

DOES JERRY DOE KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT MERLIN?

In this post, I described that Jerry Doe, a former CIA operative who claims he was fired from the CIA in retaliation for reporting intelligence the CIA didn't like, now claims that some of that intelligence pertains to Iran. The timing of the allegations of his complaint that may pertain to Iran-2000, not (as the NIE cites) 2003—got me thinking about James Risen.

You see, we know of another operation from 2000 involving Iran that the CIA is still touchy about—the Merlin operation that Risen describes in his book, *State of War*.

In case you've forgotten, in February 2000, the CIA had a Russian nuclear scientist pass blueprints for a nuclear weapon to Iran. The blueprints were erroneous in key ways, so they wouldn't lead to a nuclear weapon—at least, they wouldn't have if the Russian hadn't alerted the Iranians to the faults in the blueprints, which he did. But the CIA was willing to pursue such a crazy plan, Risen reported, because they hoped Iran would follow the blueprints and spend years pursuing a faulty warhead.

Here's Risen's description about why CPD tried something as crazy as Merlin.

The Counterproliferation Division within the CIA's Directorate of Operations, the agency's clandestine espionage arm, came up with MERLIN and other clandestine operations as creative, if unorthodox, ways to try to penetrate Tehran's nuclear development program. In some cases, the CIA had worked jointly with Israeli intelligence on such operations, according to people familiar with the covert program.

Now, if his complaint and Warrick's report on it is true, Jerry Doe was busy penetrating Tehran's nuclear development program in 2000, at precisely the same time when—purportedly out of frustration with their inability to penetrate Tehran's nuclear development program using traditional means—the CIA dumped nuclear blueprints into the Iranians' laps. Though, as Risen notes, the CIA was careful to hide the fact that it was the source of the blueprints.

What better way for the CIA to hide its involvement in this operation than to have a veteran of Arzamas [Russia's equivalent of Los Alamos] personally hand over the Russian nuclear designs?

Now look at the passage from Doe's complaint that appears to pertain to Iranian nukes:

Plaintiff was first subjected to a demand that he alter his intelligence reporting in 2000, [2 lines redacted]. Plaintiff reported this information via formal CIA cable channels. Plaintiff was subsequently advised by CIA management that his report did not support the earlier assessment [one line redacted] and instructed that if he did not alter his report to support this assessment it would not be received well by the intelligence community. Plaintiff was aware that earlier reporting underlying the assessment was less-than-genuine and refused to alter his report. As the result, CIA/DO/CPD refused to disseminate his report to the intelligence community despite Plaintiff's efforts.

If this does pertain to Iran, then the event that precipitated Doe's troubles with the CIA was his report, in 2000, that Iran wasn't pursuing a nuclear program, at precisely the same time as the CIA was having a Russian plant nuclear blueprints with Iran. Further, Doe also

alleged that the Intelligence Community assessment that Iran was pursuing nuclear weapons was based on something "less-than-genuine." And Doe, of course, worked in the same corner of the CIA that hatched Merlin.

Now, there are several other reasons why it's possible that Doe has a connection to Merlin. James Risen was, as far as I'm aware, the first person to provide details about Doe's case.

The Central Intelligence Agency was told by an informant in the spring of 2001 that Iraq had abandoned a major element of its nuclear weapons program, but the agency did not share the information with other agencies or with senior policy makers, a former C.I.A. officer has charged.

In a lawsuit filed in federal court here in December, the former C.I.A. officer, whose name remains secret, said that the informant told him that Iraq's uranium enrichment program had ended years earlier and that centrifuge components from the scuttled program were available for examination and even purchase.

Risen wrote that story in August 1, 2005, long after Doe's initial complaint in December 2004. His article appears to have been timed to two other events—rising interest in the CIA leak case, which gave Doe's lawyers the opportunity to draw parallels between Plame's plight and Doe's. And Doe's first motion to have his complaint declassified, which had been submitted just a few weeks earlier (which makes Risen's 2005 story similar to Warrick's story from today). In that July 2005 filing, Doe lawyer Roy Krieger seems to have argued that the reports on crappy Iraqi WMD intelligence made the redactions in the complaint moot, which is presumably why Risen focuses more closely on the Iraqi intelligence that Doe submitted as distinct from Warrick's focus on Iran today. But to make the connection—to allege that the CIA

was hiding the fact that it had fired an officer who had proved Iraq didn't have nukes—Risen had to include far more detail than what appeared in Doe's complaint. Unlike Warrick (who based his Iran news today on a statement from Krieger), Risen fleshed out the story using anonymous sources.

While the existence of the lawsuit has previously been reported, details of the case have not been made public because the documents in his suit have been heavily censored by the government and the substance of the claims are classified. The officer's name remains secret, in part because disclosing it might jeopardize the agency's sources or operations.

Several people with detailed knowledge of the case provided information to The New York Times about his allegations, but insisted on anonymity because the matter is classified.

So in August 2005, James Risen interviewed sources close to Doe who reported that the CIA had fired Doe because he refuted their crappy Iraq intelligence. According to Eric Lichtblau's own book, those interviews occurred during the period when Risen was working on State of War (Risen and Lichtblau had a conversation about including the warrantless wiretapping program in the book in spring 2005; Risen warned NYT he was going to put the story in his book in fall 2005). And the Doe story was one of only six stories Risen wrote in all of 2005 that didn't pertain to the warrantless wiretapping program. Risen has never returned to the story of Jerry Doe—not to report on the CIA's demand that he not show up at his own hearings, and not to report on this filing.

By now you've probably guessed where I'm heading. That is, to remind you that in January, Risen got subpoenaed for the source behind one of the stories he tells in this chapter of his

book. And the Merlin story is the most likely culprit.

The chapter in question has details about the US decision to support Iran's MEK even though it's a terrorist organization, Iranian attempts to help us on the GWOT (the same stuff that Flynt Leverett got censored on), and a description of a female officer inadvertently revealing all of CIA's agents in Iraq. While any of these might be the sensitive information in question, and the exposure of CIA's Iranian agents involved a double agent, by far the most likely item of interest is MERLIN, the operation in which the CIA used a Russian defector to provide Iran with nuclear blueprints.

This speculation seems to be confirmed by this April story on the search for Risen's sources.

Former government officials have recently been called before a federal grand jury and confronted with phone records documenting calls with a reporter who covers intelligence issues at The New York Times, according to people with detailed knowledge of the investigation.

[snip]

In January, Mr. Risen received a subpoena that, his lawyers said, appeared intended to force him to reveal his sources for a specific chapter in "State of War" that described efforts by the C.I.A. to infiltrate Iran's nuclear program.

Of all the things Risen revealed in his book, the government is coming after him for his sources on Iran's nuclear program, not on the super-secret warrantless wiretap program. If you look at his NYT reporting, he appears to have

done no reporting on Iran's nuclear program.
Except, that is, until you learn that Jerry Doe
claims to have infiltrated Iran's nuclear
program.