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Spy Agencies Warned of Iraq Resistance

By Walter Pincus
Washington Post Staff Writer
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U.S. intelligence agencies warned Bush administration policymakers before the war in Iraq that there would be significant armed opposition to a U.S.-led occupation, according to administration and congressional sources familiar with the reports.

Although general in nature, the sources said, the intelligence agencies' concerns about the degree of resistance U.S. forces would encounter have proved broadly accurate in the months since the ouster of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and his inner circle.

Among the threats outlined in the intelligence agencies' reporting was that "Iraqis probably would resort to obstruction, resistance and armed opposition if they perceived attempts to keep them dependent on the U.S. and the West," one senior congressional aide said. The general tenor of the reports, according to a senior administration official familiar with the intelligence, was that the postwar period would be more "problematic" than the war to overthrow Hussein.

As U.S. military casualties mount and resistance forces wage a campaign of targeted bombings in Iraq, some administration officials have begun to fault the CIA and other intelligence agencies for being overly optimistic and failing to anticipate such widespread and sustained opposition to a U.S. occupation. But several administration and congressional sources interviewed for this article said the opposite occurred. They said senior policymakers at the White House, Pentagon and elsewhere received classified analyses before the war warning about the dangers of the postwar period.

"Intelligence reports told them at some length about possibilities for unpleasantness," said a senior administration official, who like others spoke on condition of anonymity. "The reports were written, but we don't know if they were read."

In the run-up to the U.S.-led invasion, senior Pentagon officials were privately optimistic about postwar Iraq, and their assessment shaped calculations about the size of the occupation force that would be required and how long it would have to be there, as well as the overall cost of the U.S. management of Iraq after the fall of the Hussein government.

The more pessimistic view generally remained submerged, but the controversy did occasionally break into the open, most notably when then-Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric K. Shinseki told Congress in February that several hundred thousand occupation troops would be needed. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz rejected his estimate at the time as "wildly off the mark."

Although the Pentagon has said it has no plans to increase the number of U.S. forces in Iraq -- now nearly 130,000 -- the Bush administration has launched a new diplomatic campaign to win foreign pledges of more troops to help stabilize the country.

Before the war, the CIA passed on intelligence that some members of Hussein's Republican Guard military units and his Baathist Party had plans to carry on resistance after the war, according to one senior intelligence official. "They had been given instructions should the regime fall," the official said.

U.S. military and civilian leaders in Iraq have said they believe the daily attacks against U.S. forces are being carried out by Hussein loyalists.

CIA analysts last summer also expressed concerns that the "chaos after war would turn [Iraq] into a laboratory for terrorists," according to another former intelligence analyst. President Bush picked up on this theme in his nationally televised speech Sunday night, saying Iraq is attracting international terrorists and is now the "central front" in the war on terrorism.

There is not universal agreement about the clarity of the prewar intelligence that was forwarded by the CIA and its counterpart agencies at the Pentagon and State Department. Some administration officials said the intelligence was murkier than others now depict it.

"The possibility there would be armed opposition was based on inductive reasoning," one administration official said of reports from the Defense Intelligence Agency. "The analysts were guessing." Another congressional aide said the intelligence reports he had seen "were not very specific and had a range of outcomes and caveats depending on how the war would go."

However, the prevailing view within intelligence agencies, including the DIA, was that there would be resistance. Officials said this explained the thinking behind Shinseki's congressional testimony earlier this year. A DIA memo last fall said postwar Iraq would be "highly complex and driven by political and religious factions," according to one former Pentagon analyst. "They [Defense Intelligence Agency analysts] said it would be hard to keep the lid on and to keep the various areas of the country from falling apart."

Former Army secretary Thomas E. White said that during discussions he had in the Pentagon before the war, he was told "the situation once the war was over would be contentious." Although White said he did not see intelligence on postwar Iraq first hand, it was discussed in meetings with Shinseki, who said there were reports that "you could expect a major influx of Islamic fighters."

It was for those reasons, White said in a telephone interview, that Shinseki saw the need "to size the postwar force bigger than the wartime force."

Speaking of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, White said, "Their view of the intelligence was much different. Their notion of it was resistance would run away as the few remaining Saddam loyalists were hunted down."

White said on NBC's "Today" show Thursday that the postwar planning assumptions approved by senior Pentagon civilians were based on U.S. troops being "greeted in the streets by a euphoric public, glad of being rid of Saddam Hussein, and consequently we could very rapidly draw down the force structure."

White, who resigned his Army post in April, has published a new book sharply critical of the administration's Iraq policy.

Pentagon spokesmen did not immediately reply to telephone questions about the prewar intelligence.

A White House official said the administration is not surprised by the level of resistance U.S. forces are encountering. "It does not come as a surprise that some of the bitter fanatics continue to fight against a foregone conclusion and that foreign terrorists would seek to hold back progress made in Iraq over the last five months," the official said.

Several senior policymakers, however, have said recently that they were not totally prepared for what has occurred. On Sunday, for example, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice was asked on CNN's "Late Edition" if there could have been better planning for the postwar period. She responded, "Obviously, there were things that were not foreseen. They have now -- [and] are now being addressed."

Before the war, intelligence analysts also questioned whether the administration would be able to achieve its goal of rapidly introducing democracy in Iraq, according to administration and congressional officials. Intelligence agencies reported that "any chance of achieving democracy was predicated on long-term active U.S. and Western military, political and economic involvement with the country," one administration official said.

On Feb. 26, the day Bush said in a speech that bringing democracy to Iraq would help democratize other Arab countries, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research completed a classified analysis that dismissed the idea.

The State Department analysis reportedly stated that "liberal democracy would be difficult to achieve" in Iraq and that "electoral democracy, were it to emerge, could well be subject to exploitation by anti-American elements."

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