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CODEL LONDON/KUWAIT

A travel diary of meetings with foreign and domestic intelligence in Britain and Kuwait

January 11, 2003 – January 20, 2003

INTRODUCTION

Why? Why spend the next nine days traveling to Britain and Kuwait? The answer to this question became very clear -- not before the trip, but at its end.

The House Intelligence Committee is charged with two primary objectives: to establish policies that enable civilian and military officials in the United States to possess superior intelligence and to understand the intentions of those who might threaten our security. It is also the responsibility of the committee to monitor the implementation of U.S. policies and programs to ensure that we receive the most results for the expenditure of our resources. In the end, the role of the committee is to provide U.S. decision-makers with superior intelligence that will then hopefully lead to superior decision-making. Intelligence is still only as good as the people who use it.

I eventually learned that the answer to the question posed at the beginning of this diary was that the purpose of the trip to Britain and Kuwait was to provide us with more information to plan our intelligence activities for the future, and to provide oversight to the groups collecting intelligence today.

Do we expect practical results once we finish this mission? Absolutely. If we perform the duties with which we are charged correctly, we will possess better information to provide to our decision-makers as they contemplate how to wage war on terrorism, both domestically and internationally. We will also be able to provide information to our military planners as they develop strategic and tactical plans to conduct a possible war against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein -- a war that will involve men and women from West Michigan.

The practical results of good intelligence in Britain included our witnessing the location and arrest of a number of suspects planning a terrorist attack using the deadly toxin ricin. Insufficient intelligence meant that when police raided the suspected site, they were unprepared for what they found. They hadn't expected the number of suspects to be there, and a police officer was subsequently killed. Real consequences come with being prepared or unprepared.

Pre CODEL

As with previous CODELs (Congressional Delegations), the drill is almost identical -- prepare, prepare, prepare! Reading materials are provided. The agenda is established. The objectives are set. Specifically, we need to cover four things on the first part of this CODEL.

1. Understanding the British organizational structure of its law enforcement agencies. British intelligence agencies such as Scotland Yard and MI-6, which is similar to the CIA in the United States, interact in various ways with the similar goal of preventing and investigating terrorist acts among other issues regarding solving and fighting criminal acts. The joint inquiry of the last Congress offered some detailed suggestions for improving U.S. capabilities in the war on terrorism. We can learn about the positives and negatives of various alternatives by understanding how the British system works on both a theoretical basis and a practical basis.
2. Gaining information from the British on the war on terrorism and the potential conflict with Iraq. We have a lot of interdependence with the British, so this will provide an opportunity to share information.
3. Building personal relationships with our colleagues in the U.K. We will be engaged with them for an extended period of time and we need both formal and informal links.
4. Seeing how intelligence hits the road in a real life situation, such as military planning in the Persian Gulf.

The first day of the CODEL does not begin all that well before I depart. I attend the mayor and city council coffee in Holland. I spend too much time at the coffee and need to rush to the airport. The short version of the story is that my flight is cancelled and the new schedule gets me into D.C. moments before our scheduled departure from Andrews Air Force Base. After a comedy of errors, primarily on my part, everything works out and I make the CODEL. Seven members leave Andrews at about 6:30 p.m. After stops in Gander, New Foundland and Shannon, Ireland, we arrive at the hotel in London at about 10 a.m. on Sunday morning, January 12.

January 12, 2003

This is one of those infrequent days on a CODEL where you have a Sunday off to get your body clock adjusted to the new time zone. A short nap and a long shower and it is time to explore the area around the hotel. We walk through Hyde Park and stop to listen at the "Speaker's Corner." At this specific location, individuals stand up and talk about the issues of the day. One individual, the one with the largest audience, talks about Iraq and the U.S., and Britain's relationship with the U.S. (It is from this practice and from this location that we get the phrase, "Get up on your soapbox.") Today the speakers speak from short ladders, but they used to stand on a soapbox!

I think we'll learn a lot about the Brits on this trip. We have a lot in common, and we need to maintain strong alliances if we are to be successful in the world. Aside from the

war on terrorism, we have the potential military conflict with Iraq, problems with North Korea and South America, as well as our own border concerns and internal homeland security issues. For some reason, I believe that this will be a very busy year for the Intelligence Committee.

January 13, 2003

The day begins with the traditional country briefing that includes a very strong emphasis on intelligence issues. The key point stressed over and over is the steadfast cooperation between the U.S. and the United Kingdom.

In some ways, the issues associated with terrorism have evolved more in the U.K. than they have in the U.S. The U.K. has faced domestic terrorism for more than 30 years, primarily from the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Domestic surveillance is prevalent. In fact, the typical Londoner is caught on video an average of 52 times daily. London probably possesses the most civilian surveillance in the world, and people are accustomed to it. Privacy invasion does not appear to be an issue. Their process for dealing with terrorism has evolved over the past 30 years to meet new threats and challenges, and it is now part of the daily routine.

Other differences include the fact that, for domestic surveillance, they have no Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) process like we do in the U.S. They can detain people for up to seven days very easily. Much of the power is ministerial, not judicial. In effect, the judicial branch reviews actions after they have been made. In the U.S., the judicial branch approves actions before they are taken. These are striking differences between the U.K. and the U.S.

The overall complexity of the structure in place to deal with threats to the U.K. is very different than the structure in the U.S. They employ roughly 50 to 60 police agencies for the entire country. The jurisdictions work directly with Scotland Yard. In contrast, there are probably more than 60 police jurisdictions in an American congressional district when you include city, county and state policing agencies. In addition, the people working on the issues in the U.K. have been working together for 20 to 30 years. They know each other. Communication is less complex and more developed in the U.K. Their system shows us that good communication is needed; but it does not show us how to make it happen. We are just different.

In some areas, the U.K. has not responded to terrorism as noticeably as the U.S. has. Roads still run near public buildings. (We have closed off Pennsylvania Avenue near the White House in D.C.) Their buildings do not have setbacks from roads. Statutorily, much of their intelligence community was not created until 1994, and it generally maintains a lower profile.

While the evolution and functions of our intelligence community differs from theirs, some things remain the same. They believe that the most serious threat that we jointly

face is the conjunction of terrorist groups and weapons of mass destruction. We also agree that terrorist organizations are regrouping, and the question is not whether they will again attack, but when. We also agree that quick action against Afghanistan prevented the establishment of “Terror International.”

January 14, 2003

Today starts with a bus trip to Wolesworth, a British military Royal Air Force (RAF) base, located about two hours outside of London. There we will meet with our Joint Analysis Command. Our capabilities for analysis and planning are outstanding. Our resources on an electronic and human basis are very good.

Today’s activities also include a visit to Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre (JARIC), another former RAF base where we meet with the Brits to discuss cooperation and their capabilities. It is a good partnership, and again we learn about things that they do to fight terrorism that would not work in the U.S. Countries with different histories, different roots, different experiences, and differences of scale must deal with similar problems in very different ways. We talk about the Constitution as our foundation, but remember, the U.K. does not even have a written constitution.

Just a note for the day: It is an awesome experience to be on an old RAF base that was used as a bombing platform during World War II and a launching point for D-Day. It is not hard to understand why the two nations are so closely tied. Each of the bases has memorials that recognize the sacrifices of the men who had served there.

January 15, 2003

Meetings for the day are scheduled with Scotland Yard, various security groups, and members of their Intelligence Committee. At noon, we will head over to the House of Commons to watch the weekly questioning of the Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Tony Blair has three issues on which he wants to focus in general:

- Iraq – work through the United Nations process and hope for success, with war as a last resort.
- Restart the peace process in the Middle East.
- Work on issues in sub-Saharan Africa.

Prime Minister Blair is very supportive of the U.S. He leads from the front and wants to be the one who shapes public opinion. He has been successful to date, but some cracks are appearing. Front-page newspaper stories talk about differences and divisions within his own party.

As we start this day off, the need for this trip becomes very clear. The headlines are not all that different to what you might read in the American press. First, a law enforcement officer has been stabbed and killed during a police raid in an anti-terrorism effort linked to the discovery of the deadly toxin ricin in a London apartment. Secondly, the debate about involvement with the U.S., the possible war with Iraq, and the depth of public support is questioned. And finally, the investigation into Bloody Sunday, which took place almost 30 years ago, continues. The Bloody Sunday Inquiry is a tribunal established to review the events of Jan. 30, 1972 that led to the shooting deaths of 13 demonstrators in Ireland by British soldiers. Why is this last point important? Its results may undermine public trust of the government in general, based on the conclusions and findings of the report.

How are things the same? In our meetings, we generally discuss the rescaling and recalibrating of U.K. anti-terrorism efforts. (Sounds familiar.) They are building on their experience with the IRA, but recognize that the new threat is very different. They discuss how they link the objectives of the Prime Minister to something actionable by local police officers. They have battled terrorism for years. We are struggling with how we take intelligence and use it to help direct actions by state and local policing agencies. British authorities would be the first to admit that the current product is a result of 30 years of efforts, including many lessons learned from failures. They also discussed their process for alerting the public about various threats that may exist. It is a policing decision as well as a political decision.

And how are things different? They are trying to connect and coordinate 50 to 60 policing agencies. We have township, village, city, county, and state policing agencies to coordinate. There are thousands of agencies throughout the U.S., many with overlapping jurisdictions and vastly different resources available to them. They have been exposed to much more public violence and destruction within their own homeland than the American people have. London was targeted consistently during World War II, and they had a Homeland Defense Force preparing for an invasion that never came. They have experienced the threats and violence from the IRA, and the Cold War was much closer to home for them than it ever was to the U.S. They have dealt with threat alerts for years.

We visited Prime Minister Winston Churchill's war rooms while we were in London. As people walked through those rooms during World War II, the sound of the air raid sirens continued constantly. Photos show people spending nights in the subways. Most Londoners have experienced streets blocked off because of suspicious cars or packages. They have lived through the process and decision-making; they are familiar with the trade-offs between the security and safety of the populace vs. individual freedoms. This latest round of terror is only different, not new.

There is not a right or wrong answer to these questions for us, but it is a debate that we need to go through. The British are accustomed to tipping off police about suspicious activity. When a similar program was proposed in the U.S., it raised many red flags. Some individuals and groups said they would not participate. That is how we are

different. We are a product of our different histories, and as similar as these histories are, they also make us very different.

Three things strike me:

- The British and the U.S. agree on the threats that are out there and that they are very serious.
- Headlines announce that 10,000 asylum seekers who were refused asylum in Britain cannot be found. The issue here is the rule of law. The Brits, with a wink and a nod, did not enforce parts of their law and now are paying a price for this failure. They believe that among these 10,000 individuals are those most likely to threaten their safety. The U.S. has a lesson to learn here. We need to reform and enforce our immigration laws.
- In Britain, people understand after 30 years of terror that improvements in security can be made. Threats can be reduced, but no free people will ever enjoy 100 percent security. Do Americans understand that reality, or do they believe that we should be able to stop all terrorist incidents in the U.S. and all attacks against our citizens around the world?

January 16, 2003

Meetings with the British continue. Today, we meet with our counterparts at the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), which is similar to our National Security Agency (NSA). The meetings detail their capabilities and our cooperation -- how we can and do work together and how we can improve on that relationship.

Their long-term commitment to these activities is clear. They are building a new facility of close to 1 million square feet that will become the new headquarters for GCHQ. They are obviously very proud of this site.

January 17, 2003

We visit more of our joint facilities in the U.K. We meet with U.S. frontline troops who show and demonstrate some of their unique capabilities to gather and communicate intelligence in a real-time fashion, enabling our military commanders and our troops to have the information necessary to most effectively protect themselves and accomplish their mission.

The CODEL meets with U.S. troops for lunch and discusses a number of issues that impact their effectiveness. Issues include language capabilities, training, and job flexibility. These are issues that we have heard before in our trips. Now it is time to do something about them. These meetings with our frontline personnel are some of the most productive meetings that we have on any CODEL. The feedback that we receive from

the troops and their commander is that they really appreciate these visits and the interest expressed in their work!

January 18, 2003

We attend meetings at the Milworth installation. This unit forms part of the international communications network that is so vital to the United States and Britain. It is an interesting and impressive site of approximately 20 structures of various sizes, some rather large, that from a distance look like huge golf balls dropped onto the English countryside. We meet with employees and obtain a better understanding of how they fit into this international communications network. The site has been somewhat controversial; groups protest here regularly.

In the middle of the afternoon, I separate from the CODEL. The rest of the delegation will head to Berlin and Ireland to continue talks. I am taking a red-eye flight to Kuwait for meetings on Sunday. I will then take the red-eye from Kuwait back to the states and West Michigan on Sunday night. For three days and two nights, the only place to sleep will be on the plane.

January 19, 2003

Kuwait -- this is where the rubber meets the road. For much of this trip, the CODEL has focused on the ability to gain intelligence superiority over any potential enemy. If the U.S. can combine our weaponry superiority with intelligence superiority, we should place ourselves in a position to provide our decision-makers, including those on any battlefield, with the tools for decision superiority. I visit one of the operations headquarters. This is where the pieces come together. We are putting together an impressive array of individuals and technology that plan for whatever may happen in this part of the world. These individuals believe that the intelligence structure provided will enable them to become significantly more effective in any future engagements.

Kuwait has been very supportive of the U.S. They have sectioned off almost one-third of the country for U.S. operations and preparations and provide a security perimeter for this area. It provides us with a staging area. The country is desolate, at least the part where our troops are being positioned and will be positioned. It is like a big Lake Michigan beach, except the sand is not as clean and there is no water nearby. Today the weather is cool, probably around 60 degrees. By the time we leave the desert, it is probably near 40 degrees and cooling. By July and August, the temperature will reach 135 degrees. This is a challenging environment.

I see some of the sights left from Iraq's invasion of 1990, such as building shells. I ride the highway of death where the U.S. caught many of the retreating Iraqi units. I ride by the stretch of the highway that is now a graveyard for many of the vehicles and military hardware that were destroyed. It's a significant collection of hardware.

I see the operation of some of our advanced military weapons, including the Predator and other unmanned aerial vehicles. These weapons provide great intelligence with no risk to human life and at a relatively low cost. A Predator is actually flying while we are there. People from around the world can request real-time information as to what they want or need to see. Again, it is the attempt to get weapons and intelligence superiority that will lead to decision superiority by U.S. officials.

This part of the trip closes as we meet with young troops from back home. They are eager to talk until we put them on camera to send messages back home. Then they clam up. Like in the U.K., these are talented people doing a tough job.

It is back to the hotel to clean up and take the red-eye back home. Hotel? Yes, I reserved a room to clean up before we went to the meetings today, and it also gave me an opportunity to clean up before the flight home. No time to sleep, however. That will have to wait until take-off.

January 20, 2003

A five-and-a-half-hour flight to Amsterdam, a little more than eight hours to Detroit, another 35 minutes to Grand Rapids, an hour drive, and I will be home. For the rest of the week, I will meet with constituents to discuss what I learned on this trip and other issues important to West Michigan.