

US intelligence officials play the terrorism scare card, and make a damning admission

Patrick Martin
19 February 2005

The testimony Wednesday before Congress by CIA Director Porter Goss and an array of other top intelligence, military and homeland security officials was a further attempt to panic the American people with vague and unsubstantiated claims of new and imminent terrorist threats against the United States.

“It may only be a matter of time before Al Qaeda or another group attempts to use chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons,” Goss told the Senate Intelligence Committee.

In response to a question from Senator Jay Rockefeller, a West Virginia Democrat, Goss agreed that lax security at Russian nuclear facilities was of particular concern. Already, given the deteriorating conditions at those sites, “there is sufficient material unaccounted for so it would be possible for those with know-how to construct a nuclear weapon,” Goss said.

Goss was joined by FBI Director Robert Mueller and retired Admiral James Loy, acting deputy director of the Department of Homeland Security, who echoed Goss’s warnings about impending attacks from Al Qaeda.

Loy’s written statement to Congress exemplifies the mood of hysteria that the Bush administration seeks to whip up, declaring that despite a massive counterterrorism operation by the US government, “any attack of any kind could occur at any time.”

In his statement, Loy singled out the threat of infiltration into the United States across the Mexican border, which is traversed by millions of immigrants, legal and illegal, every year. He wrote that intelligence “strongly suggests” that Al Qaeda operatives have considered using Mexico as an entry point—an assertion that means precisely nothing, since terrorists have no doubt thought about many ways to attack US targets.

Loy called the state of border security “a very serious situation,” while adding that there was “currently no conclusive evidence” that Al Qaeda personnel had

actually entered the US from the south.

The main purpose of his comments, and the attendant media publicity, was to assist congressional Republicans in their efforts to justify new legislation cracking down on undocumented workers from Mexico and Central and South America as part of the “war on terror.”

FBI Director Mueller, for his part, said his greatest concern was “the threat from covert Al Qaeda operatives inside the United States,” so-called “sleeper cells.” US transportation systems and nuclear power facilities were especially vulnerable, he said, without providing any evidence.

Since the essence of “sleeper cells,” if they exist at all, is that they don’t do anything but wait for instructions, their detection is improbable, if not impossible. Proving a case against the members of such a cell is also problematic, since the “crime” consists in inaction. Mueller summed up the futile character of such efforts, declaring, “I remain very concerned about what we are not seeing.”

The purpose of hyping this alleged danger is to lend credibility to repressive measures by the Bush administration that would otherwise have no justification. Previous efforts to prosecute supposed “sleeper cells” have failed to uncover even a single genuine, ongoing connection to Osama bin Laden or Al Qaeda.

Several cases have ended with plea bargains in which the unfortunate defendants, fearing trials under conditions of a nationwide hysteria over the threat of terrorism, received long jail terms for activities as innocuous as paintball training. Other cases have ended as complete fiascos: defendants acquitted, or, as in Detroit, the case dropped due to prosecutorial misconduct.

While Bush’s top counterterrorism aides made their appearance on Capitol Hill, the Associated Press reported important details of previous efforts to use the threat of terrorism as a political weapon on behalf of the Bush

administration and Bush's reelection campaign.

The AP reported February 17 that former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge had met privately with Republican pollsters twice in a period of 10 days last spring, just as he was embarking on a series of speaking engagements in presidential battleground states. Ridge met with Republican strategists Frank Luntz and Bill McInturff, on May 17 and May 26.

Ridge was later criticized for timing his terrorism alerts so as to bolster the Bush reelection campaign, including one just after the Democratic Party's nominating convention in Boston. Ridge's ominous warnings took the media spotlight off newly nominated Democratic candidate John Kerry for several days. The former homeland security secretary responded to criticisms with the cynical and dishonest statement: "We don't do politics in the Department of Homeland Security."

The AP revealed that at the time Ridge uttered those words, his aides at the Department of Homeland Security were fighting to prevent the press from obtaining Ridge's appointment calendars, showing his meetings with Luntz and McInturff. They were finally handed over to AP three days after Ridge left office.

Ridge and his former aides claimed the meetings concerned how to make the media operations of the Department of Homeland Security more effective and were not related to the presidential campaign. The meetings took place during the low ebb of the Bush campaign in the polls—after the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, and amid media speculation that Ridge might be called in to replace Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld if Rumsfeld resigned.

Despite the obvious public relations purpose of Wednesday's appearance by intelligence officials before Congress, there was one significant admission whose implications were largely ignored by the media. Both CIA Director Goss and Vice Admiral Lowell E. Jacoby, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, conceded that the war in Iraq has strengthened Al Qaeda and associated Islamic terrorist groups by inflaming anti-American sentiment throughout the Middle East.

"Islamic extremists are exploiting the Iraqi conflict to recruit new anti-US jihadists," Goss told the Senate Intelligence Committee. "These jihadists who survive will leave Iraq experienced and focused on acts of urban terrorism," he added. "They represent a potential pool of contacts to build transnational terrorist cells, groups and networks in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and other countries."

Goss, a former Republican congressman, tried to draw

back from the obvious implications of this statement, declaring, "The Iraq conflict, while not a cause of extremism, has become a cause for extremists."

But DIA Director Jacoby dispensed with this political spin, admitting that the war in Iraq is fomenting anti-American sentiment. "Overwhelming majorities in Morocco, Jordan and Saudi Arabia believe the US has a negative policy toward the Arab world," he said.

He added that the Iraq insurgency has grown "in size and complexity over the past year," and he provided figures to back up this assessment. Iraqis opposed to the US occupation were mounting an average of 60 attacks per day, more than double the rate a year ago. On January 30, Iraq's election day, more than 300 attacks were carried out, despite the nationwide shutdown of transportation and the all-out mobilization of US troops and Iraqi police.

The statements by Goss and Jacoby constitute a crushing refutation of the claims that the Bush administration invaded and occupied Iraq in order to protect the American people from the threat of terrorism. The invasion, and the accompanying atrocities, murder and torture by American forces, have dramatically increased the hatred of America throughout the Middle East and in Muslim countries generally, boosting the public support and recruitment for reactionary terrorist groups like Al Qaeda.

The obvious conclusion—obvious to all but the American media, which dares not draw it—is that the US invasion of Iraq had nothing to do with fighting terrorism. It was ordered by the Bush administration, with the support of both Republicans and Democrats in Congress, in order to seize control of Iraq's oil wealth and gain for American imperialism a key strategic position in the Middle East, from which further acts of military aggression can be waged against other potential targets like Iran and Syria.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact