

Pentagon report admits fabricated intelligence used to justify Iraq war

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A dryly worded report by the Defense Department's inspector general has further substantiated a conclusion already drawn by the majority of the American people: the Bush administration and senior officials in the Pentagon falsified intelligence to justify an unprovoked war of aggression against Iraq.

The report presented Friday to the Senate Armed Services Committee is entitled "Review of Pre-Iraqi War Activities of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy." The document amounts to a damning political indictment of a key figure in manufacturing the phony case for a war against Iraq, Douglas Feith, who occupied the undersecretary office—the number-three post in the Pentagon—from July 2001 until his resignation in August 2005.

Feith's office was used to create an in-house intelligence bureau that consisted of two sections, one known as the Office of Plans, and the other the Policy Counter-Terrorism Evaluation Group. The two sections were employed in an attempt to substantiate the two-pronged lie utilized by the Bush administration to foist the war in Iraq upon the American people.

The first was dedicated to manufacturing evidence that Baghdad was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction, and the second to substantiate allegations that the Saddam Hussein regime had forged close ties to the Al Qaeda terrorist network blamed for the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City and Washington. The combined aim of these efforts—which began in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks—was to terrorize the American people with the prospect of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons being delivered by Iraq into the hands of terrorists for use against US cities.

The Pentagon intelligence shop was seen by the administration as a means of bypassing the Central Intelligence Agency, which chafed at producing the unequivocal indictment against Iraq that the White House

wanted. It cherry-picked dubious intelligence to make the preconceived case for war.

The report, produced by the Pentagon's acting inspector general Thomas Gimble, states that Feith's office "developed, produced and then disseminated alternative intelligence assessments on the Iraq and Al Qaeda relationship, which included some conclusions that were inconsistent with the consensus of the Intelligence Community, to senior decision-makers."

It describes the reports issued by Feith's office as "of dubious quality or reliability," adding that they assembled "unreliable" intelligence to make a case for an al-Qaeda-Iraq link "that was much stronger than that assessed by the IC [Intelligence Community] and more in accord with the policy views of senior officials in the Administration."

It is not so much the content of this report—which parallels charges widely made elsewhere in both the run-up to and aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of March 2003—that is significant. Rather, it is the fact that the Pentagon's own watchdog is compelled to admit the nature of this operation.

Indeed, until now, the inspector general's investigation had been utilized by the former Republican leadership in the Senate to stonewall any independent investigation of the fabricating of pre-war intelligence.

It was Feith's office that served as a conduit for the "intelligence" provided by Ahmed Chalabi—the former banker and convicted embezzler—and his exile group, the Iraqi National Congress. It was also the champion of the discredited claim that 9/11 hijacker Mohamed Atta had met with an Iraqi official in Prague months before the attacks on New York and Washington. The Pentagon inspector general's report made particular note of Feith's office producing a slide show for administration officials describing this nonexistent meeting as a "known contact." Administration officials, and in particular Vice President Cheney, repeatedly invoked this lie to justify the war and

blame Iraq for 9/11.

The inspector general's report focused on a July 25, 2002, memo from Feith's office entitled "Iraq and al-Qaeda: Making the Case." The memo acknowledged that "some analysts have argued" that the Islamist movement led by Osama bin Laden and the secular nationalist regime of Saddam Hussein were enemies and would not cooperate, "reporting indicates otherwise."

The inspector general's report concluded that Feith's office "was inappropriately performing Intelligence Activities...that should be performed by the Intelligence Community."

It continued that these actions were "inappropriate because a policy office was producing intelligence products and was not clearly conveying to senior decision-makers the variance with the consensus of the Intelligence Community."

At the same time, the inspector general declared that Feith's actions had not been "illegal or unauthorized." It found that he was acting under the direction of both former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and former Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz.

In his response to the report, Feith, who now teaches at Georgetown University in Washington, seized upon the finding that he had not carried out any illegal actions, while maintaining that to charge him with "inappropriate" behavior after his work was authorized by Pentagon superiors was "bizarre."

Indeed, the contradiction to which he refers is evident. That a senior official's manufacturing of phony intelligence to promote a war of aggression—itsself a war crime—could be classified as legal is untenable.

The inspector general's report will not end the matter. Senator Jay Rockefeller (Democrat, West Virginia) said that the Senate Intelligence Committee, which he heads, will conduct its own investigation into whether Feith's actions violated the 1947 National Security Act. This statute requires that US government agencies involved in intelligence activities "keep the congressional oversight committees informed." Noting that the inspector general had concluded that Feith was indeed carrying out intelligence activities, Rockefeller stated, "The Senate Intelligence Committee was never informed of these activities. Whether these actions were authorized or not, it appears that they were not in compliance with the law."

Feith's sudden resignation from the Pentagon in 2005 appeared to come in response to the tightening ring of investigations into matters related to his office. Among them was his questioning by the FBI over the actions of

one of his subordinates, Larry Franklin, who passed classified US documents on Iran to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which in turn handed them to the Israeli embassy.

Suspicion of Feith's possible involvement in this affair involving the Pentagon, the foremost Zionist lobby and the Israel government has firm political foundation. Before joining the Bush administration, Feith was affiliated with the pro-Likud Party Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA). In 1996, he co-authored a policy document for the then-incoming Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu advocating the reconquest of all the occupied territories, the ouster of Saddam Hussein and "rolling back Syria."

The further discrediting and exposure of the phony intelligence utilized to justify a war that was waged against Iraq—not over WMD or terrorist ties, but for control of oil resources—has unfolded at an awkward moment for the administration.

Even as the inspector general's report was being disclosed in Washington, Defense Secretary Robert Gates was claiming at a NATO meeting in Spain that the Pentagon has "pretty good" evidence that Iran is arming Iraqi insurgents for attacks on US occupation forces.

The administration had announced that on January 31, US ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad and US military commanders in Baghdad would present the media with a "dossier" substantiating Iranian involvement in the Iraqi violence. In the end, the press conference was called off, evidently because the "evidence" was too threadbare.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the same process overseen by Feith in the run-up to the Iraq war is being initiated once again in preparation for military aggression against Iran. Once again, claimed threats from weapons of mass destruction and terrorist ties are to be used to justify a war aimed at furthering Washington's aims of asserting US imperialist hegemony over the strategic energy resources of the entire Persian Gulf.



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