
March 23, 2003

A NATION AT WAR: INTELLIGENCE; C.I.A. Aides Feel Pressure In Preparing Iraqi Reports

By **JAMES RISEN**

The recent disclosure that reports claiming Iraq tried to buy uranium from Niger were based partly on forged documents has renewed complaints among analysts at the C.I.A. about the way intelligence related to Iraq has been handled, several intelligence officials said.

Analysts at the agency said they had felt pressured to make their intelligence reports on Iraq conform to Bush administration policies.

For months, a few C.I.A. analysts have privately expressed concerns to colleagues and Congressional officials that they have faced pressure in writing intelligence reports to emphasize links between Saddam Hussein's government and Al Qaeda.

As the White House contended that links between Mr. Hussein and Al Qaeda justified military action against Iraq, these analysts complained that reports on Iraq have attracted unusually intense scrutiny from senior policy makers within the Bush administration.

"A lot of analysts have been upset about the way the Iraq-Al Qaeda case has been handled," said one intelligence official familiar with the debate.

That debate was renewed after the disclosure two weeks ago by Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, that the claim that Iraq sought to buy uranium from Niger was based partly on forged documents. The claim had been cited publicly by President Bush.

"The forgery heightened people's feelings that they were being embarrassed by the way Iraqi intelligence has been handled," said one government official who has talked with C.I.A. analysts about the issue.

The forged documents were not created by the C.I.A. or any other United States government agency, and C.I.A. officials were always suspicious of the documents, American intelligence officials said.

But the information still ended up being used in public by Mr. Bush. Intelligence officials said there was other information, which was deemed to be credible, that raised concerns about a possible uranium connection between Niger and Iraq.

Several analysts have told colleagues they have become so frustrated that they have

considered leaving the agency, according to government officials who have talked with the analysts.

"Several people have told me how distraught they have been about what has been going on," said one government official who said he had talked with several C.I.A. analysts. None of the analysts are willing to talk directly to news organizations, the official said.

A senior official of the agency said no analysts had told C.I.A. management that they were resigning in protest over the handling of Iraqi intelligence. At the State Department, by contrast, three foreign service officers have resigned in protest over Mr. Bush's policies.

The official said some analysts had been frustrated that they had frequently been asked the same questions by officials from throughout the government about their intelligence reports concerning Iraq. Many of these questions concern sourcing, the official said.

The official added that the analysts had not been pressured to change the substance of their reports.

"As we have become an integral component informing the debate for policy makers, we have been asked a lot of questions," the senior C.I.A. official said. "I'm sure it does come across as a pressured environment for analysts. I think there is a sense of being overworked, a sense among analysts that they have already answered the same questions. But if you talk to analysts, they understand why people are asking, and why policy makers aren't accepting a report at face value."

Another intelligence official said, however, that many veteran analysts were comparing the current climate at the agency to that of the early 1980's, when some C.I.A. analysts complained that they were under pressure from the Reagan administration to take a harder line on intelligence reports relating to the Soviet Union.

The official said the pressure had prompted the agency's analysts to become more circumspect in expressing their analytical views in the intelligence reports they produced.

"On topics of very intense concern to the administration of the day, you become less of an analyst and more of a reports officer," the official said.

The distinction between an analyst and a reports officer is an important one within the C.I.A. A reports officer generally pulls together information in response to questions and specific requests for information. An intelligence analyst analyzes the information in finished reports.