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What intelligence community needs

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In order to depoliticize any claim that any U.S. president would ever take military action especially one involving tactical nuclear weapons based on politically predetermined intelligence, Congress needs to legislate and fund with a small budget what I'm calling the Contrarian Threat Assessment Directorate.

The director of this small, independent intelligence arm would be nominated by the president, confirmed by the Senate, and report directly to the president. Through a statutory amendment, the director would become an adviser to the National Security Council (NSC) on the contrarian, dissenting and minority intelligence assessments.

To inoculate the contrarian threat assessment director from the possibility of being susceptible to any type of political influence from either the president or Congress, the director would serve a 10-year term, similar to that of the FBI director. Essentially then, short of a criminal offense, it would be virtually impossible to fire the contrarian director.

While not the nemesis of the director of central intelligence (DCI), the contrarian threat assessment director would be the official advocate and voice of the dissenting threat assessment view. Indeed, the voice of dissenting intelligence analysts would be heard loudly and clearly in the Oval Office, NSC and Senate and House Intelligence Committees, along with the voice of the DCI, when the contrarian director would routinely make presentations and give briefings on the contrarian view. This would dramatically, compellingly and officially level the playing field in the critical realm of "actionable" intelligence.

As a concomitant benefit, this Devil's Advocate-balanced approach to prewar threat assessments would be a major disincentive for angry dissenting analysts to leak classified information to the news media.

Since their dissenting analysis would routinely be heard by the president, chagrined analysts would be disarmed from the need to leak intelligence information to embarrass the president or the administration. Moreover, if the president attempted to close out the assessment of the contrarian director from a prewar threat evaluation, then the news media, without divulging any classified data, could take the president to task for not including the contrarian analysis in the threat assessment calculus.

Not surprisingly, some past and current senior policymakers will argue this intelligence policy proposal is draconian and unnecessary, as it would undermine the DCI's mandate to collect, analyze and disseminate intelligence. To the contrary, this proposal is the necessary check, balance and cost of the highly controversial national security strategy of pre-emption that includes the exigent use of tactical nuclear weapons.

This unprecedented paradigm shift in strategic policy by the Bush administration in a post-September 11 threat world should be applauded on the one hand. On the other side of the strategic

ledger, however, it is rather ominous because only unimpeachable intelligence that establishes, for example, that North Korea is two hours away from launching nukes at Japan will constitute "actionable" intelligence for nuclear pre-emption purposes.

Probable cause, preponderance of the evidence, conjecture and innuendo simply will not suffice when a weapon of mass destruction (WMD) is being launched to pre-empt the imminent launch of another WMD.

Thus, the NSC staff urgently needs to coordinate the drafting of a classified white paper on what should be the minimum "actionable" intelligence threshold that would justify the president's use of tactical nuclear weapons in a pre-emption context. Then the Intelligence and Armed Services Committees should conduct public hearings on the unclassified implications of that report.

Operation Iraqi Freedom was the first test of President Bush's pre-emption doctrine. Although it was a swift and brilliant military victory, accusations still fly around that prewar intelligence assessments were inflated, skewed or suppressed. Bush is neither the first nor the last president to face such invective.

To be sure, Operation Iraqi Freedom was necessary and Mr. Bush made a tough choice in a very hard case. The current debate over the integrity of prewar intelligence assessments is mild though when we consider how it will take a quantum leap in volatility when tactical nuclear weapons enter into the pre-emption equation.

The odds are seemingly high that within the next decade that the occupant of the Oval Office will have to order the use of tactical nuclear weapons to pre-empt a major terrorist group or rogue regime WMD attack against the nation. If the president or the intelligence community should fail the nation then with even a hint of politically inspired intelligence, then there will most certainly be nonpartisan global cries of presidential "impeachment." Enter the director of the Contrarian Threat Assessment Directorate, who would serve a 10-year term and routinely brief the president and NSC on the dissenting intelligence analysis. An inaugural and on-going task for the director and this agency of, say, 100 intelligence analysts, would be to comprehensively study intelligence failure case studies and develop best practices from lessons learned.

Citizens are the key stakeholders in national security policy formulation, especially in this perilous post-September 11 era. The president and the Intelligence and Armed Services Committees are obligated to us to ensure that the prewar voices of dissenting intelligence analysts are heard loud and clear in the decades ahead. Since its inception nearly 60 years ago, the CIA, lamentably, has had a few blemishes on its track record of collecting, analyzing and disseminating intelligence that is above the political fray. Some past presidents bear some guilt for this, as well. As a sad consequence, the nation needs and deserves an independent Contrarian Threat Assessment Directorate that has the other ear of the president.

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