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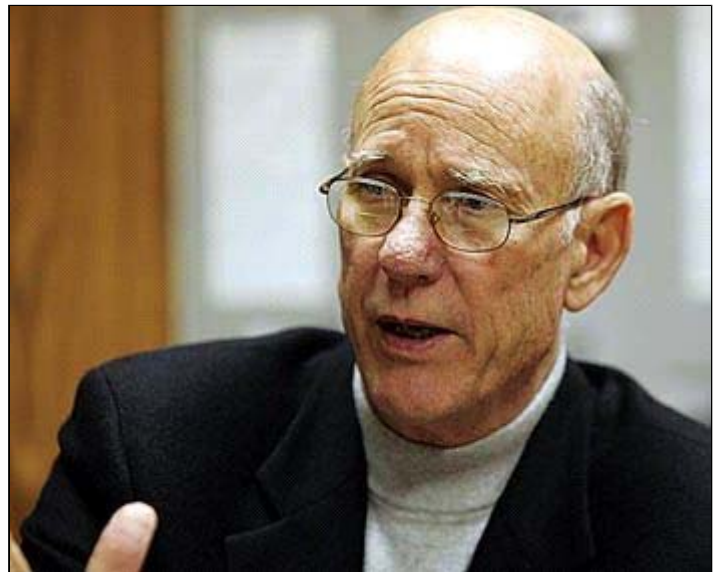
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Senate Intelligence chairman quietly 'fixed' intelligence, and diverted blame from White House over Iraq

Larisa Alexandrovna

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush issued an order to the Central Intelligence Agency, Department of Defense, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the State Department, and his cabinet members that severely curtailed intelligence oversight by restricting classified information to just eight members of Congress.



"The only Members of Congress whom you or your expressly designated officers may brief regarding classified or sensitive law enforcement information," he writes, "are the Speaker of the House, the House Minority Leader, the Senate Majority and Minority Leaders, and the Chairs and Ranking Members of the Intelligence



Committees in the House and Senate."

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The order is aimed at protecting "military security" and "sensitive law enforcement."

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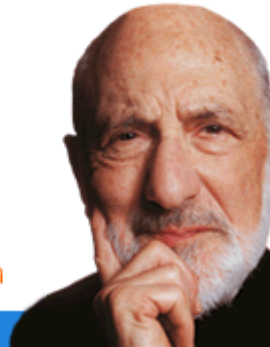
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But what was said to be an effort to protect the United States became a tool by which the Republican chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee Pat Roberts (R-KS) ensured there was no serious investigation into how the administration fixed the intelligence that took the United States to war in Iraq or the fabricated documents used as evidence to do so.

**Timeline:
How
Roberts
helped fix
pre-war
intelligence**

Coupled with limited access to intelligence documents, **RAW STORY** has found that Roberts and a handful of other strategically-placed Washington players stymied all questions into pre-war intelligence on Iraq and post-invasion cover-ups, including the outing of a CIA covert agent, by using targeted leaks and artfully deflecting blame from the White House.

The Senate and House intelligence committees were created in the 1970s after a series of congressional investigations found that the CIA had acted like a "rogue elephant" carrying out illegal covert action abroad.

By the late 1990s, members of the committees and their staffs were seeing more than 2,200 CIA reports and receiving more than 1,200 substantive briefings from

agency officials each year to assist them in their role of providing proper oversight.

But the little-reported 2001 Bush directive changed that, ensuring that only two members of each committee received full briefings on intelligence operations, and preventing committee staffs from carrying out meaningful research.

Tom Reynolds, spokesman for the ranking Democrat on the House Select Committee on Intelligence, Jane Harman (D-CA), downplayed the significance of the order, saying members continued to have access. He acknowledged, however, that the "gang of eight" had higher-level clearances.

The spokesman for the Senate Intelligence Committee deferred comment to the White House; the White House did not return requests for comment.

At the time of the order, Rep. Porter Goss (R-FL) chaired the House Intelligence Committee. His counterpart in the Senate was Sen. Bob Graham (D-FL), whom Sen. Roberts replaced in 2003.

Chairman Pat Roberts

In a sense, the pre-invasion of Iraq and the post-invasion intelligence blame game can be seen through the lens of a chess game, with the pieces in place well before any troops set foot on the ground.

Roberts appears to become an extension of the White House in selling the war beginning in January 2003. That month, he is appointed to chair the Senate Intelligence Committee, picking up one of the eight coveted clearances.

By the end of the month, Roberts is convinced that Saddam is harboring both al Qaeda and weapons of mass destruction. Much of what convinces Roberts is a series of briefings organized by then-Deputy National Security Advisor, Stephen Hadley. Hadley led a White House team to help sift through CIA intelligence, filtering information for Congressional briefings.

Roberts embraces a larger pro-war role. His voice is joined by Vice President Dick Cheney and then-National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice.

Their calls align with President Bush in his State of the Union address, in which he declares, "The British Government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

Shortly thereafter, the Administration hits a snag: Documents alleging Iraq's intention to reconstitute its nuclear program by purchasing uranium from Niger are publicly acknowledged to be forgeries.

Background on the Niger forgeries

The Administration asserts that they didn't hear the documents were forgeries until after the speech.

But the U.S Embassy in Rome has already had the Niger forgeries for three months.

British intelligence say they passed the documents to Vice President Dick Cheney's office in early 2002. The Vice President subsequently makes several visits to the CIA with "questions" about recent Niger to Iraq uranium sales.

The International Atomic Energy Agency questions the Niger claim in December after the National Security Agency issues a fact sheet on Iraq's weapons omissions to the UN Security Council. As NSA deputy, Hadley may have already had the documents as well.

The IAEA, however, is not given the documents until the end of February 2003, a year after the U.S. first acquires them. Once acquired, they determine the documents are fakes within several hours.

John Pike, director of the Washington military watchdog GlobalSecurity.org, says the Administration's line on the Niger documents raises questions.

"The thing that was so embarrassing about the episode was not simply that the documents were forgeries, but that they were clumsy forgeries, as was so quickly determined by

the IAEA," he told [RAW STORY](#). "It is one thing to be taken in, but to be so easily taken in, suggested either bewildering incompetence or intentional deception, or possibly both."

Roberts blocks Niger questions

Whether Roberts actually saw the Niger forgeries during Hadley's briefings is unclear. What is clear is that by March of 2003, the Intelligence chairman was in a position to head off any serious investigation into concerns raised by Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), the committee's ranking Democrat and vice-chair.

Rockefeller has grave concerns about deceptive intelligence, so serious that he pens a formal letter to FBI director Robert Mueller.

Rockefeller urges Mueller to investigate the Niger forgeries as part of what he feared to be "...a larger deception campaign aimed at manipulating public opinion and foreign policy regarding Iraq," writes the *New Yorker's* Seymour Hersh.

Roberts declines to sign the Rockefeller letter, seeing the involvement of the FBI as inappropriate. As a result, Rockefeller's letter falls on deaf ears.

On July 11, 2003, faced with public pressure to investigate the Niger forgeries, Roberts blames the CIA and defends the White House.

"Sen. Rockefeller and I are committed to continue our close examination of all of the issues surrounding the Niger documents," the Kansas senator declares. "So far, I am very disturbed by what appears to be extremely sloppy handling of the issue from the outset by the CIA."

More astonishing is that CIA spokesman William Harlow stated that the agency had not obtained the Niger documents until "after the President's State of the Union speech and after the congressional briefings, and therefore had been unable to evaluate them."

Roberts blocks WMD questions

Roberts also figures prominently in warding off bipartisan efforts to investigate WMD in Iraq - the reason given by the Bush administration for going to war.

As pressure heats up, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee John Warner (R-VA) says he would support joint hearings with Roberts on "the issue" and that Roberts "had been receptive to the idea."

That sentiment changes, however, after Roberts meets with Senate GOP leadership and Vice President Dick Cheney. The Kansas senator then says talk of hearings is "premature."

Roberts soon announces he will hold a closed-door review of intelligence documentation and the lead-up to war. He begins to spin questions and skeptics of the war as politically motivated.

"I will not allow the committee to be politicized or to be used as an unwitting tool for any political strategist," he says.

[Page Two : Using leaks and smears, Roberts shifts blame to Democrats and CIA](#)

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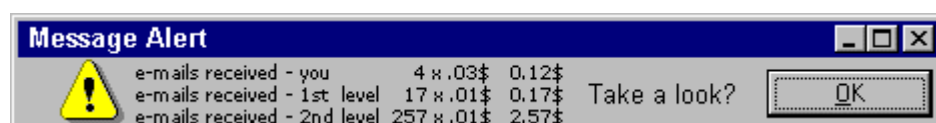
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