Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 18, 2005

Ambassador John Negroponte
Director of National Intelligence
New Executive Office Building
725 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20511

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

As you know, during Operations Desert Storm, Iraqi Freedom, and our ongoing operations in Iraq, there have been a vast array of foreign papers, documents, and other materials captured, found or otherwise procured. These materials, in their various forms, are a potential treasure trove of information that could be useful to the U.S. government, our allies around the world, and, just as importantly, to the general public.

We are fully aware of the formal process to recover, safeguard, catalog and exploit these items and the information that is produced from them. We are also fully aware, and supportive, of the sensitive nature of many of these efforts. However, as we understand it, the sheer volume of materials that we have obtained is overwhelming our Intelligence Community's ability to properly categorize and translate the contents, analyze and review the information, verify authenticity, and report to users the knowledge generated. Many, if not most, of the literally millions of pages of documents are unclassified and could be worked by people who do not have security clearances. However, the current approach by the Intelligence Community requires that only cleared individuals look at this vast amount of data, and nearly guarantees that exploitation will take decades, if ever, to complete. In fact, we've learned that tens of thousands of boxes of documents captured since the 1991 Desert Storm operation have never been meaningfully reviewed in any way. We believe there is a need for a managed risk approach to discovering the contents of these materials.

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We are proposing that you immediately develop a process to, consistent with necessary security guidelines and agreements with our foreign government partners, release these documents to the general public, including posting documents on the world-wide web in a manner allowing cooperative public review. This would serve to allow the entrepreneurial, linguistic and analytic talents of the general public to dramatically assist the Intelligence Community in understanding the contents of these materials. At a minimum, this public assistance could "point" the Intelligence Community to the small subset of information that is likely to be of importance. Clearly there would have to be safeguards built in such that "new" documents could not be manufactured by creative minds, forgeries could be identified, accuracy of translations and authenticity of content could be verified, etc. Without question, intelligence sources and methods would have to be protected.

In addition to the public release of these documents, we would also like you to explore the establishment of one or more international academic commissions or institutes dedicated to the study of these documents and media. Such an organization or organizations could be located convenient to document exploitation facilities to give direct access to the original documents. For example, a joint commission of Iraqi and other academics from around the world could examine documents and tapes related to Saddam's decision making process over the years and issue public reports. These organizations would serve as a focused effort by serious academics to ensure that these documents and media are fully exploited.

This is clearly a dramatic departure from the norm in terms of how our Intelligence Community conducts its business to protect America and its public. However, the materials that go untouched because of limited resources, expertise and/or time provide us with no useable information. This proposal takes risk, but we believe it is manageable risk.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Peter Hoekstra
Chairman
House Permanent Select Committee
on Intelligence

Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Select Committee
on Intelligence