

Furor Erupts Over Recordings of Saddam

By **ELI LAKE**, Staff Reporter of the Sun | February 16, 2006



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CAIRO, Egypt - Two former CIA directors have resigned from the board of the organization planning tomorrow to make public secret recordings of Saddam Hussein and his advisers.

In the last week both John Deutch and James Woolsey abruptly left their positions at Intelligence Summit, according to its president, John Loftus, who said their departure is part of a campaign by the directorate of national intelligence to punish him for releasing the recordings.

The reason both men gave for their resignations was new information they received regarding one of the summit's biggest donors, Michael Cherney, an Israeli citizen who has been denied a visa to enter America because of his alleged ties to the Russian mafia.

Mr. Loftus said Mr. Cherney was framed by the Russian mob as part of a scheme to extort him. Mr. Woolsey, however, wrote in an e-mail, "My only response is that I got new information this week about the funder from someone I know and whose judgment on these matters I trust. Based on that information I decided to withdraw. If Mr. Loftus is saying that anyone pressured me about this issue he is quite wrong." Mr. Deutch did not respond to a request for comment.

Mr. Loftus has promised that the recordings he will release to the public tomorrow will show that Saddam personally discussed a germ attack on Washington at some point after 2000. However, ABC News, which obtained the recordings from Mr. Loftus's source - a former U.N. weapons inspector, John Tierney, who was asked by the FBI in September 2005 to translate them - says otherwise.

ABC News reported that Saddam is quoted as saying, "Terrorism is coming. I told the Americans a long time before August 2 and told the British as well ... that in the future there will be terrorism with weapons of mass destruction."

The deposed Iraqi tyrant, however, added that Iraq would not authorize such an attack, but speculated that a chemical, nuclear, or biological attack could be launched from a boobytrapped car.

The 12 hours of recorded conversations are part of a vast trove of untranslated documents, recordings, videotape, and photographs captured in Iraq during the war. Whether this information will be examined for clues to the whereabouts of WMD stockpiles is a matter of debate within the intelligence community.

The CIA, FBI, and directorate of national intelligence have resisted calls from Congress to reopen the hunt. But an interagency outfit known as the Media Exploitation Center, administered by the Defense Intelligence Agency, last month started its own search of these materials to attempt to discover the location of the weapons of mass destruction.

"There are elements in NSA and DIA that believe there is enough evidence to warrant further re-examination and a relook at all the material," a congressional staff member told The New York Sun yesterday. "This includes the imagery, documents, and human sources. They also think a more extensive debriefing of knowledgeable human sources and third party nationals is in order."

The quiet re-examination parallels efforts from the chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Rep. Peter Hoekstra, a Republican of Michigan, who is in the early stages of his own review. He told the Sun last week that he checked the authenticity of Mr. Loftus's recordings with the intelligence community and confirmed that it was Saddam's voice on them.

Mr. Hoekstra has also been pestering the directorate of national intelligence to translate and make public what he claims are nearly 36,000 boxes of captured documents and materials from Iraq that may shed clues on the WMD front.

The Defense Department now appears to be working on the directorate to make other Iraq files public as well. A February 6 letter from Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld to Senator Santorum, a Republican of Pennsylvania, said Mr. Rumsfeld is working with the director of national intelligence, John Negroponte, to release Iraqi files sought from the Harmony database, which catalogs material on terrorism secured since September 11, 2001.

Mr. Rumsfeld wrote, "You should know that Mr. Negroponte has lead responsibility within the US government for this material. As such we have been working with his office to establish the best path forward."

Mr. Loftus claimed that he is a victim of this intramural intelligence battle. "Why is Negroponte and the FBI trying to smash my little charity operation?" he asked. "They have

called my board members saying you have to resign. As soon as the audio tapes hit Negroponte's office, they are told they have to quit."

But the reason Messrs. Deutch and Woolsey gave for their resignation centered on concerns about Mr. Cherney. The Russian businessman immigrated to Israel in 1995 after allegations in his native country swirled that he was involved with assassinations and other criminal enterprises.

In 1998, he was barred from Bulgaria for an alleged plot to assassinate the son of a Cabinet minister. The information originally was passed on by Israeli law enforcement authorities, who later rescinded the claim.

Mr. Loftus said he checked with his board last year when Mr. Cherney offered to make a large donation to Intelligence Summit and did not hear any reservations. In December, Mr. Loftus authored a piece for the group's Website titled, "The Framing of Michael Cherney."

A spokeswoman for the Directorate of National Intelligence would not comment on the resignations of Messrs. Deutch and Woolsey. About the Saddam recordings she said, "Intelligence community analysts from the CIA and the DIA reviewed the translations and found that while fascinating from a historical perspective, the tapes do not reveal anything that changes their postwar analysis of Iraq's weapons programs, nor do they change the findings contained in the comprehensive Iraq Survey Group report.

"The tapes mostly date from the early to mid-1990s and cover such topics as relations with the United Nations, efforts to rebuild industries from Gulf War damage, and the pre-9/11 situation in Afghanistan."

Mr. Loftus, however, expressed disagreement. "There is a candid discussion between Saddam and his top aides to launch a sneak attack against the United States, whether to use a nuclear or germ weapon. It is discussed that maybe we would have the others do it, that is an unclear reference. It becomes very clear, though. Saddam thinks this is something the Iraqis should do."

The Intelligence Summit will make the recordings public tomorrow at its annual conference in Arlington, Va.