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Flawed terror war reports

By Ed Royce

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The New York Times has publicly, although haltingly, admitted serious errors in its coverage of the global war on terror. The mea culpa by the so-called "paper of record" over its coverage of terror financing is simply too little, too late. They have compromised national security and the ability of U.S. intelligence to fight the terrorists who would do us harm. The damage done is irreparable.

The apology by Editor Byron Calame rings with insincerity. It appears to be little more than an attempt to save some journalistic "face." While the editor should be acknowledged for admitting the reckless action of his newspaper, he should

have admonished his colleagues -- not simply for the inaccurate reporting, but for also ignoring the pleadings of congressional leaders, the administration and the September 11 commission not to publish the terrorist finance tracking story.

For those of us who have questioned the New York Times coverage all along it was no surprise to find the apology secreted deep in the paper where it would be noticed by very few. The most disturbing aspect of this betrayal however is its habitual nature. The disclosure of the Terrorist Finance Tracking Program is not the only New York Times display of disloyalty and contempt for the American people. The paper has, on three separate occasions, put the lives of those on the front line at direct risk and hampered our efforts in the war on terror. The American public should be angry and must start to take notice.

In December 2005, the Times reported on a closely held program that monitored al Qaeda communications. The NSA wiretaps "terrorist surveillance program" was a key element in our fight against terrorism here at home. The full extent and operations of the program remain classified, however Attorney General Alberto Gonzales has stated that the aim is not "to collect reams of intelligence, but to detect and warn and prevent (terrorist) attacks." In short, thwart acts of violence inside the United States. This did not deter the New York Times.

As previously mentioned, in June of this year, the Times revealed a sophisticated effort by the Treasury Department and the intelligence community to trace terrorist financing. According to a top Treasury official, the program "has provided us with a unique and powerful window into the operations of terrorist networks." Again, the Times felt compelled to publish, clearly against the public's best interest. The Congress took the extraordinary step of condemning the Times on the floor of the House.

Most recently, the Times leaked select excerpts of the National Intelligence Estimate

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entitled, "Trends in Global Terrorism." Significantly, only portions of the classified document were printed by the New York Times -- the portions painting the most dire assessment. The administration responded by declassifying and releasing more of the NIE's findings. Tellingly, a Democratic staff member of the Intelligence Committee has been suspended pending an investigation into the leaking of the document. If substantiated, any wrongdoing must be severely punished. No matter what ones political affiliation, this is simply unacceptable -- it directly endangers lives.

If indeed there is a leak within the Democratic staff of the House Intel Committee, it proves that the Democrats are prepared to play politics with our national security, in concert with the New York Times. The question is just how deep does this unsavory coalition run? What really tipped the balance to force their astonishing admission? We may never know. Regrettably, neither the New York Times nor the suspended Democratic staff member, if found culpable, will likely suffer any consequence from the illegal disclosure of this program. It is the American people who may well pay the ultimate price.

The politically induced illegal leaks which expose our nation's tactics and tools in the war on terror must be plugged. Attempts by the Democrats and the newspaper to exploit these illegal disclosures for political gain also must cease. The New York Times has assisted only the terrorists in publishing our intelligence secrets. One must wonder if Osama bin Laden has a subscription to the "paper of record"?

Ed Royce, a California Republican, is chairman of the House International Relations, Terrorism and Nonproliferation Committee.

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