

Arrest of Pentagon Official May Help Unravel Neo-Conservative Cabal

by Jeffrey Steinberg and Nancy Spannaus

Pentagon Iran desk officer and neo-con patsy Larry Franklin was arrested on May 4, on charges that he passed classified information based upon secret Pentagon documents to two American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) officials in June 2003, at a restaurant in Arlington, Va. The two AIPAC officials, who were not named in the complaint, were Steve Rosen and Keith Weissman, who were both fired by AIPAC in recent weeks.

A number of senior intelligence sources, reached for comment on the Franklin charges, all had the same essential reading: The FBI has a *prima facie* case against Franklin. In FBI raids on his home, Federal agents confiscated 83 classified documents, which he was not authorized to have there. The case is cut and dried, and a charge of mishandling classified documents carries a ten-year Federal jail sentence. Franklin is being squeezed to provide prosecutors with a complete picture on the AIPAC/Israel espionage operation, including Pentagon officials who were part of the effort. These include, but are not limited to: Doug Feith, William Luti, Harold Rhode, and Abram Shulsky.

In addition, one source emphasized the importance of Franklin's December 2001 trip to Rome, accompanied by Rhode and Michael Ledeen. The trip centered around a meeting with former Iran-Contra swindler Manucher Ghorbanifar, whom Ledeen sought to reactivate as a Pentagon channel to the Iranian government, and as a source on activities inside Iraq and Afghanistan. The Rome trip coincided with the surfacing of the forged Niger government documents, falsely charging that Saddam Hussein was seeking large quantities of yellow cake uranium from the African nation.

Franklin was arrested on a criminal complaint, even as a grand jury continues to consider his case. He is widely considered to be providing information to prosecutors. A closer look at his associations with the neo-con crowd shows that by targeting him, FBI officials might be able to unravel a whole skein of wrongdoing, which could help bring down the inner circle linked to Vice President Dick Cheney.

Preparing To Hit Iran?

The investigation of Franklin, and his dealings with the AIPAC officials, first was made public in August 2004, in the immediate wake of a major propaganda barrage promoting

pre-emptive military action against Iran. As head of the Iran desk at the Pentagon, Franklin had access to classified documents related to that area; according to the criminal complaint, he allegedly disclosed Top Secret information related to potential attacks upon U.S. forces in Iraq, to the two individuals, neither of whom had the security clearance to receive that information. At the time, Lyndon LaRouche estimated that patriotic sections of the U.S. intelligence community were acting to defuse a potential Israeli "breakaway ally" hit against Iran.

It was not only AIPAC officials with whom Franklin was in touch. He is reported to have also had meetings with Naor Gilan, until recently an Iran specialist at the Israeli Embassy in Washington. And, according to both the *New York Times* and Associated Press on May 5, FBI officials recently questioned a former senior Mossad official about his ties to Franklin. The official was Uzi Arad, a former senior official with the Israeli intelligence agency. Arad is reported to have told the FBI that he had met Franklin twice, and received an academic paper from him.

Arad is no garden variety Mossad agent. He held senior posts from 1975 to 1999, and served as the Foreign Policy Advisor to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. After the FBI probe of Franklin was announced Aug. 29, 2004, Azad was one of the Israelis who jumped to defend Israel against the allegations that Franklin had passed them classified documents, saying that at worst the analyst (Franklin) "crossed the line" by inappropriately disseminating sensitive material. "That is not espionage," he said.

Azad is also notable for the fact that, in a speech at the Jerusalem Institute for Contemporary Affairs on March 26, 2003 (five days into the Iraq War), he called on the United States and Israel to take military action against Iran as well. The luncheon meeting which Franklin had with the AIPAC officials, at which he allegedly passed them classified information, occurred on June 26, 2003.

Who Is Larry Franklin?

Sources in the military and intelligence community have provided this news service with a profile of the suspected Israeli mole: Larry Franklin is a Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) analyst, who shifted from Cold War Soviet studies,



Larry Franklin is shown here speaking in the ear of neo-con Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith.

to a specialty in Iran-Iraq. A protégé of DIA Sovietologist Winnifred Joshua, Franklin also studied at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), where he was reportedly picked up by Paul Wolfowitz, then-Deputy Secretary of Defense, and an individual who has been probed for passing U.S. secrets to Israel since 1978, according to a February 2004 study by Stephen Green, which catalogued long-standing espionage allegations against, and investigations into Wolfowitz, Feith, Michael Ledeen, Stephen Bryen, and Richard Perle.

In the Summer of 2001, Franklin was transferred from DIA to the Pentagon's policy office under Feith, where he took charge of the Iran desk in the Near East South Asia (NESA) section, and later worked for the Office of Special Plans (OSP), the Iraq war-planning unit under Feith and NESA head William Luti. Luti had been a military aide to former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, and had been in the Office of Vice President Cheney at the start of the "Bush 43" Administration. According to Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski (USAF, ret.), who served in NESA from June 2002 to March 2003, Luti bragged at staff meetings, that he was reporting directly to "Scooter," which, she learned, was a reference to Cheney's chief of staff, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby.

As an Air Force Reserve officer, Franklin had served several tours of duty at the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv, where, according to one military source, he had gotten in trouble for unauthorized contacts with Israeli intelligence officials. According to one news account, the current FBI probe into Franklin's activities was triggered by a June 2002 leak in the *New York Times*, which detailed American war plans against Iraq. While on the NESA Iran desk, Franklin was also reportedly the subject of a probe into his mishandling of classified documents; however, a serious probe into that incident was blocked by the intervention of Luti and Feith, according to a

confidential Pentagon source.

Franklin, according to an eyewitness, was part of a neo-con inner circle that met frequently, behind closed doors, in the office of Doug Feith. The group included Feith, Luti, OSP official Abram Shulsky, Office of Net Assessment Mideast specialist Harold Rhode, former Defense Policy Board Chairman Richard Perle, David Wurmser, and Michael Maloof. As a group, they worked closely with Wolfowitz and with Libby, whose own ties to the Israeli Mafiya and Israeli intelligence run deep: Libby was the former attorney for Israeli "Mafia" boss Marc Rich.

Franklin, Rhode, and Ledeen

In the Summer of 2003, it was revealed that Larry Franklin had been part of a Pentagon team, composed also of Rhode and self-professed "universal fascist" Michael Ledeen, which had travelled to Rome, in December 2001, to open unauthorized channels to the Iranian government, through a widely discredited Iran-Contra figure, Manucher Ghorbanifar. According to one news account of the trip, the troika sabotaged talks then under way between the State Department and the Iranian government, involving the turning over to the United States of five top al-Qaeda figures, who were in custody in Iran.

Virtually every member of the neo-con grouping has been under investigation for espionage, fabrication of intelligence, and other treachery against the United States. Sources, for example, have identified Rhode, a longtime protégé of British intelligence's Dr. Bernard Lewis, and a close collaborator of Ledeen, as the target of a separate espionage probe, involving his passing of U.S. national security secrets to Israel, while he was in Baghdad as part of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). While in Baghdad, Rhode practically lived out of the home and office of Iraqi National Congress (INC) head Ahmed Chalabi.

Ledeen is also, according to law enforcement sources, a target of inquiry, concerning his suspected role in passing forged Niger government documents to the Italian intelligence service, SISMI. The forged documents purported to "prove" that Iraq was seeking uranium from Niger, to build a nuclear bomb. Vice President Cheney and other Bush Administration officials used the threat of Iraq's alleged imminent possession of a nuclear bomb, as a bludgeon to force Congressional approval of the Iraq War. When President Bush cited alleged Iraqi efforts to obtain uranium "yellow cake" from an African state in his Jan. 28, 2003 State of the Union address, the whole issue blew up, leading to the ongoing Federal criminal probe.

Although both the State Department and CIA had cautioned that the Niger yellow cake story was dubious, Bush and Cheney went ahead with their shrill allegations. Then-International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) director Dr. Mohammed ElBaradei revealed in early March 2003, that the Niger documents were shoddy forgeries. According to several former U.S. intelligence officials, one prime suspect in the

document forgeries scam was Chalabi's INC. Ledeen, a long-time Chalabi booster, has also long been a paid "consultant" to SISMI. A September 2004 *Washington Monthly* article reports that when Ledeen, Franklin, and Rhode met in December 2001 with Iranian government officials in Rome, the head of SISMI and Italy's Minister of Defense also attended the meetings.

A Bolton Angle?

While the issue of Pentagon illegal activity with Israel, in order to provoke a war against Iran, or Syria, is still a live one, so is the matter of the Niger "yellow cake" concoction, a story which has never been solved, and which is intimately connected with the still live investigation of what is known as the Plame leak.

It was December 2001, after the Ledeen, Franklin, Rhode trip to Rome, that fraudulent documents surfaced, alleging that Iraq was negotiating for yellow cake from Niger. In the Spring of 2002, reportedly on the recommendation of Vice President Cheney, former U.S. Ambassador Joe Wilson was sent to investigate the charges, and returned a report saying that the claim was false. In the Summer of 2003, Wilson was subjected to an attempt to discredit him in the media, including through the disclosure of the identity of his wife, covert CIA operative Valerie Plame. The disclosure of Plame's identity was a violation of Federal law, but, as yet, the Administration has not "solved" the case. A Federal Special Prosecutor is still pursuing the case of the leak, which many sources report to have originated from the vicinity of Cheney's office.

On the strength of Wilson's report, and other analysis, the CIA and the State Department removed the Niger report from their intelligence estimates of Iraq's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. Yet, in December 2002, Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs John Bolton played a key role in putting this false information in a widely circulated State Department Fact Sheet on "Omissions From the Iraqi Declaration of the United Nations Security Council."

In a March 1, 2005 letter to the chairman of the National Security Subcommittee of the House Government Reform Committee, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) asked for a committee investigation into State Department efforts to conceal the role of Bolton in the creation of the Fact Sheet, and in insisting that the Niger reference be kept in the Fact Sheet, despite objections from both State Department intelligence and CIA officials.

This inquiry has relevance not only to Bolton's potential connection to an espionage network, but to his persistent role in "fixing" intelligence which he and his neo-con friends did not like. It was this cooking of intelligence which provided the justification for pushing the United States into war against Iraq, in pursuit of WMD which were not there, and which the neo-con circles around Dick Cheney continue to carry out in pursuit of the new wars they have on their agenda.