

UPDATE ON GAMING INTELLIGENCE TO JUSTIFY WAR

I wasn't so disturbed by the news that DNI Mike McConnell had decided to reverse the recent practice of producing unclassified Key Judgments from an NIE ... until I read Scott Horton's take on it.

Michael McConnell started his first two months on the job with a solid record for candor and accuracy. He avoided political doublespeak. And then something strange happened. He became a shameless and irresponsible political propagandist.

[snip]

With that background, it should come as no surprise that McConnell now plans to keep America in the dark as to the national intelligence estimate (NIE) on Iranian nuclear programs. Pam Hess of AP reports:

National Intelligence Director Mike McConnell has reversed the recent practice of declassifying and releasing summaries of national intelligence estimates, a top intelligence official said Friday. Knowing their words may be scrutinized outside the U.S. government chills analysts' willingness to provide unvarnished opinions and information, said David Shedd, a deputy to McConnell.

He told congressional aides and reporters that McConnell recently issued a directive making it more difficult to declassify the key judgments of national intelligence

estimates, which are forward-looking analyses prepared for the White House and Congress that represent the consensus of the nation's 16 spy agencies on a single issue. The analysis comes from various sources including the CIA, the military and intelligence agencies inside federal departments.

Now we know that the NIE has been done and gathering dust for more than three months. We also know that Vice President Cheney's office, which promptly leaks NIEs when it finds them useful, absolutely hates this NIE and has been doing everything it can think to do to put it off. Why might that be?

Sources close to the NIE tell me that it would work at cross-purposes with the Administration's fall roll-out of its new war effort against Iran. The NIE will apparently conclude that Iran is diligently pursuing a nuclear weapons program, and that Iran is pursuing a delivery system. It will also conclude that even on the fastest possible track it is still a couple of years away from having anything meaningful. Which means this threat does not become an acute one until some time after Bush and Cheney leave office. In other words, it's an NIE that the Vice President badly wants to drop somewhere behind a filing cabinet. And the best way to do that is to declare it's so super secret that no one can have a copy of that particular decoder ring.

Honestly, the last two NIEs did seem shaded for political reasons, so I suspect unclassified Key Judgments would be in any case. But the last several NIEs on the subject have shown that Iran is nowhere near getting nukes. And if Cheney

wants to bury the latest version of "not yet," then it begins to piss me off.

Meanwhile, there are two new additions to the discussion about the scary satellite pictures that may—or may not—prove that Syria was trying to build nukes. First, via Noah Shachtman, the news from the NYT that the Syria location is at least four years old.