

DEEP BACKGROUND

CIA trainers report that the Agency is having trouble figuring out what to do with all the new officers acquired during the Bush administration's Global War on Terror.

Agency budgets ballooned in the wake of 9/11, and there was pressure from the White House to increase manpower dramatically. Career Trainee classes, the CIA's equivalent of the military's Officer Candidate Schools, went from an intake of about 100 a year to more than 1,000 in 2002-03. As the numbers went up, the quality of the training went down, particularly as a no-fail system was adopted. The influx of new officers, increasing the size of the Agency from 12,000 to 20,000 over the course of two years, created a demographic problem. The average experience level of CIA officers has dropped to eight years due to resignations or retirements to take lucrative contractor positions. This means that many of the officers instructing new hires at the principal training center near Williamsburg, Virginia lack background. And few of the new officers bring with them qualifications such as foreign-language skills and experience abroad. Many don't have a clue what it's like to live and work in a foreign environment and suffer severe cultural shock if they do go overseas. Most are assigned to the burgeoning number of offices in the United States while those sent to the huge stations in Iraq and Afghanistan are often bored and frustrated, confined to their offices because of security concerns. Many have quit as a result.



The Obama administration is considering cybersecurity legislation that will enable the government to close down the Internet in the event of a national emergency.

Of course, government would have the power to decide what constitutes an emergency. Existing technology already allows for real-time monitoring of many activities that most Americans would regard as constitutionally protected. Telecommunications companies retain detailed records of customer activities. Some Internet providers record every single action taken, including individual keystrokes. In Britain, a new law, with the wonderfully euphemistic title, Intercept Modernization Program—part of the equally splendid Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act—will soon go into effect. It will require telecommunications providers to collect and retain all information on subscribers' activities for a period of six months. Employees of 653 public agencies, most of which have no law-enforcement or intelligence function, can access the information with no judicial oversight. In the United States, such records are maintained in a haphazard fashion by the various service providers, but they can be accessed by the Justice Department through the issuance of a national security letter, which has no judicial review and includes legal penalties for anyone who even discloses that he has received one. More than 35,000 were issued last year. In a recent case in Philadelphia, an Internet service provider was asked for detailed information relating to all traffic on a certain date, to include IP addresses, times, e-mail addresses, physical addresses, registered accounts, Social Security Numbers, bank account numbers, and credit card numbers.

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Senate, where party-line procedural votes tend to matter more and the filibuster power is on the line. In the House, it makes no difference whether there are 178 votes for John Boehner for speaker or 177. As of now, conservatives can only prevail on a handful of issues in the House, and if a Republican is not willing to take the right side in those fights, the grassroots should be just as pleased to see his seat fall to a Democrat.

There are encouraging signs that conservatives are beginning to understand how they have been used by the GOP. In NY-23, they disregarded all the usual warnings that they sky would fall if a Democrat won an election and supported a conservative third-party candidate over a liberal Republican. That third-party candidate, Doug Hoffman, was hardly ideal—he had no real knowledge of the district he was running to represent—but he forced the liberal Republican from the race and nearly won the seat. Elsewhere, pro-bailout Republicans are routinely booed at Tea Party events.

The Tea Party movement will accomplish nothing if it becomes an appendage of the Republican Party in much the same way that the antiwar movement became annexed to the Democratic Party. It's a truism among veteran conservatives: the GOP is better in opposition than in power. Few activists on the Right follow that reasoning to its logical conclusion, however—that putting Republicans back in control might not be an improvement over a hamstrung Democratic majority. Conservatives should fight Washington's overreach no matter which party is in power, rather than being distracted from their principles by nightmare scenarios of Democratic dominance or sweet promises of Republican utopias. ■

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Bitter Fruit

IF WE HAD IT TO DO OVER, would we send an army into Afghanistan to build a nation?

Would we invade Iraq?

While these two wars have cost 5,200 dead, a trillion dollars, and a divided America, what have we won?

Gen. Stanley McChrystal needs 40,000 to 80,000 more troops, or we risk “mission failure” in Afghanistan. At present casualty rates — October was the worst month of the war—thousands more Americans will die before we see any light at the end of this tunnel, if ever we do.

Pakistan, which aided us in Afghanistan, now has a war of its own to fight. Its army is in a battle in South Waziristan, while the country is wracked by terror bombings, the latest in a Peshawar bazaar that specialized in women’s clothing and jewelry and toys for kids. So horrific was the toll even the Taliban and al-Qaeda denied any role in it.

The 130,000 U.S. troops in Iraq are, after almost seven years, to begin pulling out two months after January’s election. But a hitch has developed. Iraq’s parliament missed the deadline for setting the rules. At issue: will voters be allowed to choose individual candidates, or will they be allowed only to vote for slates of candidates?

Gen. Ray Odierno implies that postponement of the election may mean postponement of U.S. withdrawals.

Ominously, in August, terrorists bombed the foreign and finance ministries in Baghdad and later blew up the Justice Ministry and Baghdad Provincial Governorate. And the Kurds are now claiming their control of oil-rich Kirkuk is non-negotiable, which crosses a red line in Baghdad.

Next door, a terror attack by Jundallah (God’s Brigade) in Iran’s southern province of Sistan-Baluchistan killed 40, including two senior commanders of the Revolutionary Guard.

An enraged Tehran pointed a finger at the United States, as there have been charges the CIA has been in contact with Jundallah as part of President Bush’s destabilization program to effect “regime change.”

But Barack Obama has been in office for nine months—and he would never authorize such an attack on the eve of a critical meeting on Iran’s nuclear program. Moreover, the State Department condemned the Jundallah bombing as terrorism and offered public condolences to the families of the victims.

If we didn’t authorize this, who did? Was the timing of this attack coincidental? Were these just freelance secessionists on an operation unrelated to the U.S.-Iran talks? Or is someone trying to torpedo the talks and push Iran and the United States into military collision?

This was a provocation. And whoever carried it out and whoever authorized or abetted it wishes to dynamite the U.S.-Iran negotiations, abort a rapprochement, and put us on a road to war.

Speculation is focusing on the Saudis, the Gulf Arabs, and the Israelis, who have been accused, as has the United States, of aiding PJAK, a Kurdish faction that has conducted raids in northern Iran.

If we have any control of these organizations, we should shut them down. With U.S. armies tied up in Iraq and Afghanistan, and America conducting Predator and cross-border attacks in Pakistan, provoking a war with Iran would be an act of madness.

Looking back, how has all this fighting advanced U.S. national interests? We have a “democratic” Iraq that is Shia-dominated and tilting to Iran. We have an open-ended war in Afghanistan that will likely do for Obama what Iraq did for Bush. But we can’t pull out, it is said, for if we do, Kabul falls and Afghanistan becomes the sanctuary for an Islamist war to take over Pakistan and its nuclear weapons.

And if that should happen, it would indeed be a crisis.

And so, how has all this intervention availed us?

We ran Saddam out of Kuwait and put U.S. troops into Saudi Arabia. And we got Osama bin Laden’s 9/11. We responded by taking down the Taliban and taking over Afghanistan. And we got an eight-year war with no victory and no end in sight. Now Pakistan is burning. We took down Saddam and got a seven-year war and an ungrateful Iraq.

Meanwhile, the Turks, who shared a border with Saddam, have done no fighting. Iran has watched as we destroyed its two greatest enemies, the Taliban and Saddam. China, which has a border with both Pakistan and Afghanistan, has sat back. India, which has a border with Pakistan and fought three wars with that country, has stayed aloof.

The United States, on the other side of the world, plunged in. And now we face an elongated military presence in Iraq, an escalating war in Afghanistan and potential disaster in Pakistan, and are being pushed from behind into a war with Iran.

“America rejects the false comfort of isolationism,” said George W. Bush in his 2006 State of the Union. We did reject that false comfort. We can enjoy the fruits of interventionism. ■