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Opinion

Vindicating Larry Franklin

By ELI LAKE
 January 16, 2007

When [President Bush](#) announced the new [Iraq](#) strategy Wednesday evening, acknowledging that [Iran](#) was effectively at war with us in Iraq by supplying terrorists with advanced improvised explosives, my thoughts turned to Lawrence Franklin.

Nearly a year ago, Judge T.S. Ellis III, sentenced this Pentagon Iran analyst to almost 13 years in a federal prison after he pleaded guilty to discussing classified information with two former lobbyists from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. The case, which is thus far the Bush administration's only successful anti-leaking prosecution, illustrates the strategic confusion of our national security bureaucracy in a time of war.

Franklin, it turns out, was trying — unconventionally — to influence a debate in the administration in 2003 over a national security policy directive regarding Iran. He provided Aipac's Iran specialists, Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman, with his own list of specific instances of how Iran was sending teams from its Quds Force to sow terror, kill American soldiers, and pose a threat to Israeli operatives in northern Iraq. He hoped his list could find its way to the National Security Council, through the two lobbyists, to counter the intelligence from other channels suggesting that Iran had an interest in stabilizing Iraq.

Franklin was not a typical bureaucrat. He was dogged in his view of the Iranian threat, and he was also not averse to taking risks that would earn him the enmity of powerful foes. He risked incurring the enmity of the CIA by meeting with sources of Manucher Ghorbanifar, an Iran-Contra era figure, and, in December 2001, met with the man's sources in [Rome](#). At the meeting, according to Franklin's friend [Michael Ledeen](#), Franklin was told about hunter-killer teams operating against coalition forces in western [Afghanistan](#). He delivered the intelligence personally to special forces command that month in [Kabul](#), and, according to Mr. Ledeen, the intelligence was correct.

For his troubles, Franklin got caught up in the prosecution of two Aipac officials and has been libeled by some in the Web fringes as a spy for [Israel](#). One of the commanders who worked closely with Franklin, General Mulholland, wrote a letter to the court last year, praising the former analyst's patriotism and diligence.

What's interesting is why Franklin took such desperate measures to make the president aware that the leading sponsor of terrorism in the world was sponsoring terrorists in a post-[Saddam Iraq](#). Messrs. Weissman and Rosen were leading proponents in the 1990s of the view that Iran's sponsorship of international terrorism could be modified through diplomatic sticks and carrots — the inverse of Franklin's view that the Islamic Republic was genetically predisposed to use terrorism as statecraft.

One reason was that in 2002, the Bush administration, as part of its efforts to coordinate the Iraqi opposition, was resigned to working with Iran's proxies, the Supreme Council for the [Islamic Revolution in Iraq](#) and the Dawa party. This decision locked [America](#) into an impossible position. Mr. Bush was betting that Iran would have an interest in stabilizing Iraq because the groups closest to Iran would be brought into the government to replace Saddam Hussein. The kind of analysis Franklin was providing would scuttle a policy built around the presumption that Iran shared our interests in Iraq.

That presumption has cost the [White House](#) a good part of its strategic coherence. On the one hand, the president has at times acknowledged the malicious role the Iranians play in Iran, he has lent his voice at times to the struggle of Iranian democrats, and he has authorized paltry sums of cash for meetings about the Iranian opposition. On the other hand, Secretary Rice in 2005 ordered our envoy in [Baghdad](#), [Ambassador Khalilzad](#), to open a direct channel with his Iranian counterpart and placed hopes for modifying Iranian behavior in a [United Nations Security Council](#) resolution. America has pledged up to now

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to respond to the threat Iran poses in Baghdad by talking to bureaucrats in [Geneva](#), [Paris](#), and [London](#). Then last month, we changed our strategy. Suddenly America is responding to the Iranian threat in Iraq by going after Iran's outposts and missions. It may be too late. As the National Security Council's power point summary of the new strategy says, Iran has been "burrowing" its agents deep inside the new Iraqi government. Iran has proven that it is not averse to working with the Sunni car bombers who kill Shiites and with the Shiite militias who kill Sunnis. Iran's Quds Force turns out to be playing both sides of the Iraqi civil war.

This news has been ignored and disbelieved by those lawmakers advocating a "diplomatic surge." But it would not likely come as a surprise to Franklin, a Persian speaker who now parks cars and works odd jobs, as he awaits final word on the jail sentence he earned for trying to get word of all this to a president who failed to grasp what Franklin was trying to tell him.

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