

THE INTELLIGENCE INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX PREPARES FOR WAR

In my review of Tim Shorrock's important *Spies for Hire*, I summarized one of the most important parts of the narrative he tells in the book.

Shorrock describes, for example, [Mike] McConnell's key role in the formation of the Intelligence and National Security Alliance (INSA), a trade organization that serves as a bridge between large intelligence contractors (like Booz Allen, SAIC, Computer Sciences Corporation, and ManTech) and the officers from CIA, NSA, and DHS who join them on the board of the organization. "INSA," Shorrock explains, "is one of the only business associations in Washington that include current government officials on their board of directors." Shorrock describes how INSA worked with the DNI (back when John Negroponte was DNI and McConnell was head of INSA and a VP at Booz Allen) to foster information sharing in the intelligence community—including with contractors. He reports that, for the first time in 2006, INSA's contractors were consulted on the DNI's strategic plans for the next decade. And Shorrock describes one intelligence veteran wondering "if INSA has become a way for contractors and intelligence officials to create policy in secret, without oversight from Congress."

McConnell, after nurturing this enhanced relationship between contractors and government intelligence services, ascended to serve as DNI. He was, Shorrock points out, "the first contractor ever to be named to lead the Intelligence Community." Once confirmed,

McConnell immediately buried a report assessing the practice of outsourcing intelligence. And he worked to further expand the ties between government spying and its contractors.

[snip]

[The warrantless wiretap program] not just about Bush and Cheney ignoring laws and spying on citizens (though it **is** that). It's that, in the name of fighting terrorism, the Bush Administration is creating a monstrous new Intelligence-Industrial Complex in which intelligence contractors and the government collaborate—with little oversight—to snoop at home and abroad.

Now, Shorrock's book got far too little attention, IMO. But he did lay out in great detail the many problems with the degree to which we have outsourced our national security infrastructure to contractors (and Jeremy Scahill has, of course, tirelessly chronicled that as well).

Which is why I'm amused by the panic revealed in a memo the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a few weeks ago preparing all members of the intelligence community for an upcoming Dana Priest series covering the same terrain. The memo reveals:

- The Director of Communications for ODNI, Art House, briefed Intelligence Community public affairs officers on the article back in January
- House briefed the Deputies Committee for the intelligence community on the Priest series the week

the memo was released

- House has laid out a response plan to Priest's article including his agency and the NSC, to be coordinated with all the IC agencies
- House is already planning "a meeting or conference call to review procedural action before, during and after publication, and to compare substantive points that might be offered in rebuttal to the article"

Perhaps that's just good messaging strategy—the kind that (as it happens) becomes a lot less effective when it is laid out ahead of time.

But what I'm perhaps most amused by is this paragraph:

This series has been a long time in preparation and **looks designed to cast the IC and the DoD in an unfavorable light.** We need to anticipate and prepare so that the good work of our respective organizations is effectively reflected in communications with employees, secondary coverage in the media and in response to questions. [my emphasis]

Nowhere in this memo—at least as republished by Marc Ambinder—does House even hint that Priest has her details wrong (and given that she's been working on it for two years, I'd be surprised if she did). The only real risk that House raises is the "unauthorized disclosure of sensitive and classified information."

Yet the conclusion he draws from months of

preparation for an article by Priest that is presumably factually correct is that it is “designed to cast the IC and the DoD in an unfavorable light.”

I’ve got a ton of respect for Priest’s reporting and therefore would guess that the article is designed to reveal **the truth** about the IC and DoD. And yet the intelligence community, inside its bunker, perceives a search for the truth as a design to portray it unfavorably.

What an apt explanation, then, for the problem with excessive contracting: when a reporter avails herself of Constitutionally protected rights to act as a watchdog on our government and its contractors, the government itself assumes that must be an attack. Hell, the IC has had time to preemptively respond to some of the problems Priest is about to reveal (and, as I said, Shorrock gave them a head start two years ago).

But instead, it has decided to go to war.