

Posted on Thu, Dec. 01, 2005

White House resisted requests for risk analysis, ex-Senator says

By Frank Davies
KNIGHT RIDDER

WASHINGTON - In the months before the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration resisted pleas from senators to assess the risks of a war, especially the prospect of Iraqi resistance, and failed to share with senators key information about weaknesses in the case for war, former Sen. Bob Graham, D-Fla., charged Wednesday.

Graham, who was the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee in the run-up to the Iraq war, said that in September 2002, six months before U.S. forces invaded, he asked then-CIA Director George Tenet to analyze the "readiness and willingness" of Iraqis to resist the American presence. He also asked Tenet to look beyond the removal of Saddam Hussein, he said.

"They ignored our requests. To the administration, it was always going to be Paris in 1944: We would be embraced, we'd go home and the Iraqi people would be happy," said Graham, who's teaching at Harvard University.

As a result, "there was no effort to assess a range of possibilities, including an insurgency," he said.

In a major speech Wednesday, President Bush defended the decision to go to war and the need for U.S. forces to stay in Iraq "to assure victory." He also described the fight against the insurgency as "the central front" in the war on terrorism.

Graham said the effort to link Iraqi insurgents to global terrorism ignored the fact that few of the insurgents were foreigners and paralleled the administration's efforts in 2002 to suggest links among Iraq, al Qaida and the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks that didn't exist.

His comments also rebutted assertions by the administration that the Senate had access to the same intelligence regarding Iraq that guided Bush's decisions.

The National Journal reported last week that the CIA told Bush during his daily briefing 10 days after the Sept. 11 attacks that there was no link to Iraq, a finding that was repeated later in a longer CIA report.

Graham said that information was never passed to the Senate Intelligence Committee.

He said the administration also withheld from the Senate warnings from German intelligence that an Iraqi defector, code-named Curveball, was untrustworthy. Curveball was the source for administration allegations that then-Secretary of State Colin Powell made before the U.N. Security Council that Saddam had built mobile germ facilities in Iraq. American forces never found such laboratories in Iraq.

"We're seeing more evidence all the time that they were manipulating the intelligence, selecting what they wanted to hear and getting that on the front page, and trashing everything else," Graham said.

The White House did not respond directly to Graham's assertions. A senior administration official who asked not be further identified said only that "CIA records confirm 30 separate briefings on Iraq-related intelligence were given to members of Congress or their staff between October 2002 and March 2003." The CIA had no comment Wednesday.

© 2005 ContraCostaTimes.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.contracostatimes.com>