short of eligibility for retirement.

Signed/

Richard Beske, San Diego

Kathleen McGrath Christison, Santa Fe

William Christison, Santa Fe

Patrick Eddington, Alexandria

Raymond McGovern, Arlington

Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

Transcript Follows:

Panorama

"Panorama" management informs us that there are no restrictions on further dissemination of what follows.

German TV (ARD/Erstes Programm)

8:15 PM, March 6, 2003

Cooking the Books; Falsifying the Evidence: How Bush is Mobilizing for War

Moderator: Anja Reschke

Welcome to Panorama!

While many Americans listen submissively to George Bush's statements regarding plans for war against Iraq, he is having a rather difficult time with his own government workers, particularly his intelligence analysts.

The Central Intelligence Agency is responsible for collecting and analyzing evidence relating to Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and his relationship to al-Qaeda. But CIA analysts apparently are not doing their job to the satisfaction of the president. Indeed, as Bush keeps coming up with new claims about Iraq's weapons and its plans for terrorist attacks, one thing is certain: The information is not coming from the CIA. Here is a president who no longer trusts his own intelligence service.

The Media Prepare for War on American TV

Every day the media warn about Saddam Hussein's chemical and biological weapons. American audiences also hear again and again: Saddam and bin Laden work together. The only hope, war!

The continual propaganda is effective. Virtually everyone feels threatened by Saddam, even as they go about their daily lives. Indeed, the majority of Americans believe that Saddam Hussein was personally behind the attacks of September 11, 2001.

We asked Americans the question: Did Saddam Hussein play a role in the 9/11 attacks?

Man: "Saddam Hussein and all the rest of those terrorists played a role in a lot of things. People forget in this country what happened in New York. Let's not forget that."

Woman: "I hope that Saddam Hussein wasn't the one behind the 9/11 attacks, but I believe he was though."

Woman: "I think he probably had a lot to do with it. I don't know that he was actually the spearhead for it, but I think he supported it."

This complete nonsense is the result of a successful disinformation campaign.

Ray McGovern, veteran of a 27-year CIA career, for several years provided daily briefings to the president's most senior advisers, including George Bush senior.

McGovern: "The day after 9/11 Dick Cheney, Wolfowitz, and Rumsfeld were saying, 'Now let's go get Iraq.' And so the push was on to find evidence that Iraq had some sort of connection with 9/11. And I am very sad to say that our president himself has in a subliminal way always made that connection. And that is why most Americans, pity them, tend to believe that Iraq did have something to do with

9/11, while the intelligence community is convinced it did not.”

President Bush is still leaning on the CIA to provide the kind of evidence that will support his plans for war against Iraq. The evidence is still lacking, but this has not slowed the president down.

Saddam and the Terrorists

In a letter dated October 7, 2002, CIA Director George Tenet told the US Senate that Iraq was “drawing a line short” of conducting terrorist attacks with either conventional or chemical/biological weapons against the United States.” The CIA took the position that the probability was low that Iraq would either initiate an attack with weapons of mass destruction or give them to terrorists.

On the very same day, October 7, President Bush went before the cameras and turned the content of Tenet’s letter on its head. Bush claimed, “Iraq could decide on any given day to provide a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist group or individual terrorists.”

McGovern: “The ethic at CIA reflects the inscription on the entrance wall, which says, ‘You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.’ And we, that is, CIA analysts, took that very seriously. And so, if we do not see evidence of a tie between al-Qaeda and Iraq, for example, we will not write that.”

The Alleged Threat From Saddam’s Weapons of Mass Destruction

As we have indicated, the CIA Director told Bush and his national security advisers that the probability that Saddam will launch such an attack, in the foreseeable future, would be low.” But simultaneously President Bush claimed in public the exact opposite. He told the American people, “The risk is simply too great that he will use them.”

Robert Baer, a former CIA case officer who spent years working on covert operations in Iraq, is astonished.

Baer: “There is no imminent threat from Iraq, all right! If he does have missiles, which he probably does, they are buried in the ground, and it is going to take months to dig them up. We’ve seen no evidence of VX gas, or Bubonic plague, or anthrax, or any of this stuff.”

McGovern: “The logical conclusion is that the information has been doctored, that the information has been cooked to the recipe of policy and this, for an intelligence outfit, is anathema, beyond the pale. This is something that renders it superfluous to even have an intelligence agency.”

Saddam and Nuclear Weapons

According to President Bush, the "Iraqi dictator" will be able to produce his own nuclear weapons in the very near future.

George Bush: "We could wait and hope that Saddam does not give weapons to terrorists, or develop a nuclear weapon to blackmail the world. But I'm convinced that is a hope against all evidence."

McGovern: "President Bush has said the Iraqis could produce a nuclear weapon perhaps in another year. Now the formal intelligence estimate on that is that they could not possibly do that until the end of the decade. One wonders where the president gets his information. I really don't fault him as much for being dishonest as for being naive to think that he can go to Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz and expect to get a straight answer on such things."

Former CIA Officer David MacMichael: "I think the administration is indeed pressuring the intelligence system, whether it be the CIA, FBI, or anyone else, to come up with the strongest possible evidence to indicate there is a genuine and immediate threat of attack by chemical, biological, or other weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups, and in particular those associated with al-Qaeda, and to link Iraq to that."

Bush and Rumsfeld have been putting the pressure on the CIA for months. Still, CIA analysts would not let themselves be pressured into twisting the intelligence to support the "line" dictated from above. And so, the Defense Secretary in the meantime has created his own secret intelligence group as a rival to the CIA.

Baer: "The CIA said, 'Listen; we don't have enough information to indict Saddam on terrorism charges.' And Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, said, 'That's not good enough. Give us the raw databases and we'll make our own decisions.' And they rounded up these people who are non-professionals, a couple of ex-lawyers, consultants, who all rallied around and said, 'Well, let's take this, let's take that, let's take this and we can indict.'"

Rumsfeld's private intelligence group put its shoulder to the wheel and provided a doubting world with alleged evidence that Saddam is producing nuclear weapons. Armed with this "new evidence," UN inspectors in the last several weeks were sent off to confirm it. They could not.

Former UN Inspector David Albright: "Often what you see in the Bush administration is that they don't care. I mean, you say, 'This isn't true.' They say, 'Oh, Okay,' and then they repeat it again publicly. Or they just say, 'Don't form a conclusion. Keep working on it.' And so there are several cases where the inspectors are just expected to keep working on it, and yet they think

it's garbage."

McGovern: Intelligence needs to be as pure as a virgin. When intelligence is pimped, as is now being done by the White House and the Defense Department, it loses its virginity. And, as is well known, nothing is quite the same again once you have lost your virginity."

President Bush has almost reached his goal: war against Saddam Hussein. And the American media are beating the drums. For example, Fox TV, America's most watched news channel and its very popular star-anchor Bill O'Reilly, who stirs up millions of viewers:

O'Reilly: "When the war begins, this is what we expect from every American: Either you support the military or you shut up. Americans and our foreign allies who come out against us are enemies of the state."

Baiting, intimidation, disinformation, with results that are grotesque:

A question put to US citizens: "Do you think that Saddam Hussein may attack America in the near future with weapons of mass destruction?"

Woman: "If we don't watch out, it just might happen."

Man: "Absolutely. I think they will attack the United States with chemical weapons."

Woman: "I hear that Iraq has a lot of nuclear weapons that could hit the West Coast and it is very worrisome to me."

Worrisome indeed. Clearly, it is feelings and opinions, not facts, that are determining support in the US for war or peace.

Reporters: John Goetz and Volker Steinhoff; Edit: Karen Menge

Avoiding Another Long War

Exaggerated coverage of a dubious report by the International Atomic Energy Agency about Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program has spurred a rush toward a new war in the Middle East, but ex-U.S. intelligence officials urge President Obama to resist the pressures and examine the facts.

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS)

SUBJECT: Avoiding Another Long War

As professionals with collectively hundreds of years of experience in intelligence, foreign policy, and counterterrorism, we are concerned about the gross misrepresentation of facts being bruited about to persuade you to start another war.

We have watched the militarists represent one Muslim country after another as major threats to U.S. security. In the past, they supported attacks on Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya and Afghanistan, as well as Israel's attacks on Syria and Lebanon, nine Muslim countries and Gaza.

This time, they are using a new IAEA report to assert categorically that Iran is building a nuclear weapon that allegedly poses a major threat to the U.S. Your intelligence and military advisors can certainly clarify what the report really says.

As you know, the IAEA makes regular inspection visits to Iran's nuclear facilities and has TV cameras monitoring those facilities around the clock. While there is reason to question some of Iran's actions, the situation is not as clear-cut as some allege.

Mohamed ElBaradei, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient and former IAEA director-general, said recently, "I don't believe Iran is a clear and present danger. All I see is the hype about the threat posed by Iran." He is not alone: All 16 U.S. intelligence agencies concluded "with high confidence" in a 2007 National Intelligence Estimate that Iran had halted its nuclear-weapons program as of 2003.

We are seeing a replay of the "Iraq WMD threat." As Philip Zelikow, Executive Secretary of the 9/11 Commission said, "The 'real threat' from Iraq was not a threat to the United States. The unstated threat was the threat against Israel."

Your military and intelligence experts can also provide information on unpublicized efforts to derail Iran's nuclear program and on the futility of attempting to eliminate that program which is dispersed and mostly underground through aerial bombing.

Defense Secretary [Leon] Panetta and other experts have stated that an air attack would only delay any weapons program for a year or two at most.

Former Mossad head Meir Dagan said that an air force strike against Iran's nuclear installations would be "a stupid thing," a view endorsed in principle by

two other past Mossad chiefs, Danny Yatom and Ephraim Halevy. Dagan added that “Any strike against [the civilian program] is an illegal act according to international law.”

Dagan pointed out another reality: bombing Iran would lead it to retaliate against Israel through Hezbollah, which has tens of thousands of Grad-type rockets and hundreds of Scuds and other long-range missiles, and through Hamas.

We are already spending as much as the rest of the world combined on National Security and \$100 billion per year on a Long War in Afghanistan. The Israel lobby has been beating the drums for us to attack Iran for years, led by people with confused loyalties like Joe Lieberman, who once made the claim that it is unpatriotic for Americans not to support Israel.

Another Long War is not in America’s or Israel’s interests, whatever Israel’s apologists claim. Those are the same people who claim that [Iranian President Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad said he would “wipe Israel off the map.” Persian specialists have pointed out that the original statement in Persian actually said that Israel would collapse: “This occupation regime over Jerusalem must vanish from the arena of time.”

What we have is a situation where Israel’s actions, for example in sending 300,000 settlers into the West Bank and 200,000 settlers into East Jerusalem, are compromising U.S. security by putting us at risk for terrorist retaliation.

We have provided Israel with \$100 billion in direct aid since 1975. Since this is fungible, how has funding settlements contributed to our security? You agreed to provide \$3 billion in F-35s to Israel in exchange for a 90-day freeze on settlements. What you got was 90 days of stonewalling on the peace process and then more settlers. What more do we owe Israel?

Certainly not a rush to war. We have time to make diplomacy and sanctions work, to persuade Russia and China to make joint cause with us.

James Madison once wrote that “Of all the enemies of true liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes. No nation can preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.”

We are currently winding down what you labeled a “dumb war;” we should not undertake another dumb war against a country almost three times larger than Iraq, that would set off a major regional war and create generations of jihadis. Such a war, contrary to what some argue, would not make Israel or the U.S. safer.

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