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The Pentagon... Whose Side Are They On?

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In the event there may be those who've fallen into a deep stupor from listening to too much anti-war rhetoric in this political season, allow me to mention just a few unpleasant realities.

The American people now find themselves under attack by the most numerous and the most brutal enemy that any civilized nation has ever faced – the *only* enemy ever to seriously threaten the lives of every man, woman, and child in America.

The enemy we face today does not wear a uniform, he does not represent a nation state, he moves freely from country to country, he travels aboard our trains and planes, and he lives and works among us in our cities, towns, and villages. He may be a student, a schoolteacher, a truck driver, a doctor, or a lawyer. On any given day he may be the driver of a Ryder truck filled with explosives or the shopper standing next to us in a mall with explosives strapped to his body.

In a conflict such as this the most critical weapons we can have are not nuclear weapons, high performance aircraft, great warships, or massive numbers of tanks, artillery, and infantry. The most important weapon we can have in this war is information...solid, actionable intelligence.

In a September 2006 column we reported that a critical new technology called Computerized Voice Stress Analysis (CVSA), the most significant new development in the science of truth verification, was being purposely denied to our military intelligence units in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo by policy directive from the Pentagon.

Apparently unaware that high level Pentagon officials were inexplicably biased against CVSA, but recognizing the need for a truth-verification device that could be used in field applications where polygraph use was either impractical or impossible, the Pentagon Special Operations Command (SOCOM) conducted an independent study of CVSA. Their study showed that CVSA was being used successfully as an important crime fighting tool by more than 1,400 federal, state, and local law enforcement organizations across the country. Since 2006, that number has grown to more than 1,700.

Yet, in spite of an August 2004 interim policy directive from the Pentagon, Special Forces units in Iraq and Afghanistan have gained access to a limited number of CVSA units and are reporting phenomenal success in obtaining actionable intelligence...without the use of “water-boarding” or other aggressive interrogation techniques.

One returning Special Forces interrogator, who claims to have used CVSA “day and night” for two months, reports essentially 100% success in obtaining confessions and actionable intelligence.

In one instance, a suspected al Qaeda terrorist demonstrated less than complete truthfulness when asked if he had planted a roadside bomb (IED) that had killed and wounded American troops. Upon rephrasing his questions, the interrogator was able to determine that the subject did not actually plant the IED in question...but knew who did. Probing further, the interrogator learned that the subject had the name of the guilty party in his address book.

Another high value individual (HVI), who initially denied any link to al Qaeda, was subjected to CVSA examination. When repeated denials indicated clear deception, interrogators persisted. They eventually learned that, not only had the suspect served as a driver for a senior al Qaeda leader, he admitted to having participated in the planting of roadside bombs and in the planning and execution of ambushes in which U.S. military personnel were killed or wounded.

Military interrogators have found CVSA to be particularly effective in locating insurgency safe-houses. When known al Qaeda operatives are subjected to CVSA examination, interrogators are able to divide cities and provinces into quadrants and inquire, sector-by-sector, in which area terrorist leaders are hiding. Then, as interrogators find deception in the subject’s negative responses, they are able to narrow their search to neighborhoods, even to individual houses.

When making door-to-door sweeps, female suspects represent an especially difficult problem. Under strict Islamic law, females are not allowed to go outdoors without being accompanied by a male member of their family. When U.S. and Iraqi troops have taken Iraqi women into custody, forcibly removing them from their homes, there have been angry repercussions in the streets. However, with the introduction of CVSA, the highly portable units can be taken directly into the homes and suspect females can be quickly evaluated. CVSA has an additional advantage over the polygraph in that it is not necessary for interrogators to touch their subjects in any way.

Those who have either used CVSA technology in Iraq, or trained others in its use, are quick to point out that, not only has CVSA been effective in obtaining solid leads to major terror cells, it has been equally effective in clearing the innocent...those detained because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Hundreds of al Qaeda suspects are held in detainee centers throughout Iraq, many for as long as 18 months, with no definitive results from repeated polygraph interrogations. U.S. military commanders are now hesitant to release any suspects until they have passed a final exit screening by an interrogator armed with a CVSA unit.

However, in spite of this impressive record of success, the Pentagon has placed an order for 94 hand-held polygraph “gadgets” called PCASS (Preliminary Credibility Assessment Screening System) a product of the Lafayette Instrument Co. of Lafayette, Indiana, at a price of \$7,500 each... a direct response to the hand-held CVSA FIST (Field Interrogation Support Tool), developed by the National Institute for Truth Verification, of West Palm Beach, Florida,

Unlike CVSA, the new PCASS devices have not been field tested under combat conditions where the lives of U.S. military personnel are at stake. Nevertheless, the Pentagon is proceeding with the acquisition of the unproven devices and will soon deploy them to military interrogators in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In an April 9, 2008 report, MSNBC investigative reporter Bill Dedman describes the data sent “up the chain of command” by Pentagon polygraph proponents during the approval process. According to Dedman, a Pentagon presentation obtained by MSNBC through a Freedom of Information Act request, claimed that the PCASS is “82 to 90% accurate.” However, in other Pentagon studies obtained by MSNBC, data show that, in evaluating the PCASS, scientists conducting the tests fudged the numbers by ignoring all “inconclusive” readings and using only those responses showing clear deception or truth-telling.

When “inconclusive” responses are included, the accuracy rate of PCASS falls to a level of 63 to 79%. Damning with faint praise, Pentagon officials have been quoted as saying that the use of PCASS is “still better than relying on human intuition.”

In the meantime, while Pentagon polygraph proponents scheme to force the adoption of PCASS technology by military field interrogators, while denying them the use of a technology that has been proven effective, Special Forces commanders are taking matters into their own hands. The commanding general of Special Operations forces in Iraq has responded to the highly positive “after action” reports prepared by CVSA examiners in his command and has authorized the continued use of CVSA.

The internal Pentagon battle over truth verification technology is not merely a question of whether taxpayer dollars should be spent on a system that is not wanted or needed. In this instance it is clear that our Special Forces interrogators already possess a technology that has far greater applicability in field operations than the polygraph. Yet, civilian bureaucrats in the Pentagon insist upon supplying them with unproven technology...technology that is only marginally better than flipping a coin...that would cast serious doubt on actionable intelligence and put lives at risk.

If the Pentagon is truly interested in cutting costs, and if the quality of actionable intelligence is a matter of secondary concern, I have a proposal for them. Instead of soaking the taxpayers for the PCASS units at \$7,500 each, I have a technology that may be just as effective. I can provide them with an unlimited number of specially-minted coins which read “He’s Lying” on one side and “He’s Telling the Truth” on the other. They come in 24k gold, silver, copper, and aluminum and I’ll provide all they need for just \$5,000 a copy.

One returning Special Forces interrogator has said that there are two principal reasons for the reduction in violence in Iraq: the surge and CVSA technology. It’s time that civilian officials in the Pentagon recognized what law enforcement officials across the country are proving every day: that CVSA technology can be the most significant tool yet available in our search for actionable intelligence in the War on Terror. Lives of our fighting men and women are at stake and it’s time the Congress demanded that the Pentagon tell us exactly whose side they’re on.