

DNI MCCONNELL TO INTELLIGENCE ANALYSTS: GO TALK TO JUAN COLE

In a post on AJ Rossmiller's Still Broken, I pointed out that bloggers probably knew more than Condi Rice leading up to the 2005 Iraqi elections because 1) we were reading Juan Cole, 2) we didn't censor out news we didn't like:

When AJ was asked how he got the 2005 election right, one of the things he pointed to, half-seriously, was the open source work of Juan Cole.

I began to write the explanation of our methodology, and I tried to resist the temptation to criticize other agencies while explaining how and why we did things differently. State, in particular, was very sensitive about their screwup, and I didn't want to piss anybody off.

"Sir, can't I just say that I copied and pasted Juan Cole?"

You see, those running the most powerful country in the world aren't reading Juan Cole directly, or at least they weren't. If they're lucky, some analyst like AJ will read him and allow Cole's expertise to influence his analysis. And if they're lucky, that analysis might bubble up to decision-makers without being censored by the vetting process. But AJ's book demonstrates that those are two very big "if's."

Well, Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell just conceded that AJ was right for

reading Juan Cole.

In a new directive that challenges the insular culture of U.S. intelligence agencies, Director of National Intelligence J. Michael McConnell has ordered analysts to cultivate relationships with outside experts “whenever possible” in order to improve the quality of intelligence analysis.

The DNI’s July 16 directive on “Analytic Outreach” (pdf) establishes procedures for implementing such outreach, including incentives and rewards for successful performance.

“Analytic outreach is the open, overt, and deliberate act of an IC [intelligence community] analyst engaging with an individual outside the IC to explore ideas and alternate perspectives, gain new insights, generate new knowledge, or obtain new information,” the directive states.

“Elements of the IC should use outside experts whenever possible to contribute to, critique, and challenge internal products and analysis....”

“Sound intelligence analysis requires that analysts... develop trusted relationships” with “experts in academia; think tanks; industry; non-governmental organizations; the scientific world; ...and elsewhere.”

Golly. Almost seven years after 9/11 and the intelligence community might just catch up to us DFH bloggers!