
The CIA Follies (Cont'd.)

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PICTURE A large and very important federal agency. It happens to conduct highly specialized work that requires close and attentive management. One of its basic assignments, for example, is to collect intelligence. Toward that end, it relies on twelve major stations from which it gathers data. The information thus assembled has to be reliable, meaning that those who collect it, and those who organize the collection process, must be both trustworthy and highly trained. And once the intelligence is gathered, it has to be analyzed. This process, too, requires a high degree of organization, and the men and women who engage in it must be top experts in their field. Their final product, hugely influential, and released to the outside world only at specified intervals, is by necessity wrapped in secrecy. Indeed, unauthorized disclosure is punishable by law.

A final peculiarity about this government body: even when its machinery is humming along quietly and efficiently, its leaders are themselves frequently in the dark about the actual state of play of the subject matter their organization is tasked with studying. In fact, according to a *New York Times* article, the institution's officials were recently per-

plexed by one particular set of data they had gathered; the indicators were "flashing a bewildering mix of green and red."

The organization in question? The Federal Reserve Board—a body whose work is in key respects strikingly similar to that of a much larger government agency. But the machinery of that latter organization—namely, the CIA—is not humming along quietly and efficiently. To the contrary, it has for some time been the subject of intense controversy, the latest round of which has erupted with the appearance of a new memoir, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years with the CIA*, by its former director George Tenet.*

LIKE THE FED chairman, the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) presides over an immense bureaucratic structure with a myriad subsidiary tasks. And like the Fed chairman, he is responsible for making sure that his agency collects all the information that is of such vital importance to the health of the nation. He is also responsible for making sure that this information is thoroughly and properly analyzed, that appropriate conclusions are drawn from it, and that these conclusions, even as they are kept secret, are conveyed to government policymakers in a timely fashion.

But there the similarities end. The Fed has a set of stable goals that can be specified with some de-

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gree of precision, the most critical of which is the regulation of the nation's money supply so as to keep prices stable. The CIA's goals are far more open-ended and diffuse. In the words of its mission statement, the agency is responsible for "[c]ollecting information that reveals the plans, intentions, and capabilities of our adversaries"; for "[p]roducing timely analysis that provides insight, warning, and opportunity to the President and decision-makers charged with protecting and advancing America's interests"; and for conducting "covert action at the direction of the President to preempt threats or achieve U.S. policy objectives."

Each of these tasks is a tall order in and of itself, and far more complex than maintaining a stable money supply. When the Fed is gathering data, it is working with open sources and knows exactly what indicators it is looking for and where to find them. When the CIA is gathering data, it is looking for material that is kept hidden by determined adversaries. Nor, in many cases, does the CIA know in advance exactly what it is seeking; it is often merely on the lookout for trouble, which for a superpower with global interests can come from an endless variety of locations and in an endless variety of forms. On one day, Kashmir may be the subject of urgent discussion; on the next, a puzzling shipment of aluminum pipes to a country known to be interested in building nuclear weapons; on a third, perhaps a coup d'état in a place like Venezuela. Sometimes the crises happen all at once.

Even if the CIA enjoyed the technological resources and fielded the professional expertise to track and understand all of its potential targets—a very big "if"—some of its analyses might still be invalid. In particular, bureaucratic tendencies can warp judgment. These tendencies include mirror imaging, the belief that one's adversaries operate much like oneself; group-think, the natural proclivity of an organization to embrace an internal consensus and to suppress dissenting views; and stove-piping, the inability of different departments to communicate vital information to one another. On some occasions, the information the CIA collects might be worse than worthless—as when the agency falls victim to deliberate deception, or when its own employees turn out to be working for America's adversaries as double-agents or moles.

Over the decades, the CIA has been prey to all of these bureaucratic deformations and espionage traps, and more. Intelligence may be vital to our security, but it is also a difficult game, one at which the United States, perhaps because it is a democracy averse to secrecy and skullduggery, has only oc-

asionally performed brilliantly or even well. George Tenet's tenure as director, chronicled in *At the Center of the Storm*, is a case in point.

For this book's account of his stormy seven-year term, Tenet has been hammered pitilessly by both Left and Right. In an article in *Mother Jones* entitled "George Tenet: Loser, Yes. Sycophant, Yes. Fall Guy? Yes," James Ridgeway thundered that the "slick, self-serving, and stunningly unrepentant Tenet should at best have been fired on September 12, 2001; at worst, he should be in jail. Instead, he has a presidential Medal of Freedom, a best-selling book, and an excuse for everything." Conservatives and neoconservatives have been no less open-handed with their own denunciations.

Is the contumely deserved? If, as I have suggested, gathering accurate intelligence is an almost insuperable task, the real question is not whether Tenet was a failure by some utopian standard but whether he was better or worse than the norm—and if worse, why. Answering that question requires a look back at the condition of the agency when Tenet came in, and the steps he took or failed to take to address its problems. Much of the evidence can be found in Tenet's book itself.

TENET BECAME CIA director under Bill Clinton in March 1997, replacing John Deutch, who had lost the confidence of his underlings. The President's first choice had been Anthony Lake, National Security Adviser in Clinton's first term; but Lake was forced to withdraw from consideration under withering congressional fire. Tenet, then number-two at the agency, was asked to step in. Clinton's decision, we learn from Tenet's memoir, was almost an afterthought: "I found it odd," he recalls, "that there was no job interview . . . no one asked me what I would do with the intelligence community should I get the job."

Not that Tenet himself was without a clue to the problems facing him. He had served as staff director of the Senate Select Intelligence Committee, as a deputy to Lake and later to Sandy Berger on Clinton's national-security council, and then, beginning in 1995, as second-in-command at the CIA under Deutch. But none of this experience would avail. Like Deutch before him, Tenet found himself in charge of an organization that was already in the midst of a profound crisis.

At the top, there had been high turnover—four DCI's in just the previous five years, and two more (Lake and Admiral Bobby Inman) whose nominations had been withdrawn. Among the rank and file, morale was setting postwar lows. The Aldrich

Ames spy case, which finally broke in 1994 and revealed more than a decade of breathtaking bureaucratic sloth—had set the agency back on its heels; nearly every operation the CIA had been running against the Soviet Union, its most important target, had been compromised. Far less well known, but equally stunning, was the Harold Nicholson case: for three years, the man running “the Farm”—the CIA’s training school in Virginia—had been working as a Russian agent. Until he was exposed in 1996 on the eve of Tenet’s appointment, Nicholson was still selling the Russians the files of CIA agents all over the world, including those of graduates of the school.

As if this were not bad enough, Clinton had drastically cut spending on intelligence as part of the “peace dividend” from the ending of the cold war. The CIA had had to slash its workforce by 25 percent. The year before Tenet became director, only a dozen or so new officers had been inducted. “[W]e learned later,” Tenet writes ruefully, “that while we were training a handful of case officers each year, al Qaeda was training literally thousands of potential terrorists at its camps in Afghanistan, the Sudan, and elsewhere.” The CIA of 1997, writes Tenet, putting the case mildly, was thus “not a well-oiled machine with an abundance of resources or an organization that ran with crisp precision”; were it otherwise, he modestly concedes, “plenty of other people would have been vying” for the job of director and he would have been unlikely to get it.

It was almost by accident, then, that Tenet came to serve at what would turn into one of the most tempestuous moments in American history. The tempests did not blow in all at once. As he recounts in an early chapter, the CIA director was initially absorbed by Clinton’s efforts to negotiate a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, a process into which the CIA, in a role new to it, had been injected as a broker between the two sides. After innumerable meetings involving various Arab potentates, and exceptionally frustrating sessions with Yasir Arafat, the effort came to naught.

In 1998, however, the focus abruptly changed with attacks on American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the onset of the era of al-Qaeda sponsored terrorism.* By the latter part of that year, writes Tenet, “I was aggressively seeking additional resources from our government to fight terrorism.” But his pleas yielded nothing: “For the most part I succeeded in annoying the administration for which I worked but did not loosen any significant purse strings.”

Some things were soon to change. When George

W. Bush won the 2000 presidential election, Tenet assumed that “the odds of my being gone . . . had increased.” But the President-elect soon invited him in for a chat, and, once again as if by an afterthought, Tenet was reappointed as DCI. Though he was to lose the cabinet rank he had enjoyed under Clinton, he came to enjoy “extraordinary access” to the new President, who made it plain that he wanted to be briefed every day. Such regular contact, Tenet notes, was “an incredible boon to a CIA director’s ability to do his job.”

IN RETROSPECT, the “boon” is not so obvious. For, nine months later, the U.S. was massively attacked on its own soil, a catastrophic event that neither the White House nor the CIA had been able to avert.

In close detail, Tenet narrates his attempts over the previous summer to impart the urgency of the danger the U.S. was facing from al Qaeda. A chapter looks back at the CIA’s failed effort to interdict Mohammed Atta and his gang as the clock was ticking on a plot that in the end could not be uncovered in time. Considering these lapses, and the missed opportunities, Tenet accepts a measure of institutional and personal blame. But most of the fault he directly and/or obliquely places elsewhere: on Condoleezza Rice, then serving as National Security Adviser, for neglecting to act on his warnings[†]; on “systemic shortcomings, in resources, people, and technology”; and on the lack of a “comprehensive, layered system of domestic protection.” In the final analysis, he concludes vaguely, “people made mistakes; every human interaction was far from where it needed to be.”

If September 11 was a searing experience of failure, the aftermath was no less dismal. True, there was Afghanistan, where the CIA would successfully put its own paramilitary forces on the ground, forging relationships with local chieftains and calling in air strikes on Taliban positions. But even as parts of the American government, in Tenet’s telling, were trying to roll up the Taliban and al Qaeda, the rest

* Actually, that era began with the first World Trade Center attack in 1993, but the FBI and CIA did not come to understand this until much later.

[†] By summer 2001, Tenet writes, the agency had developed firm intelligence that “[t]here will be a significant terrorist attack in the coming weeks or months.” This urgent warning had been orally provided to Rice, who then relegated it to a tertiary player in the bureaucracy where it languished unattended. Yet as the fuse was burning, Tenet and his deputies were presumably also briefing George W. Bush every morning, six days a week. If they had credible and alarming information, why was it not put directly in the hands of the top military commander, the President of the United States?

was gearing up for a war against Saddam Hussein. And here the CIA failed again, seemingly with even less justification than on 9/11.

If tracking a trans-national group like al Qaeda posed a uniquely difficult set of challenges, Iraq was a traditional nation-state that had long been in the CIA's sights as a major threat to American security. But the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) that the CIA produced on the eve of the war, the agency's most authoritative intelligence product, turned out to be grossly flawed in its treatment of Iraq's program to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Tenet argues that, in fact, the CIA had been careful to sprinkle the NIE with appropriate caveats like "we do not know," a phrase that "appears some thirty times across ninety pages" (as opposed to "three instances" of the words "we know"). But that is a trifling defense, as he himself admits. For in a summary section of the document labeled "Key Judgments," the agency's language was not nearly so measured; to the contrary, it was "too assertive. . . . The nuance was lost."

In this connection, Tenet devotes an entire chapter to the two most famous words of his directorship: "slam-dunk." When he uttered these words to President Bush in a White House meeting on the eve of the Iraq war, he claims, he was talking *not* about the evidence that Iraq actually had WMD's, but merely about the ease with which a public case to that effect could be advanced. The whole episode rankles him to this day. He relates that when the "slam-dunk" story first came out in Bob Woodward's 2004 book, *Plan of Attack*, he called Andy Card, the White House chief of staff whom he suspected of being involved in passing on the damaging quotation. "Yes," he says he told Card,

we wrote a National Intelligence Estimate, we expressed our confidence levels . . . we were fairly strident about the fact that we believed Saddam had weapons of mass destruction. But what you guys have gone and done is made me look stupid. For someone in the administration to now hang this around my neck is about the most despicable thing I have ever seen in my life.

A few weeks later, he resigned.

AS HIS accounts of 9/11 and of the WMD fiasco make plain, Tenet is willing at least partially to acknowledge mistakes. At many junctures in his memoir, he is also disarmingly self-deprecating, most poignantly when, after his tumultuous term was over, he was informed that President Bush

wanted to honor him with the Medal of Freedom, our country's highest civilian commendation:

I was not at all sure I wanted to accept. We had not found weapons of mass destruction and postwar Iraq hadn't been the cakewalk that some had suggested it would be.

Insofar as Tenet offers a justification for these admitted failures, it is that the roles in which he served—as head of the intelligence community, director of the CIA, and the president's principal intelligence adviser—"were too much for any one person." Clearly there is something to that. Whatever one's view of the CIA's shortcomings and setbacks during the Tenet years, one cannot put down his book without a feeling of sympathy for him and for the men and women around him who labored to protect us. They cannot be accused of sitting on the sidelines.

But of course one cannot leave things at that. For there are inescapable problems with Tenet's account, with Tenet himself, and with the agency that he managed.

Intelligence is an art or trade that requires an unusual cast of mind. Apart from the expected qualities that make for success in any important career, running an intelligence agency demands a measure of erudition combined with a scrupulous care for facts and the capacity to distinguish true information from false. But the interpretation and provision of intelligence also depend vitally upon the ability to place assembled facts in a broader historical context, and then, by drawing on a reservoir of knowledge and intuition, to understand and/or imagine their potential import.

No DCI has ever fully measured up to this ideal, but there have been degrees of falling short. Tenet clearly has many skills—as a get-along, go-along guy, as a smooth talker, as a bureaucratic operator, and as a manager. But by the evidence offered in his own book, he is no student of history, or for that matter of human character. This is not just a matter of his restricted range of cultural reference, drawn less from the classics than from sporting events, or from TV ("It was like I was Tom Cruise jumping on Oprah Winfrey's couch"), or from pop psychology. Thus, of the various Arab leaders with whom he met, Saudi Arabia's then-Crown Prince Abdullah struck Tenet as not only "incredibly impressive" but as one who "never allowed himself to forget his roots," while Egypt's Hosni Mubarak had "a tremendous amount of wisdom," and with Jordan's King Hussein "I always felt that I was in the presence of wisdom and history."

Nor, although the CIA director is supposed to eschew policymaking, is it surprising that to the extent Tenet does express any policy views, they are almost always the blandest pap imaginable, fully in synch with establishment pieties. About America's low standing in the Middle East, he writes:

Commentators have talked about American arrogance and incompetence as the cause for this. Whatever the reason, we should stop acting as if it were irreversible. A bold new framework for security, stability, and the growth of reform in the Middle East is required, with the people of the region leading the effort and the United States serving as their most ardent and forceful supporter.

And so forth.

As leader of the CIA, Tenet fought for more resources, more manpower, and better technology. But he never began to address the fundamental problems of the agency either in the age of Clinton or in the age of Bush. Indeed, he was, or became, part of the problem himself. At a juncture of history when the agency's real, crying need was to penetrate, or at a minimum to study closely the thinking of, adversaries like Iran or North Korea or Iraq—three countries where its coverage and understanding had been chronically inadequate—he now permits himself to boast that he “made it a priority to enhance the agency's record on diversity” and to have “its workforce reflect a broad cross-section of our population.” In other words, he saw it as the CIA's most pressing “business need” (his term) to turn its affirmative-action program, at least, into a truly “well-oiled machine”—albeit one running inside a government bureaucracy now indistinguishable from any other.

TENET'S obtuseness on this narrow but noteworthy point goes hand in hand with a fundamental incoherence on the subject of national security. On the opening page of the book, setting the stage for much that is to come, he tells us how he went to the White House on the day after September 11, 2001, full of foreboding about the possibility of a “multi-pronged assault” on the United States. As he was entering, he writes, he encountered Richard Perle, a member of the Pentagon's Defense Board and “one of the godfathers of the neoconservative movement.” As the two crossed paths,

we made eye contact and nodded. I had just reached the door myself when Perle turned to me and said, “Iraq has to pay a price for what happened yesterday. They bear responsibility.”

Tenet's response: “I was stunned but said nothing.”

This opening sequence with Perle is just the starting point of a theme that winds its way across the book, according to which various American neoconservatives, “fixated” on or “obsessed” with Iraq, are said by Tenet to have drawn non-existent links between al Qaeda and Baghdad in order to justify a war against Saddam Hussein. But in fact, as has been widely noted, Richard Perle was stranded in Paris on September 12 when the White House conversation with Tenet allegedly took place. Although Tenet has subsequently acknowledged his error in dating, he has tried to buttress the substance of his charge by citing comments Perle made to Robert Novak on September 17 and a September 20 letter to the President signed by Perle and 40 others—in both of which, he says, Perle attributed direct responsibility for September 11 to Saddam Hussein.

Neither of these sustain Tenet's charge. Both make a different point: that, in the words of the September 20 letter, “any strategy aiming at the eradication of terrorism and its sponsors must include a determined effort to remove Saddam Hussein from power.” This naturally raises the question of how Tenet himself did, and does, understand the ties between al Qaeda and Iraq. Or, to put it differently: were the neoconservatives irrationally “obsessed” with the issue, or was this murky but vitally important subject one that the CIA had neglected?

In his memoir, Tenet does acknowledge Saddam Hussein's deep involvement with terrorism:

[T]here was no doubt that Saddam was making large donations to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers and was known to be harboring several prominent terrorists, including Abu Nidal, a ruthless killer responsible for attacks on El Al ticket counters in Rome and Vienna in 1985, resulting in 18 deaths and injury to 120 people. Saddam also gave refuge to one of the individuals still being sought for the first World Trade Center bombing.

In a passage that speaks volumes, Tenet then also concedes that the CIA “had devoted little analytic attention to [this issue] prior to September 11,” and was therefore “not initially prepared for the intense focus that the administration put on the Iraq-al Qaeda relationship.” Instead, he offers in apparent extenuation, the agency had been “consumed with the very hot war with Sunni extremists all over the world.”

This is confounding. A high proportion of those Sunni extremists were Palestinian suicide bombers whose families Saddam Hussein was rewarding.

Abu Nidal himself, notwithstanding the secular ideology he came to embrace, was a Sunni. The individuals who carried out the first World Trade Center bombing, one of whom Saddam was sheltering, had been Sunni extremists. Not only were they Sunnis; they were the germ of the al-Qaeda organization. Yet Tenet, as if these dots could not be readily connected, blithely asserts that the CIA, “consumed” with “a very hot war with Sunni extremists all over the world,” did not find it worthwhile to study the relationship with Iraq. Incoherence seldom gets more incoherent than this.

It was only after a great deal of congressional and administration prodding that, nearly a year after September 11, the CIA finally began to look seriously at Iraq’s links to al Qaeda. In his memoir, Tenet now downplays what it found, claiming that the “intelligence did not show Iraq and al Qaeda had ever moved beyond seeking ways to take advantage of each other” and that “[w]e were aware of no evidence of Baghdad’s having ‘authority, direction, and control’ of al-Qaeda operations.”

HERE INCOHERENCE moves in the direction of outright contradiction or, worse, of evasiveness. For the issue is not one of authority, direction, and control. Here was a regime that had in recent years invaded Kuwait, waged war against Saudi Arabia and Israel by hurling Scud missiles at them, used weapons of mass destruction against Iran and its own citizens, and had, on the eve of the first Gulf war, come close to developing nuclear weapons.

The question facing American policymakers was therefore exactly as President Bush put it in his June 2002 address to the graduating class of West Point. In the aftermath of September 11, “[c]ontainment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies.” Did the CIA judge it a likelihood or even a possibility that Saddam Hussein would provide such weapons to terrorist allies, including al Qaeda?

Though Tenet disingenuously omits mentioning it in his memoirs, in October 2002, six months before the American invasion of Iraq, he wrote a letter to Bob Graham, the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. It stated (emphasis added throughout):

We have solid reporting of senior level contacts between Iraq and al Qaeda going back a decade.

Credible information indicates that Iraq and al Qaeda have discussed safe haven and recip-

rocal non-aggression. Since Operation Enduring Freedom [the military operations that commenced shortly after September 11, 2001], we have solid evidence of the presence in Iraq of al-Qaeda members, including some that have been in Baghdad.

We have credible reporting that *al-Qaeda leaders sought contacts in Iraq who could help them acquire WMD capabilities. The reporting also stated that Iraq has provided training to al-Qaeda members in the areas of poisons and gases and making conventional bombs.*

Iraq’s increasing support to extremist Palestinians, coupled with growing indications of a relationship with al Qaeda, suggest that *Baghdad’s links to terrorists will increase*, even absent U.S. military action.

Quite apart from any question of direct Iraqi complicity in the events of September 11, this should have been enough to raise serious alarm in the nation’s intelligence agency, and indeed to have added a compelling article to the warrant for military action against Saddam even without an iron-clad assessment of his nuclear program. Yet, in a blatant manipulation of the historical record, Tenet, in a much-quoted passage of his memoir, writes that the various possible reasons for going to war were never seriously debated by the administration:

In none of the meetings can anyone remember a discussion of the central question. Was it wise to go to war? Was it the right thing to do? The agenda focused solely on what actions would need to be taken if a decision to attack were later made.

In other words, having supplied the administration with building blocks of the case for war, Tenet now acts as if none ever existed.

One can understand why: among those building blocks, the most shoddily constructed was the CIA’s erroneous finding regarding the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Tenet’s ex-post-facto explanation for this particular error is that, “[i]n many ways, we were prisoners of our history. . . . Inevitably, the judgments were influenced by our *underestimation* [emphasis added] of Iraq’s progress on nuclear weapons in the late 1980’s—a mistake no one wanted to repeat.”

He is right about that. His analysts were prisoners of the past, their fingers burned by opposite misjudgments made by the CIA prior to the first Gulf war. But that hardly excuses him or the agency he headed a decade later for failing to perform its assigned job of assembling facts and laying

out what it knew of them to be true, and, more crucially, what it did not know.

Laurence Silberman, the federal judge whom President Bush asked to investigate the CIA's pre-war performance, has put the issue well: "It would have been eminently justifiable [for the CIA] to have told the President and the Congress that it was *likely* that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction based on his past use, insufficient indications of destruction [of previously existing stocks], and his deceptive behavior" (emphasis added). Instead, piling uncertainty on top of guess, and conjecture on top of blunder, the CIA pronounced itself highly confident in its appraisal.

When Colin Powell addressed the United Nations on the eve of the war, Tenet stood at the Secretary of State's side as he said: "Every statement I make today is backed up by sources, solid sources. These are not assertions. What we are giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence." In fact, almost every point in his speech was based on less than solid intelligence. The CIA led the United States to tie its policy, and its diplomacy, to unfactual facts and misplaced expectations, with ramifications that still inflame the debate over our intentions and our conduct.

IN APPRAISING the sorry record of the CIA during George Tenet's tenure as director it must be recalled that the agency has had its share of previous intelligence failures. The CIA was established in 1947 in large measure to avoid another surprise attack like the one the U.S. had suffered on December 7, 1941 at Pearl Harbor. But only three years after its founding, the fledgling agency missed the outbreak of the Korean war. It then failed to understand that the Chinese would come to the aid of the North Koreans if American forces crossed the Yalu river. It missed the outbreak of the Suez war in 1956. In September 1962, the CIA issued an NIE which stated that the "Soviets would not introduce offensive missiles in Cuba"; in short order, the USSR did precisely that. In 1968 it failed to foresee the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. It gave Richard Nixon scant warning of the Egyptian intention to go to war in October 1973. It did not inform Jimmy Carter that the Soviet Union would invade Afghanistan in 1979. This is only a partial list.

September 11 and the Iraq-WMD fiasco thus come at the long end of an extensive chain. Still, in the lengthy history of American intelligence fail-

ures, they are arguably the most damaging: 9/11 because of its sheer human and material cost; the Iraq-WMD fiasco, not only because it contributed to a calculus for war that might have looked different if the equation did not contain the coefficient of a mushroom cloud, but also because of the stain it has left on American credibility at a moment when the integrity of our word is critically important.

Not to be overlooked is the damage done to the essential mission of intelligence itself. In an age of weapons of mass destruction, of an inchoate global suicide cult composed of Hizballah, Hamas, al Qaeda, and a host of other Islamic groupings, of a fanatical Islamist regime in power in Tehran sitting astride the crossroads of Asia and the Middle East, and manifold other short- and long-term challenges to our security, we are now in a position that even when the CIA gets things right, its findings are likely to be greeted with skepticism if not outright dismissal. As a consequence of its failures to give warning when warning was needed, and of its giving warning when warning was not needed, it has become the intelligence agency that cried wolf and is now treated as such.

Efforts at reform, hurriedly conceived and implemented after 9/11, have stripped the CIA of some of its responsibilities and powers. The new position of Director of National Intelligence (DNI), now occupied by General Michael Hayden, is responsible, as the CIA director formerly was, for coordinating the work of the sixteen agencies that comprise the intelligence community and also for briefing the President. The DNI already has a staff of more than 1,000 people and an annual budget of more than \$1 billion. But grafting this new layer of bureaucracy on top of the existing structure has done little or nothing to address the deep organizational and cultural problems of the CIA itself.

A radical and imaginative reconception of the agency thus remains an urgent necessity. The form this reconception should take is wide open for informed debate. As was the case during World War II and the glory days of the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's precursor, there can be little doubt that many of America's best minds and hardest spirits would rush to join an effective organization engaged in derring-do against our implacable adversaries. But the longer things stay roughly as they are, with the agency a sclerotic bureaucracy mired in mediocrity, the more it will continue to attract only those who, like George Tenet himself, get their jobs because no one else wants them.