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NIE Confirms that the Outcome of the Iraq War is Critical to the War on Terrorism

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After critics of the Bush Administration's Iraq policy seized upon selective leaks from an April 2006 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), "Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States," President Bush ordered the declassification of key judgments from that report to refute the misleading portrayal of it. The excerpts¹ released by Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte make clear that, while the war in Iraq is one of many sources of inspiration for terrorists seeking to kill Americans, the outcome of that war is critical to the struggle against terrorism.

The Administration's critics focused on one sentence in the report, which was leaked conveniently in the run-up to the fall elections, six months after the report's release: "The Iraq conflict has become the cause celebre for jihadists, breeding a deep resentment of US involvement in the Muslim world and cultivating supporters for the global jihadist movement."

This conclusion should not surprise anyone. Of course, the jihadists are going to use any excuse to promote their evil agenda. They also have invoked the Israel-Palestinian conflict, the deployment of U.S. troops to protect Saudi Arabia, the Crusades, Islam's eviction from southern Spain in the Middle Ages, Danish cartoons, and the Pope's recent comments to advance their deadly cause.

But even more striking were the sentences that preceded and followed the now celebrated "cause celebre" sentence:

We assess that the Iraq jihad is shaping a new generation of terrorist leaders and operatives; perceived jihadist success there would inspire more fighters to continue the struggle elsewhere.

- The Iraq conflict has become the cause celebre for jihadists, breeding a deep resentment of US involvement in the Muslim world and cultivating supporters for the global jihadist movement. Should jihadists leaving Iraq perceive themselves, and be perceived, to have failed, we judge fewer fighters will be inspired to carry on the fight.

In other words, the NIE concludes that a victory against jihadists in Iraq would reduce the number of future terrorists while a defeat in Iraq would inspire more terrorists to take action. This is a very important judgment that has crucial implications for U.S. policy in Iraq.

No one leaked this key judgment to the mainstream media. The leaker, of course, didn't reveal that conclusion because it undermines the case against the Administration's Iraq policy and would have diluted the political impact of the leak. After

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www.heritage.org/research/MiddleEast/wm1226.cfm

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all, if the outcome of the war in Iraq will help to determine the number of terrorists who threaten the United States and its interests in the future, then the Administration is correct in arguing that Iraq is a crucial front in the war against terrorism.

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1. Press Release, "Declassified Key Judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate 'Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States' dated April 2006," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, September 26, 2006, at http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/Declassified_NIE_Key_Judgments.pdf.