

Cheney, Feith Are Hit On Iraq Exaggerations

A 46-page report issued by Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), in his capacity as Ranking Member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, shows how a small group in the Defense Department (DOD) abused rules concerning Congressional oversight and classified information, to insert “dubious” intelligence reports about the “relationship” between Iraq and al-Qaeda, to further the Bush Administration’s predisposition for war against Iraq. The report, entitled “Report of an Inquiry Into the Alternative Analysis of the Issue of an Iraq-al-Qaeda Relationship,” documents that this group was led by neo-conservative Doug Feith, Under Secretary of Defense, and that the main “consumer” of Feith’s hoked-up intelligence is Vice President Dick Cheney.

Levin’s report calls for “corrective legislation” to prevent the creation of an “alternative” intelligence agency, such as the one that Feith created with the blessing of Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

The report states: “Life-and-death decisions are based on the accuracy of intelligence. When intelligence is distorted or exaggerated to support the policies of an administration, it jeopardizes our nation’s security and the lives of the men and women of our armed forces. This report . . . demonstrates how intelligence relating to the Iraq-al-Qaeda relationship was manipulated by high-ranking officials in the DOD to support the administration’s decision to invade Iraq when the intelligence assessments of the professional analysts of the Intelligence Community did not provide the desired compelling case.”

The report also finds Cheney culpable for both “implicitly” condoning the leak of the “highly classified” alternative Feith report on al-Qaeda to the neo-con Weekly Standard, and for “explicitly” praising this Feith pack of lies as “the best possible source of information” on al-Qaeda.

A press release from Senator Levin issued on Oct. 21 said, “The report demonstrates how intelligence relating to the Iraq-al-Qaeda relationship was exaggerated by high-ranking officials in the Department of Defense to support the Administration’s decision to invade Iraq when the intelligence assessments of the Intelligence Community did not make a sufficiently compelling case [emphasis added]. The Intelligence Community’s analysis of the Iraq-al-Qaeda relationship as a relatively weak one was as definitive as reliable reporting would permit, and their conclusions were subsequently supported by the 9/11 Commission and the Report of the Senate

Select Committee on Intelligence.”

The following excerpts are taken from Levin’s Senate Armed Services Committee report. Subheads have been added.

Feith’s Manipulations of Intelligence

Within weeks of September 11, Under Secretary of Defense Doug Feith had tasked two consultants to start sifting through all of the intelligence, both finished products and raw reports, relating to terrorist groups and their state sponsors. . . . The 150-plus page briefing they developed . . . was completed in early 2002. . . .

In the spring of 2002, another analyst . . . in Feith’s Policy office went back to look at earlier intelligence reports, including raw reports involving Iraq and al-Qaeda that the IC [Intelligence Community] had previously considered but deemed not suitable to reflect in finished intelligence reports. This information was passed to Secretary Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz. . . .

Feith has stated that his tasking of policy staff to review intelligence was “routine,” and . . . “the purpose of the review was development of strategy and policy.” Yet the products of the review were not strategy or policy recommendations. . . they were selective reinterpretations of intelligence [emphasis added].

. . . The fact that a Policy office undertook such an intelligence review, rather than relying on the IC, suggests a determination to reach a particular conclusion. . . .

Wolfowitz is reported as describing “a phenomenon in intelligence work, that people who are pursuing a certain hypothesis will see certain facts that others won’t. . . .” He added, “The lens through which you’re looking for facts affects what you are looking for.” That approach proved to be precisely the problem with the Feith analysis.

His office was pre-disposed in favor of finding evidence that supported the hypothesis that al-Qaeda had a collaborative relationship with the Iraqi regime. That was the lens through which he was looking. . . . The SSCI [Senate Select Committee on Intelligence] report on pre-war intelligence on Iraq found evidence of a similar analytic failure of bias (in that case regarding Iraqi weapons of mass destruction) and described it as “a hypothesis in search of evidence.” That was the approach taken by the Feith office. . . . [pp. 12-13]

Feith et al. Push Dubious Information

Feith’s staff also pressed dubious information, including criticizing the draft IC report for omitting reference to the key issue of Atta. . . .

The Feith staff also had a harsh critique of the CTC report [called] Iraq and al-Qaida: Interpreting a Murky Relationship. One of his staff wrote in its interpretation of this information. . . . “Therefore, the CIA report should be read for content only—and CIA’s interpretation ought to be ignored” . . . This critique was sent by . . . Feith to Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz



Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, released a report documenting the fabrication of intelligence prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. It highlights the role of Cheney and Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith.

and Secretary Rumsfeld. . . .

However, documents provided to the SASC indicate that Feith's staff requested, both verbally and in written form, at least 32 changes to the draft, including inserting raw intelligence reports that had previously been omitted, deleting others, and altering the characterization of certain issues and raw reporting. . . .

Thus, even though IC analysts refused to incorporate information which they believed was dubious into their *judgments* about the Iraq-al-Qaeda relationship, and the IC *analysis* remained skeptical of that relationship, nonetheless raw, questionable intelligence reports were incorporated in the IC document because of advocacy by Under Secretary Feith and his staff.

Administration officials relied on or cited these reports in their public statements about the Iraq-al-Qaeda relationship and selectively used or cited questionable reports that went beyond the IC's judgments [emphasis in the original; pp. 14-16].

Skewing the Story on Iraq and al-Qaeda

In February, 2004, DOD provided the SASC with a copy of a classified briefing from the Feith office entitled "Assessing the Relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda."

Senator Levin subsequently learned that there were differences between the version of the briefing presented to the IC and that provided to the DOD. In May, 2004 DOD provided three versions of the briefing, stating that differences among them primarily reflected ongoing work, and that one specific slide that was critical of the IC was omitted from the briefing to DCI Tenet. . . .

[A] comparison of the three versions reveals more than 35 differences. . . . While some of the changes may well reflect analysis that was evolving, this explanation is insufficient. For example, one slide, omitted from the version presented to the CIA but included in the version presented to the White House, discussed the alleged meeting between 9/11 hijacker Mohammed Atta and an Iraqi intelligence officer in Prague in April, 2001. It described the alleged meeting as one of the known Iraq-al-Qaeda contacts. The report of the meeting was referred to by senior Administration officials, especially Vice President Cheney, as evidence of a possible Saddam Hussein link to the 9/11 attacks. However, not only has the alleged meeting never been known, either at the time this briefing was presented to the White House, or ever, the Intelligence Community was skeptical in late spring 2002 that such a meeting took place. . . .

[This] meant that unbeknownst to the IC, policymakers were getting information that was inconsistent with, and thus undermined, the professional judgments of the IC experts. . . . [pp. 16-18, 22]

Preventing Intelligence Corrections

In fact, DCI Tenet had been unaware of the Feith staff September 2002 briefing to the White House until February 2004, when Senator Levin raised the issue at an SSCI hearing. Thus the nation's foremost intelligence experts, and the President's chief intelligence officer, were deprived of the opportunity first to correct inaccuracies about IC analysis of the Iraq-al-Qaeda relationship, and, more importantly, deprived of the opportunity to inform the White House of significant concerns about the reliability of some of the reporting upon which

Under Secretary Feith's White House briefing was based. [p. 24]

More Feith Manipulations of Intelligence

On July 10, 2003, Under Secretary Feith appeared before the SSCI in a classified hearing. Senators Roberts and Rockefeller posed some additional questions to be answered for the hearing record, one of which addressed relations between Iraq and al-Qaeda. Under Secretary Feith responded to that question on October 27, 2003, and attached to his answer a classified annex entitled Summary of Body of Intelligence on Iraq-al-Qaeda Contacts (1990-2003).

Much of the information included in the Summary had been collected by the CIA, and was, as a result, originator controlled, or ORCON. When disseminated by anyone other than the originator, ORCON material must be cleared by the originating agency to ensure it is being used properly. Therefore, Under Secretary Feith should have cleared his Summary with the CIA before submitting it to the SSCI. He did not do so.

On November 15, 2003, the *Weekly Standard* published an article written by Stephen Hayes entitled "Case Closed: The U.S. Government's Secret Memo Detailing Cooperation Between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden." The article said it was based on a top secret document "dated October 27, 2003," and "sent from Undersecretary of Defense for Policy

Douglas J. Feith to . . . the Senate Intelligence Committee." The article, which purported to quote extensively from the top secret DOD document, asserts that "Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein had an operational relationship from the early 1990s to 2003," and concludes that "there can no longer be any serious argument about whether Saddam Hussein's Iraq worked with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. . . ." [pp. 24-25]

Cheney Proliferates Lie on Hussein-Osama Link

March 16, 2003. "[W]e know that he has a long-standing relationship with various terrorist groups, including the al-Qaeda organization." Vice President Cheney, "Meet the Press."

The SSCI report concluded that the CIA had reasonably assessed that likely contacts between Iraq and al-Qaeda during the 1990s *did not add up to an established, formal relationship* [emphasis added].

January 9, 2004. "With respect to the . . . general relationship . . . [o]ne place you ought to go look is an article that Stephen Hayes did in the *Weekly Standard* here a few weeks ago, that goes through and lays out in some detail, based on an assessment that was done by the Department of Defense and forwarded to the Senate Intelligence Committee some weeks ago. That's your best source of information." Vice President Cheney, *Rocky Mountain News*.

The *Weekly Standard* article to which Vice President Cheney referred starts with the conclusion that Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein had an operational relationship from the early 1990s to 2003 that involved training in explosives and weapons of mass destruction, logistical support for terrorist attacks, al-Qaeda training camps and safe haven in Iraq according to a top secret U.S. government memorandum. . . . The article ends with the conclusion that "there can no longer be any serious argument about whether Saddam Hussein's Iraq worked with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda to plot against Americans."

The article to which the Vice President referred represented that it was based on a leaked, Top Secret Defense Department document prepared by Under Secretary Feith and sent to the SSCI. By referring to the article in the way he did (including his comment that the article was based on an assessment that was done by the Department of Defense and forwarded to the Senate Intelligence Committee), the Vice President not only implicitly condoned the unauthorized release of highly classified material; he explicitly endorsed the article's contents.

Vice President Cheney's view that the Feith document was the best source of information of the Iraq-al-Qaeda relationship was not shared by the IC. Director Tenet, in testimony before the SASC on March 9, 2004, said that the CIA did not agree with the way the data was characterized . . . and that he would speak to Vice President Cheney to inform him of the IC's disagreements. . . ." [p. 34]

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