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Friday, December 2, 2005

Politics Thwarting Intelligence Probe

Rep. Heather Wilson, like most of her Republican colleagues on the Hill, says it's time to quit investigating the dismal failures of pre-war U.S. intelligence on Iraq.

Instead of probing the root causes of faulty intelligence— and whether the Bush administration highlighted intelligence that supported an invasion of Iraq and suppressed evidence that didn't— Wilson says it's more important to move forward.

Wilson and her colleagues have prevailed over Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee, stalling an investigation of pre-war intelligence failures.

Democrats in the Senate resorted to forcing a closed session last month to nudge Republicans toward resuming work on Phase Two of the intelligence panel's review. Phase One dealt with the quality of pre-war intelligence; Phase Two focuses on officials' use of the information. Committee staff has been writing drafts of two parts of the five-section Phase Two report, one of which focuses on White House public statements about the Iraqi threat.

Previous investigations by the 9/11 Commission and the Bush-appointed Robb-Silberman Commission have been faulted for their partisanship or narrow focus.

Intelligence swept the United States into war with an Iraq that purportedly had weapons of mass destruction, an Iraq that would welcome liberating GIs with flowers, an Iraq that could quickly be put back on its feet along a path toward recovery as a united, self-governing nation. Once there, U.S. forces found no WMDs. Instead of bouquets, troops get roadside bombs. Nation-building in the Mideast— surprise!— turns out to be much more difficult than anticipated.

Meanwhile, Washington's partisan equivalents of Shiites and Sunnis can't agree on an honest assessment that might steer the country away from intelligence debacles in the future.

It is, of course, important that hindsight doesn't become an obsession that causes us to stumble blindly into a dangerous future.

But it would be a disservice to the nation if Congress doesn't finish the post mortem examination of flawed intelligence and its possible misuse.

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