

Portrait of an “antiwar” Democrat: Former Feith aide makes radio reply to Bush

Patrick Martin
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Congressional Democrats issued angry denunciations of the Bush administration’s distortion of pre-war intelligence on Iraq after the Pentagon inspector general issued a report February 9 on the operations of a special Pentagon unit headed by then-Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith.

The Office of Special Plans, as the group was called, played a key role in developing the Bush administration’s case for war with Iraq, using intelligence data that was either questionable or concocted to bolster the claim that Iraq under Saddam Hussein had “an active operational relationship” with Al Qaeda. This was combined with the claim of a massive Iraqi stockpile of weapons of mass destruction to create a bogus “nightmare scenario” in which Saddam Hussein would supply a nuclear bomb to Al Qaeda to detonate in an American city.

The inspector general’s report, while covering up the larger significance of the Pentagon operation, did admit that Feith’s actions at the Office of Special Plans were “inappropriate,” although it asserted they were not illegal because Feith was following the orders of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, deputy Pentagon chief Paul Wolfowitz and other top officials, including Vice President Dick Cheney.

Eight days after the inspector general’s report produced harsh sound bites from Senator Carl Levin, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and other leading Democrats, a much less well-known legislator was chosen to give the Democratic response to President Bush’s Saturday morning radio speech. Taking the airwaves for the Democrats, and hailing the House passage Friday of a nonbinding resolution against Bush’s “surge” of additional troops to Iraq, was freshman Congressman Christopher Carney of Pennsylvania.

Carney has a remarkable background for a supposedly “antiwar” Democrat. As an intelligence officer in the Navy Reserves, he was detailed to the Office of Special Plans, where he worked with Feith and helped prepare a slide presentation purportedly documenting Saddam Hussein’s connections with Al Qaeda and attacking the official CIA assessment that there was little evidence supporting the existence of such connections.

In his five-minute radio address, Carney referred briefly to his military career, saying, “As an intelligence and counterterrorism advisor in the US Navy Reserves, I was proud to serve at the Pentagon after the September 11th attacks.” He was silent, however, about his key role in the fabrication of the Al Qaeda-Iraq connection.

Details of this work were supplied, however, in brief profiles of the new congressman that appeared after the November election in the *New Yorker* (November 20), the *Los Angeles Times* (November 22), and the *New York Times* (November 28).

All three profiles concur on key elements of Carney’s background and political positions:

* Carney was an aggressive advocate of the claim that there was an active Iraq-Al Qaeda relationship, and he still defends that theory, while now suggesting that Saddam Hussein was mainly concerned with monitoring a potential adversary, not recruiting an ally against the US. (The *New York Times* article quotes Carney as still being critical of the CIA for being “so equivocal” about the evidence of this non-existent connection.)

* Carney participated in the briefings staged by Feith in August and September 2002 for Cheney, Rumsfeld, Cheney’s Chief of Staff Lewis Libby and then-Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley, outlining

the supposed evidence of an Al Iraq-Qaeda link, including the now-discredited claim of a meeting in the Czech Republic between 9/11 hijacker Mohammed Atta and an Iraqi secret agent.

* Carney supported, and still supports, the initial decision to go to war with Iraq. He became highly critical of the Bush administration's refusal to recognize that it faced a major guerrilla war in Iraq and subsequently left the Pentagon in 2004, returning to his position as a Penn State University professor, then announcing his candidacy for the congressional seat long held by Republican Don Sherwood of Wilkes-Barre.

* Carney has maintained friendly relations with the ultra-right elements with whom he worked at the Pentagon. His congressional campaign received a contribution from Richard Perle, one of the most prominent neo-conservative advocates of war with Iraq.

Given his background in intelligence (according to his congressional web site, Carney served at the Pentagon as "senior advisor on intelligence and counterterrorism issues" and "coordinated counterterrorism activities in the Middle East"), Carney was embraced by congressional Democratic campaign officials seeking military and Iraq war veterans to run against vulnerable Republican incumbents. Carney was lucky in his opponent, Sherwood, whose campaign self-destructed amid allegations that the 65-year-old congressman had beaten up his mistress. (Sherwood admitted the affair but not the violence.)

Carney did not initially focus on Iraq in his congressional campaign, calling it "one straw among many" in influencing his decision to run. He describes himself as "probably to the right" of most Democrats in the House of Representatives on Iraq and opposes a rapid withdrawal of American troops, suggesting instead that for each battalion of Iraqi troops trained and deployed, a battalion of US troops should be withdrawn.

In his radio response to Bush, Carney declared his commitment to a US victory while calling for a shift from a purely military approach to the war to a wider deployment of US government resources. "Time is running out," he said. "In order to win the war in Iraq and bring our troops home, we know that we must embrace diplomatic and political solutions."

In his speech during the House debate on the

nonbinding resolution, Carney expressed regret that the Bush administration had not used sufficient military force from the beginning. "Mr. Speaker," he declared, "21,000 troops is far less than a half measure of what is truly needed to secure Iraq. But the unfortunate reality is that we no longer have the troops available to do the job properly."

He continued: "We are now less able to respond in other trouble spots around the globe because of this failed policy. The troops have won the war, but the administration has failed to secure the peace."

The newly elected congressman initially sought a seat on the Intelligence Committee, but had to be satisfied with Homeland Security, where he chairs a subcommittee controlling the budget of the US Coast Guard. He is understandably unenthusiastic about a congressional investigation into how the Bush administration "fixed" intelligence in making the case for war, telling the *New York Times*, "Let's win the war first, then maybe look at how we got into it. The more energy spent on answering congressional investigations, the less time will be spent on winning the war."

His *New Yorker* profile concludes with his cynical remark that if Congress does investigate the performance of the Office of Special Plans, "Maybe I'll ask myself some tough questions."



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