

LA VANGUARDIA

"Will George W. Bush be held Accountable?"

(English Translation of "¿Se responsabilizará a Bush?")

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A day before the surprise Egyptian-Syrian attack on Israel on October 6, 1973, Israel's military intelligence chief reported that "the opening of military operations against Israel by the two [Arab] armies was a low probability." Twice before the war started, a junior Israeli military intelligence officer, argued that vast Egyptian deployments and exercises along the Suez Canal "seemed to camouflage a assault." His estimates were dismissed by superiors because he was low in the hierarchy of military analysts. And his assessments did not comport with arrogantly-held Israeli concepts: neither Syria nor Egypt had the military capability to wage a successful war against Israel.

During the first week of that October War, more than 2,000 Israelis soldiers died. The Agranat Commission Report which investigated Israel's intelligence failures from that war said that the Israeli government failed to read the available intelligence properly and therefore, failed to anticipate the Arab attack. In hindsight, Israel possessed accurate information and astute analyses, but policy-makers and those high in the chain of command dismissed these intelligence estimates. Israel's intelligence chief, and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, along with Prime Minister Golda Meir left office in disgrace by the following May.

In 1978, the Iran Action officer on the US National Security Council Gary Sick, and the head of the CIA Stansfield Turner were disappointed about the poor political reporting from Tehran. When an intelligence review was made about why the US failed to predict the Shah's fall in 1979 and Khomeyni's rise to office, reasons given were "insufficient appreciation of the political power of revivalist Shi'ite Islam," and the expected exercise of "forceful leadership" from the Shah. Apparently, no one in Washington knew that the Shah was suffering from cancer for more than seven years. Though in 1977-78, when the CIA reported that he had become depressed and was "dysfunctional in his decision making," US Ambassador Sullivan in Tehran suggested staying with the Shah. America was wedded to a friend of six US presidents, even though he was losing control of his own country. The Shah's fall, the taking of American hostages for 444 days,

and the failed mission to rescue them, collectively contributed to a national embarrassment. Along with high inflation and mortgage rates, the loss' in Iran helped secure Carter's defeat in November 1980.

Now two two bi-partisan US reports of enormous consequence point to a myriad of intelligence failures, conceptual paralysis and bureaucratic mishaps, leading up to the 9/11 attacks on the US, and the American led attack against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The US Senate's Report of US Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq (<http://intelligence.senate.gov>) and The 9/11 Commission Report for a (<http://www.9-11commission.gov/>) provide a blistering assessment of the shoddy way in which intelligence was collected, evaluated, and used.

In all four cases, (if you count failure to predict 9/11 and misinformation about Iraq separately) the common failures were: staying wedded to a concept when the facts showed otherwise, poor information gathering, poor analyses, or misuse of intelligence estimates by policy-makers.

Before 9/11, the Bush administration did not pay attention to the warning signs that an al-Qaeda terrorist attack was at hand. The 9/11 Commission Report found that there was a chain of missed opportunities; American intelligence had the correct information but policy-makers chose not to act. There was the August 2001 presidential briefing memo suggesting that al-Qaeda was planning to attack the US and would use airplanes as missiles, information which Condoleezza Rice, Bush's National Security Council Adviser said at the time was only "historical information based on old reporting. There was no new threat information," she said.

A trail of missed opportunities resulted in tragedy. Is Dr. Rice accountable?

After 9/11, the administration held that removing Saddam Hussein was part of the war on terrorism,' an extension of retaliation against the Taliban in Afghanistan and the al-Qaeda network. In this the Bush administration wanted to see a connection that did not exist. And it justified its attack on Iraq through its September 2002 policy directive, titled "National Security Strategy of the United States." It outlined a doctrine of preemption in foreign affairs, do unto others before they do unto you.' And when the head of the CIA erroneously told Bush that it was a confirmed slam-dunk' that Saddam had WMD, how could the President do

anything except respond with force? Justification for linking September 11 to the attack on Iraq became a repeated mantra of the Bush administration. Yet, Vice President Cheney said as late as June 2004,"there clearly was a relationship [between al-Qaeda and Iraq]. It's

been testified to; the evidence is overwhelming." Should Cheney be held accountable?

On the question of Iraq as a culprit linked to the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration accepted as irrefutable validity that Saddam Hussein's past track record of governance through savagery and accumulation of weapons of mass destruction would make him not only a justifiable target for attack, but if Saddam were defeated in the Middle East, terrorists would not be successful again in inflicting terror on US soil or in western Europe. The Madrid bombings and killing of several hundred Spaniards in March 2004 proved that assumption wrong too. A Pew Research poll from July 2004 indicates that 71% of the American people believe that another terrorist attack in the next several months {before the November election} is either very likely, or "likely." A New York Times/CBS poll released also at the end of July indicates that 60% of the American electorate believes that the attack on Iraq was "not worth the loss in American lives and other costs."

George W. Bush has presided over poor preparedness and mishandling of intelligence information, both with devastating domestic and foreign consequences. More than 900 Americans have died, a majority of Americans do not feel safer, and terrorism has not been defeated because Saddam is out of power. To the US Senate, the American people, the United Nations, European and other allies, the Bush administration willfully provided erroneous information to justify the invasion of Iraq. In the process, his administration alienated many. Trust and confidence in the American president has taken a beating. American lives were lost, national embarrassment endured, and alienation of friends sustained.

Normally the American voter places less emphasis on foreign policy issues and more importance on critical economic issues and America's future social agenda when deciding a preferred presidential candidate. However, with less than 100 days before the presidential election, the essential question remains, and it will not go away: will the American electorate hold George W. Bush and his administration accountable for two of the most massive and egregious intelligence failures in the history of the Republic?

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