

**PLUS: A LETTER TO GEORGE TENET FROM 7 FORMER INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS**



**SORRY  
THEY'VE  
BEEN SO  
MEAN TO YOU,  
GEORGE**

**RAY McGOVERN**

**COLDTYPE**



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**April 30, 2007**

"If you can't say something positive about someone, don't say anything." This was drummed into me by my Irish grandmother and, as was the case with most of her admonishments, it has stood me in good stead. On occasion, though, it has been a real bother – as when I felt called to comment on George Tenet's apologia, *In the Center of the Storm*, coming soon to a bookstore near you.

On the verge of despair, I ran into an old classmate of Tenet's from PS 94 in Little Neck, Queens. Help at last. He told me that George was more handsome than his twin brother Billy, and that his outgoing nature and consummate political skill got him elected president of the student body.

Positive enough, Grandma? Now let me add this.

George Tenet's book shows that he remains, first and foremost, a politician – with no clue as to the proper role of intelligence work. He is unhappy about going down in history as "Slam Dunk Tenet." George protests that his famous remark to President Bush on Dec. 21, 2002 was not meant to assure the president that available intelligence on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq was a "slam dunk." Rather he meant that the argument that Saddam Hussein had such weapons could be readily enhanced to slam-dunk status in order to sell war on Iraq. Yesterday evening on CBS' 60 Minutes Tenet explained what he meant when he uttered those words – the words he says have now been distorted to blame him for the war in Iraq. What he says he meant was simply:

*"We can put a better case together for a public case." (sic)*

Tenet still doesn't get it. Those of us schooled in the craft and ethos of intelligence remain in wide-mouthed disbelief, perhaps best summed up by

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veteran operations officer Bob Baer's recent quip:

*"So, it is better that the 'slam dunk' referred to the ease with which the war could be sold? I guess I missed that part of the National Security Act delineating the functions of the CIA – the part about CIA marketing a war. Guess that's why I never made it into senior management."*

### ***Reluctant Scapegoat***

George's concern over being scapegoated is understandable. But could he not have seen it coming? Not even when then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld asked him in the fall of 2002 whether he had created a system for tracking how good the intelligence was compared with what would be actually found in Iraq? The folks I know from Queens usually can tell when they're being set up. Maybe Tenet was naive enough to believe that his friend the president ("President Bush and I are much alike," he writes) would protect him from the likes of Rumsfeld and Vice President Cheney even when – as was inevitable – someone would have to take the fall. Or did George actually believe Cheney's insight that US forces would be greeted in Iraq as liberators, and that at that point, the absence of the weapons of mass destruction would not matter?

Now George is worried about his reputation. He told *60 Minutes*:

*"At the end of the day, the only thing you have...is your reputation built on trust and your personal honor, and when you don't have that anymore, well, there you go."*

I immediately thought back to former Secretary of State Colin Powell's response when he was asked if he regretted the lies he told at the UN on Feb. 5, 2003. Powell said he regretted that speech because it was "a blot on my record."

So we've got ruined reputations and blots on records. Poor boys. What about the 3, 344 American soldiers already killed in a war that could not have happened had not these poor fellows deliberately distorted the evidence and led the cheering for war. What about the more than 50,000 troops wounded, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians whose deaths can be attributed directly to the invasion and its aftermath. There are blots, and there are blots. Why is it that Tenet and Powell seem to inhabit a different planet?

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Despite all this, they still have their defenders...or at least Tenet does. (Powell's closest associate, Col. Larry Wilkerson, decided long ago to turn state's evidence and apologize for his and Powell's role in the intelligence/policy fiasco, but Powell has tried to remain above the battle. He may, I suppose, be writing his own book.)

Saturday on *National Public Radio* Tenet's deputy and partner in crime, John McLaughlin, went to ludicrous lengths reciting a carefully prepared list of "all the things that the CIA got right," while conceding that it (not "we," mind you, but "it") performed "inadequately" in assessing weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

*[What Tenet has said, both while writing his book and while hawking it on TV, is highly troubling – so much so that a number of us wrote him a letter yesterday to express our concern to him directly. See Page 7.]*

### ***Defending Torture...Again***

Hewing to the George W. Bush dictum of "catapulting the propaganda" by endlessly repeating the same claim (the formula used so successfully by Joseph Goebbels), Tenet manages to tell *60 Minutes* five times in five consecutive sentences: "We don't torture people." Like President Bush, however, he then goes on to show why it has been absolutely necessary to torture people. Do they take us for fools? And Tenet's claims of success in extracting information via torture are no more deserving of credulity than the rest of what he says.

His own credibility aside, Tenet has succeeded in destroying the asset without which an intelligence community cannot be effective and informed policy making is at grave risk – trustworthiness. That is serious. He seems blissfully oblivious to the damage he has done – aware only of the damage he accuses others of doing to his "personal honor."

### ***Lessons***

If any good can come out of the intelligence/policy debacle regarding Iraq, it would be the clear lesson that intelligence crafted to dovetail with the predilections of policymakers can bring disaster. The role that Tenet, McLaughlin and their small coterie of malleable managers played as willing accomplices in the corruption of intelligence has made a mockery of the verse chiseled into the marble at the entrance to CIA headquarters: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Had Tenet been tenaciously honest, his analysts would have risen to the occasion. And there is a good chance that they could have helped prevent what the

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Nuremburg Tribunal called the "supreme international crime" – a war of aggression – a war that Tenet and his subordinates knew had nothing to do with the "intelligence" adduced to "justify" it, as Tenet now admits in his book.

No director of the CIA should come from the ranks of congressional staff, since those staffers work in a politicized ambience antithetical to substantive intelligence work. Tenet is Exhibit A. When he was nominated for the job, outside observers deemed it a good sign that, as a congressional staffer, Tenet had been equally popular on both sides of the aisle. But for intelligence professionals, this raised a huge red flag.

As we had learned early in our careers, if you consistently tell it like it is, you are certain to make enemies. Those enjoying universal popularity are *ipso facto* suspect of perfecting the political art of compromise – shading this and shaving that. However useful this may be on the Hill, it sounds the death knell for intelligence analysis. Tenet also lacked experience in managing a large, complicated organization. Such experience is a *sine qua non*.

Finally, it is mischievous myth that the CIA director must cultivate a close personal relationship with the president. Nor should he/she try to do so, for it is a net minus. The White House is not a fraternity house; mutual respect is far more important than camaraderie. A mature president will respect an independent intelligence director. The latter must resist the temptation to be "part of the team" in the same way that the president's political advisers are part of the team. Overly close identification with "the team" can erode objectivity and cloud intelligence judgments. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, like Cheney a frequent visitor to CIA headquarters in 2002 to "help" with the analysis on Iraq, told the press that Tenet was "so grateful to the president [presumably for not firing him after Sept. 11, 2001] that he would do anything for him." That attitude is the antithesis of what is needed in senior intelligence officers.

Much is at stake, and it will be an uphill battle to bring back honesty and professionalism to the analysis process and impede efforts to politicize the intelligence product. In an institution like the CIA, significant, enduring improvement requires vision, courage, and integrity at the top. It has been almost three decades since the CIA has been led by such a person.

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## **A LETTER TO GEORGE TENET**

28 April 2007

**Mr. George Tenet**  
**c/o Harper Collins Publishers**  
**10 East 53rd Street**  
**8th Floor**  
**New York City, New York 10022**  
**ATTN: Ms. Tina Andredis**

Dear Mr. Tenet:

We write to you on the occasion of the release of your book, *At the Center of the Storm*. You are on record complaining about the "damage to your reputation" caused by your role on the Iraq war. In our view the damage to your reputation is inconsequential compared to the harm your actions have caused for the U.S. soldiers engaged in combat in Iraq and for the national security of the United States. We believe you have a moral obligation to return the Medal of Freedom you received from President George W. Bush. We also call for you to dedicate a significant percentage of the royalties from your book to the U.S. soldiers and their families who have been killed and wounded in Iraq.

We agree with you that Vice President Dick Cheney and other Bush administration officials took the United States to war for flimsy reasons. We agree that the war of choice in Iraq was ill advised and wrong headed. But your lament that you are a victim in a process you helped direct is self-serving, misleading and, as head of the intelligence community, an admission of failed leadership. You were not a victim. You were a willing participant in a poorly considered policy to start an unnecessary war and you share culpability with Dick Cheney, George W. Bush, and others for the debacle in Iraq.

You are not alone in failing to speak up and protest the twisting and shading of intelligence. Those who remained silent when they could have made a difference also share the blame for not protesting the abuse and misuse of intelligence that occurred on your watch. But ultimately you were in charge and you signed off on the CIA products and you briefed the President.

This is not a case of Monday morning quarterbacking. You helped send very mixed signals to the American people and their legislators in the fall of 2002. CIA field operatives produced solid intelligence in September 2002 that stated clearly

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there was no stockpile of any kind of WMD in Iraq. This intelligence was ignored and later misused. On October 1 you signed and gave to President Bush and senior policy makers a fraudulent National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) – which dovetailed with unsupported threats presented by Vice President Dick Cheney in an alarmist speech on August 26, 2002.

You were all too well aware that the White House tried to present as fact intelligence you knew was unreliable. And yet you tried to have it both ways. On October 7, just hours before the president gave a major speech in Cincinnati, you were successful in preventing him from using the fable about Iraq purchasing uranium in Africa, although that same claim appeared in the NIE you signed only six days before.

Although CIA officers learned in late September 2002 from a high-level member of Saddam Hussein's inner circle that Iraq had no past or present contact with Osama bin Laden and that the Iraqi leader considered bin Laden an enemy of the Baghdad regime, you still went before Congress in February 2003 and testified that Iraq did indeed have links to Al Qaeda.  
(<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060915-4.html>).

You showed a lack of leadership and courage in January of 2003 as the Bush Administration pushed and cajoled analysts and managers to let them make the bogus claim that Iraq was on the verge of getting its hands on uranium. You signed off on Colin Powell's presentation to the United Nations. And, at his insistence, you sat behind him and visibly squandered CIA's most precious asset – credibility.

You may now feel you were bullied and victimized but you were also one of the bullies. You cannot claim that you were bullied into acting by the administration, while you chose to remain silent as the White House misled Congress and the American people. In the end you allowed suspect sources, like the notorious Curveball, to be used based on very limited reporting and evidence. Yet you were informed in no uncertain terms that Curveball was not reliable. You broke with CIA standard practice and insisted on voluminous evidence to refute this reporting rather than treat the information and source as suspect. You helped set the bar very low for reporting that supported favored White House positions, while raising the bar astronomically high when it came to raw intelligence that did not support the case for war being hawked by the president and vice president.

It now turns out that you were the Alberto Gonzales of the intelligence community – a grotesque mixture of incompetence and sycophancy shielded by a genial personality. Decisions were made, you were in charge, but you have no idea how decisions were made, even though you were in charge. Curiously, you focus



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your anger on the likes of Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Condoleezza Rice, but you decline to criticize the President.

Mr. Tenet, as head of the intelligence community, you failed to use your position of power and influence to protect the intelligence process and, more importantly, the country. What should you have done? What could you have done?

For starters, during the critical summer and fall of 2002, you could have gone to key Republicans and Democrats in the Congress and warned them of the pressure. But you remained silent. Your candor during your July 20, 2002 one-on-one with Sir Richard Dearlove, then-head of British Intelligence, provides documentary proof that you knew exactly what you were doing; namely, "fixing" the intelligence to the policy.

By your silence you helped build the case for war. You betrayed the CIA officers who collected the intelligence that made it clear that Saddam did not pose an imminent threat. You betrayed the analysts who tried to withstand the pressure applied by Cheney and Rumsfeld.

Most importantly and tragically, you failed to meet your obligations to the people of the United States. Instead of resigning in protest, when it could have made a difference in the public debate, you remained silent and allowed the Bush Administration to cite your participation in these deliberations to justify its decision to go to war. Your silence contributed to the willingness of the public to support the disastrous war in Iraq, which has killed more than 3300 Americans and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis.

If you are committed to correcting the record about your past failings then you should start by returning the Medal of Freedom you received from President Bush in December 2004. You claim it was given only because of the war on terror, but you were standing next to General Tommy Franks and L. Paul Bremer, who also contributed to the disaster in Iraq. President Bush said that you:

*Played pivotal roles in great events, and [your] efforts have made our country more secure and advanced the cause of human liberty.*

The reality of Iraq, however, has not made our nation more secure nor has the cause of human liberty been advanced. In fact, your tenure as head of the CIA has helped create a world that is more dangerous. The damage to the credibility of the CIA is serious but can eventually be repaired. Many of the U.S. soldiers maimed in

the streets of Fallujah and Baghdad cannot be fixed. Many will live the rest of their lives missing limbs, blinded, mentally disabled, or physically disfigured. And the dead have passed into history.

Mr. Tenet, you cannot undo what has been done. It is doubly sad that you seem still to lack an adequate appreciation of the enormous amount of death and carnage you have facilitated. If reflection on these matters serves to prick your conscience we encourage you to donate at least half of the royalties from your book sales to the veterans and their families, who have paid and are paying the price for your failure to speak up when you could have made a difference. That would be the decent and honorable thing to do.

Sincerely yours,

**Phil Girdi**

**Ray McGovern**

**Larry Johnson**

**Jim Marcinkowski**

**Vince Cannistraro**

**David MacMichael**

(Former CIA Officers)



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