

The paper of David Habbakuk contains stunning points. One of the underlying ones seems to be that even our intellectual mistakes are due in part to some corruption of the moral element in us. In fact, the more human beings are lacking in imagination, the more incapable they are of any profound kind of self-analysis, the more self-righteous they are the more it is likely that they will be the thick-skinned who are more sure of being right than anyone else.

Intelligence is a search for facts that will improve the quality of the decisions our policy makers must make. Of course, the search for what the facts mean can only take place after we have done the hard work of studying the fullest scope of the existing data and only then trying to interpret correctly what they mean.

The neocon group did not do this. They went forth, not to find the facts, but to build a case for their preordained conclusions. That is why their search entailed selecting only those facts or assumptions that would support those conclusions. The neocon's feud with the CIA and other U.S. intelligence agencies that did not agree with them reminds me of Hazlitt's description of the Quakers: The neocons, also "labored diligently and with great success to exclude all ideas from their minds which they might have in common with other people...they retain a virgin purity of understanding and keep up a perpetual quarantine against the infection of other people's vices (or one might add, views.) They take their notions on trust from one generation to another."

The tragedy of pre-war intelligence was that it was that this tragedy was so willfully entered into. The senior officials of the first Bush administration would tolerate around them only people who were in tune with their views and predilections. People who presented rebutting evidence were not seen as simply making an honest mistake or having different views but rather as embodying a perverse will that was ignoring truth out of pride and spiteful wickedness. This is hardly the path to humility before the facts that is part of the intellectual equipment of the good intelligence analyst.

In terms of tradecraft, the administration reliance on Ahmed Chalabi, branded since the mid 1990s by the CIA as a fabricator, was simply one way of inviting certain disaster. When Douglas Feith, the no. 3 man at the Pentagon set up a two-man cell tasked with establishing ties between al Qaida and Saddam and developing evidence that Saddam was developing nuclear weapons, the men he picked were not intelligence professionals, and the method of analysis they adopted was to submerge themselves in uncorroborated intelligence community data. The intelligence community makes a clear distinction between raw "information" and "intelligence." The latter is information which has been judged for validity by the minds of a college of experienced, seasoned analysts.

How were the two men appointed by Feith to discern the authenticity of the raw data they perused? They did not have the tradecraft to be able to vet the facts, or to get them corroborated. When one judges the information of a source one judges his reports against what is in the files and what additional intelligence is obtained from other agents. The man's assertions must be confirmed by what is in the records. What if a US agent in Syria says he has had dinner in Damascus with a Syrian general who disclosed details of

Syria's chemical warfare arsenal? He sends you his report. But what if you found that in fact the Syrian general was not in Damascus at the time, as your agent claimed, but was in Paris? You now have a real crisis and must review all the submissions of that agent to check for their accuracy.

The Bush administration didn't do this – didn't want to do this. They despised the people who did do it. What is perhaps the worst element in the Bush handling of intelligence is the deceitful way it was done. For example, by early 2002 there were doubts about the German BND's chief Iraqi intelligence source "Curveball," yet the administration's reliance on this sole source, which allowed his lies to be included in the October 2002 NIE, was disguised. In other instance, the INC source who was the chief witness on Saddam's biological weapons programs, was later found not even to have been in Iraq to able to witness the things he described in his reports and debriefings. Yet this man too was still able to get his false data in to the NIE.

The "intelligence" fostered by the Bush people was produced by people who because of lack of training, had a dangerous tendency to deem something a fact when it was simply an hypothesis. Patient objectivity, based on actual information, controlled and analyzed, was missing from their work. Tainted information got into the White House without proper prior investigation of the source's reliability. As a result the whole American public was duped, just as it had been before when the Democrats won power in 1961 by blaming the Republicans for a missile gap that did not in fact exist.

The intelligence failures of this administration are not only a failure of intellect and tradecraft, but of conscience.