



**Testimony before the  
Select Committee on Intelligence  
United States Senate**

**“Reform and Reorganization of the  
U.S. Intelligence Community”**

**July 20, 2004**

**A Statement by**

**John J. Hamre  
President and CEO**

**CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, 1800 K STREET, NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20006  
TELEPHONE: (202) 887-0200 FACSIMILE: (202) 775-3199 WWW.CSIS.ORG**

Chairman Roberts, Vice Chairman Rockefeller, thank you for inviting me to testify before the Committee on this crucial subject. I believe we are in the middle of a near-constitutional crisis. America is coming to question the credibility of an intelligence community that we cannot survive without. It is not an exaggeration to say that the nation's future security rests in your review and actions. I am honored you have asked me to participate in this review.

I am humbled to share this hearing with two fine public servants who have extensive experience in the intelligence field. They are genuine experts. I am not. I was always a consumer of intelligence products, never a producer of those products. Therefore to be helpful to the committee, I propose to offer a few observations based upon my experience in government. My goal is to give you a sense of my perceptions of the salience and credibility of intelligence products when real decisions have to be made that affect the lives of civilian and military personnel. With that, I will try to offer brief comments on the key questions you are considering.

### **Isolated by definition**

Let me begin with two general observations. First, as I reflect on my time as the deputy secretary of defense, I am often reminded of how isolated I was in that position. Let me explain this. I had a fabulous staff. I was never denied anything I requested. Organizations and individuals actively sought to get on my calendar to tell me of their work. I was inundated by paper. Every night I took home a sample case of paperwork.

Having said that, anyone who serves in these positions is very isolated. This is a product of several factors. First, the volume of material that comes to the secretary or deputy secretary is enormous. It has to be channeled for efficiency. Someone who works for you is deciding if you need to see it and when you need to see it. This is not a bad thing. This is just a fact of life.

Second, everyone who meets with you or sends you a piece of paper is trying to create a positive impression. Again, please do not take this in the wrong way. You hear lots of bad news as deputy secretary. But the Defense Department is a command organization and people want to be seen as constructive in accomplishing the mission of the department. This means that subconsciously, and even consciously, everyone who briefs you wants to be seen in the best light. Before they walk in the door, they ask their colleagues and themselves, "What is he interested in? What sets him off? How do we discuss this so as to get a constructive outcome from the meeting?"

These are not cynical manipulations. These are just the logical actions of dedicated individuals who have very limited time and access to decision makers and want to make the best of the time to get a constructive outcome. To their credit, it is also a demonstration of their appreciation for the limited time of the individual they are briefing. An uncomplicated and direct briefing is most productive for all involved.

I make this observation in order to draw a very simple conclusion. When you are insulated by staff, it is crucial that you realize that your actions and attitudes determine what

information flows to you. I found that I had to be careful not to distort the intelligence I received by the way I asked questions and the way I reacted to information. Because of the conditions I described, which are inherent in huge bureaucratic institutions, I found that I had to be very careful in how I interacted with people and organizations. People would shape what they told me based on how I interacted with them. If I reacted harshly when presented with bad news, future meetings could be tempered with overly optimistic perspectives that distort the situation. If I expressed interest in one subject, the briefer would take note and that aspect of a problem was always emphasized in future briefings.

I do not believe it is intentional, but the information you get is affected by the attitude you adopt. I don't know that this shapes analysis, but it does affect the way it is presented to you.

### **The quest for certainty**

The second general observation I would make concerns what philosophers call epistemological questions: how do we know what we know, and how good is the information that comprises this knowledge? It is reliable? Is it true? This is the core of the intelligence community's problem. The intelligence analyst is always working with fragmentary information. The question is this: a fragment of what? Does the information represent a key fact that unlocks an understanding of a development, or is it unrelated to the hypothesis under consideration?

In relationship to this quest for certainty, I observed two phenomena when I was in government. First, I noticed that fragments of information gained greater certainty the farther away they were from the intelligence professional. The intelligence analyst is usually careful to note the reliability and timeliness of the intelligence "fact," but the qualifiers of the fact are often summarized and often dropped as the intelligence briefing moves up the decision-making ladder. A data element of questionable reliability can gain credibility as it rises through the intelligence hierarchy until it becomes authoritative evidence. This does not mean that the intelligence fact was wrong. It does mean that there is a tendency to bestow greater credibility to the data the more removed the data is from the intelligence professional.

Second, I noticed that once a general proposition was accepted as valid, it was usually repeated without question in subsequent analyses. Group consciousness develops in the intelligence and the policy world when basic propositions are accepted as true. As we saw recently, the entire intelligence community and the policy community—and I include myself here—were convinced that we would find major stocks of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. We have not. This demonstrates that a group consciousness can overcome the intelligence and policy world in the quest for certainty in what is inherently an uncertain enterprise.

### **Implications for intelligence use by policy community**

In light of these phenomena, which I believe are inherent in large bureaucratic institutions and in the intelligence enterprise, what should we do? How do we insulate ourselves from the problems that we confront as a consequence of these factors?

I realized when I was in office how dependent security leaders are on our intelligence community. Because we are so dependent, we must insulate ourselves from the adverse conditions as much as possible. One of the most important ways to do that is to insure competition among analysts. To accomplish this, we need redundant analytic capabilities in our intelligence community. We need competing organizations that report to different bosses in the federal government so that we *profit* from the competition that is inherent in bureaucratic politics.

This will not insure that no mistakes will be made--witness the errors we made concerning WMD in Iraq. But, it is one of the important steps we can take to bring as much dispassionate analysis as possible to inherently uncertain questions.

Second, in order to counter the instinct toward "groupthink", we must augment the intelligence process through so-called "open source" methods. We must have, of course, classified research. But, I believe "open source" methods serve to broaden the perspectives of those who work within the confines of classification. The intellectual community advances through open competition of ideas. It is hard to do this in an intelligence community that is already limited in size and necessarily constrained in terms of work product. Analysts in the intelligence community need to interact with the wider ideas community, and the only feasible way to do that is for the intelligence community to create "open-source" disciplines to parallel classified work.

Third, all of us in policy community have to realize that we do shape the quality of ideas that come to us from the intelligence community by the way we interact with the community. This is not to say we should be passive consumers of intelligence product. Far from it. Because we are so dependent on the community, we have an obligation to challenge it, to understand the depth and quality of information that informs its findings. Intelligence analysts need to be asked to explicitly discuss the quality and depth of data that underlies their analysis. They should be explicit in identifying gaps and contra-proofs of their reasoning. These elements of introspection should be explicit annotations to the reports themselves, so that policymakers are aware of the constraints faced by the analysts.

### **Should we create a Director of National Intelligence?**

You asked in your letter of invitation that we consider the question of whether or not to create a new position of Director of National Intelligence. We face a difficult tradeoff. On the one hand we want a new organizational structure that facilitates coordination so that we can—I hate this metaphor, but it is so common now—"connect the dots." On the other hand, we already have too much group-think in a fractured intelligence community. I fear bringing it all under one chief would seriously threaten what little competition for ideas we have.

Personally, I feel this is not the critical problem we face. I hearken to the experience we had in reforming the Defense Department. I was a staff member of the Senate Armed Services Committee when we developed the Senate version of what ultimately became the landmark Goldwater-Nichols Act, the most recent defense reform initiative that transformed the Defense Department. What is not often appreciated in Goldwater-Nichols, is that the Congress basically reformed the Department by tackling the “demand” side of the Department, not the “supply” side. What do I mean?

The Military Departments—Army, Navy and Air Force—are all suppliers of military forces. Heading the “demand” side of the Department are the unified commanders in the field. They are the joint war-fighters. Goldwater-Nichols fundamentally raised their prominence in the system, and the voice of the Joint Chiefs which represents the CINCs in Washington. That was what propelled reform in DoD—giving much greater strength to the voices that demand better military capabilities.

That is what I think is missing in the current debate. All of the debate on intelligence reform is still a debate about organizing the “supply” of intelligence. There is no real debate on improving the “demand” for better intelligence.

I apologize in advance to you for saying this, but I feel the quality of oversight—both here and at the White House—has deteriorated during the past 15 years. We are not demanding better intelligence products—we are arguing over the inputs to the intelligence organizations. I was a part of this when I worked here in the Senate. We spent all our time fighting over the budget details which were really the inputs into intelligence-making. We rarely evaluated the outputs and asked why we missed the mark so often.

From my standpoint, I believe the greatest need is to strengthen the demand for better intelligence. I think that needs to start here in the Congress. You have started that process with your report last week and your hearing today. But it must go beyond this. I ask that you devote attention to this question—how can the Committee systematically undertake real oversight? Would a joint-task force or subcommittee with the House strictly for purposes of policy oversight make sense? Should the Committee establish a standing procedure to consult with the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board? Should the Congress appoint a “board of visitors” to oversee each of the major intelligence organizations and require quarterly reports and/or meetings with those boards on the quality of analysis produced in the community? Should you require a bi-cameral system for the National Intelligence Council, with one “house” comprised of the current suppliers of intelligence and the other voting “house” comprised of major consumers of intelligence products?

I offer these as ideas to start a much-needed debate. I advocate no specific actions at this stage because I have not through them through adequately, and have not heard from a sufficient cross-section of professionals to know whether or not these are good ideas. But I do know that we need to do something to strengthen the capacity to demand better intelligence.

## **Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the Committee, I realize that these are modest contributions to your deliberations. I offer them based on my own experiences in government. The years that lie ahead for America will be very challenging, and we will be very dependent on a healthy and vibrant intelligence community to chart these dangerous waters. We must take appropriate steps to insure that this community remains healthy and vibrant. That is the responsibility that lies before this Committee. I am honored to have the opportunity to present my views to you, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have for me.