

CIA Won't Listen to Congressman's Source

BY RICHARD MINITER

Less than a kilometer from Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, after midnight in an up-market hotel bar last year, the Iranian across from me wasn't drinking. Whether he was being a good Muslim or just didn't feel like it, I didn't know.

He had worked for the shah of Iran and stayed on to work for Ayatollah Khomeini for a time. His duties put him into direct contact with terrorists and mullahs. After leaving Iran, he went to work for several European intelligence services while maintaining sources high up in the Iranian regime. He said he knew more about what was going on in Teheran than the CIA. The agency, though desperate for human intelligence, had all but ignored him. His name was Ali.

So was I the only American he was talking to?

His eyes brightened. "Do you know Congressman Curt Weldon?"

He didn't tell me what vital intelligence he had passed to the Republican congressman from Pennsylvania, but now I know.

Rough Alliance

Ali's information is the core of *Countdown to Terror*, a new book by Weldon, which contains a number of explosive, if true, revelations: that the FBI stopped an al-Qaeda plot to crash a hijacked plane into Seabrook nuclear power plant near Boston, that Iran is a lot closer to building an atomic bomb than the outside world knows and that Iran has forged a rough alliance with al Qaeda, much the way it has partnered with Hezbollah, to wage war on America and its allies.

The power of Ali's claims rests on his credibility. While Weldon finds him credible, the CIA and much of the intelligence establishment does not. It's Ali's friendship with Manucher Ghanbari, the middleman center of the Iran-Contra affair, that gives the spy agency pause. They fear becoming entangled in another career-wrecking intrigue. Ali's relationship with Ghanbari is no secret; indeed in one of my meetings with Ali he introduced me to Ghanbari, who I found to be fast-talking, defensive and in a perpetual cloud of clove cigarette smoke. But Ali is his own man and the agency's attempt at guilt-by-association—the very technique that liberals used to fault Sen. Joe McCarthy for—is misguided.

Since Ali has been a source of mine, I can tell you how I established his credibility. I asked him for the names of two non-declared Iranian intelligence agents working in Europe. I passed those names to a trusted contact at a European intelligence service. A few weeks later, that service confirmed that the Iranians (whose names had never



Credit

In *Countdown to Terror*, House Armed Services Vice Chairman Curt Weldon (R.-Pa.) reveals his secret correspondence with a code-named source named Ali on issues ranging from Iran's nuclear weapons program.

appeared in press reports) were indeed believed to be intelligence agents working under diplomatic cover. A former National Security Council staffer showed me documents that revealed that Ali's intelligence was not only accurate but had saved the lives of American soldiers in Afghanistan. So I used him as a source in my book *Shadow War*. (Full disclosure: Regnery is my publisher as well as Weldon's and its parent company is the publisher of this newspaper.) In my book, by agreement, I referred to him as "Chooan." While I cannot vouch for everything in Weldon's book, I have found Ali to be a credible source over the past two years.

Decision-makers, journalists, and anyone interested in the single greatest threat to America (Iran) should read this fast-paced book. Even experts will learn from it. Iran is already at war with the United States, directly financing terror strikes against American soldiers and diplomats across the Middle East. As Weldon's book and a wealth of other documentation reveals, Iran is harboring bin Laden's son and some 500 other al Qaeda figures today. It has already tested missiles that have the range to hit U.S. bases in the Middle East as well as our friends in Israel. It is developing nuclear warheads to put on those Shihab-3 missiles. If you want to understand the threat from Iran, you can either read this book or read the headlines six months from now.

Herculean Task

In the last chapter, Weldon lays out a number of detailed and informed ideas for intelligence reform. Some (such as the mass firing of much of the senior management of the CIA and the outright abolition of the CIA's Office of Congressional Affairs, which bars direct contact between intelligence officers and even high-ranking congressman with security clearances) are so radical they are likely to be dismissed. They should not be. Hercules used a river, not a shovel, to clean the Augean stables. Weldon's pointed criticism of bureaucratic background checks that keep virtually all immigrants and many patriotic natives from serving in the intelligence services is dead

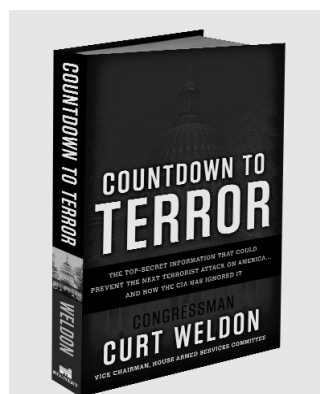
on. As is his criticism of the "coordination process" that dilutes the insights of gifted analysts with the groupthink of fossilized middle managers. The CIA today is too much of a herd, not a pack.

It's too bad the American public didn't hear more of Weldon's ideas during last year's congressional debate about "intelligence reform." Let's hope it doesn't take another September 11 attack to get the nation to listen to Rep. Weldon. ■

"For two years now, I have tried to work with the intelligence community. I find myself with no alternative but to turn to you, the American people."

—Rep. Curt Weldon in *Countdown to Terror*.

Mr. Minter is author of the New York Times bestseller Losing bin Laden: How Bill Clinton's Failures Unleashed Global Terror (Regnery—a HUMAN EVENTS sister company) and Shadow War: The Untold Story of How Bush is Winning the War on Terror (Regnery.) He has reported for the Wall Street Journal and the Sunday Times of London.



Countdown to Terror: The Top-Secret Information that Could Prevent the Next Terrorist Attack on America and How the CIA has Ignored It

by Congressman Curt Weldon
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