

BOB GRAHAM'S CREDIBILITY

On Monday, the NYT had a story on former Senator Bob Graham's continuing efforts to shed light on the Saudi role in 9/11. The article cast Graham's obstinance on the Saudi role in 9/11 against FBI efforts to get him to shut up, noting for example that the recent 9/11 follow-up report dismissed FBI's former interest in a Florida couple that had ties to some of the hijackers (though the NYT did not note how hackish the report is).

Against FBI's insistence the Saudis had no role on 9/11, NYT balances the comments of Graham's former colleagues about his judgement. And they point to his prescience.

Mr. Graham's refusal to drop what many in the intelligence community consider to be long-settled issues has stirred some private criticism that the former senator has been out of the game too long and is chasing imagined conspiracies in an effort to stay relevant as he lectures and writes books. Intelligence officials say the claims in the secret 28 pages were explored and found to be unsubstantiated in a later review by the national commission.

Former colleagues are not so ready to write off a lawmaker they remember for sounding the alarm against the invasion of Iraq. He warned that shifting attention to removing Saddam Hussein would debilitate efforts to rid Afghanistan of Al Qaeda, which Mr. Graham said posed a far greater threat to the United States.

"Bob Graham has proven to be prescient about many things," said Jane Harman, the former California congresswoman who

once served as the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee.

Never one of the flashiest members of the Senate, Mr. Graham was seen more as a cautious, conscientious lawmaker eager to dig into the dry details of policy. His unglamorous reputation no doubt contributed to his inability to catch on during an abbreviated run for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2003. But his colleagues also saw him as a man who would not be easily dissuaded.

"Bob is kind of quiet, but once he is on to something, he is like a dog with a bone," said Tom Daschle, the former Senate Democratic leader.

The NYT only raises Graham's prescience on the Iraq War, not the "many things" Jane Harman raises (who didn't overlap in the Gang of Four with Graham, but closely followed him).

But it's worth reminding that, in addition to being right about the Iraq War, Graham was right about torture. Indeed, in his last months as ranking member on Senate Intelligence Committee, he made initial moves to learn more about CIA's detention program, only to have Pat Roberts agree to stop the effort in early 2003. And, interestingly, Graham (and Nancy Pelosi, Graham's counterpart on the Gang of Four) linked the two, tying the erroneous claims about Iraq to the non-briefings on torture they were getting in September 2002.

Now that they are explicitly stating that CIA lied in its September briefings on torture, Nancy Pelosi and Bob Graham are also both linking those lies with the lies they were telling—at precisely the same time—in the Iraq NIE. Here's Pelosi:

Of all the briefings that I have received at this same time, earlier, they were misinforming

the American people there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and it was an imminent threat to the United States. I, to the limit of what I could say to my caucus, told them, the intelligence does not support the imminent threat that this Administration is contending. Whether it's on the subject of what's happening in Iraq, whether it's on the subject of techniques used by the intelligence community on those they are interrogating, every step of the way, the Administration was misleading the Congress.

And that is the issue. And that is why we need a truth commission.

And here's Graham:

Yes, they're obligated to tell the full Intelligence Committee, not just the leadership. This was the same time within the same week, in fact, that the CIA was submitting its National Intelligence Estimate on weapons of mass destruction in Iraq which proves so erroneous that we went to war, have had thousands of persons killed and injured as a result of misinformation.

Now, it's quite possible Graham and Pelosi are tying these two lies together just to remind reporters how unreliable the CIA is. Perhaps they're doing it to remind reporters of how they got burned leading into the Iraq War, trusting the spin of the Administration.

But perhaps they're trying to say
there's a direct connection, an explicit
one, between the NIE and torture. We
know Ibn Sheikh al-Libi's claims
appeared in there. Did anything that
came out of Abu Zubaydah's
interrogation? Or Ramzi bin al-Shibh?

Graham would have also been briefed on Stellar
Wind, including in briefings with Harman, though
he has been less outspoken about that.

None of this is to say these four issues – Saudi
support for an enormous attack on the US, spying
on Americans, torturing detainees, and trumping
up the Iraq War – are connected (though all have
ties). It just seems like Graham copped onto the
larger project of obfuscation during his tenure
on SSCI, in a way that is rather interesting.