

## Pentagon Office Base for Neoconservative Network Manipulating Iraq Intelligence

By Jim Lobe | September 15, 2003

An ad hoc office under U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith appears to have acted as the key base for an informal network of mostly neoconservative political appointees that circumvented normal interagency channels to lead the push for war against Iraq.

The Office of Special Plans (OSP), which worked alongside the Near East and South Asia (NESA) bureau in Feith's domain, was originally created by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz to review raw information collected by the official U.S. intelligence agencies for connections between then Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda.

Retired intelligence officials from the U.S. State Department, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) have long charged that the two offices exaggerated and manipulated intelligence about Iraq before passing it along to the White House.

But key personnel who worked in both NESA and OSP were part of a broader network of neoconservative ideologues and activists who worked with other political appointees of U.S. President George W. Bush scattered around the national-security bureaucracy to move the country to war, according to retired Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski, who was assigned to NESA from May 2002 through February 2003.

The heads of NESA and OSP were Deputy Undersecretary William Luti and Abram Shulsky, respectively.

Other appointees who worked with them in both offices, according to Kwiatkowski, included Michael

Rubin, a Middle East specialist previously with the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI); David Schenker, previously with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP); Michael Makovsky, an expert on neoconservative icon Winston Churchill and the younger brother of David Makovsky, as well as a senior WINEP fellow and former executive editor of pro-Likud *Jerusalem Post*; and Chris Lehman, the brother of John Lehman, a prominent neoconservative who served as secretary of the Navy under former U.S. President Ronald Reagan. Along with Feith, all of the political appointees have in common a close identification with the views of the right-wing Likud Party in Israel.

Feith, whose law partner is a spokesman for the settlement movement in Israel, has long been a fierce opponent of the Oslo peace process, while WINEP has acted as the think tank for the most powerful pro-Israel lobby in Washington, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which generally follows a Likud line.

Like Feith, several of the appointees were protégées of Richard Perle—an AEI fellow who doubled as chairman until last April of Rumsfeld's unpaid Defense Policy Board (DPB), whose members were appointed by Feith—and they had an office in the Pentagon one floor below the NESA offices.

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Similarly, Luti, a retired naval officer, was a protégé of another DPB board member also based at AEI, former Republican Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich. Luti in turn hired Ret. Col. William Bruner, a former Gingrich staffer, and Chris Straub, a retired lieutenant colonel, anti-abortion activist, and former staffer on the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Also working for Luti was another naval officer, Yousef Aboul-Enein, whose main job was to pore over Arabic-language newspapers and CIA transcripts of radio broadcasts to find evidence of ties between al Qaeda and Hussein that may have been overlooked by the intelligence agencies, and a DIA officer named John Trigilio.

Through Feith, both offices worked closely with Perle, Gingrich, and two other DPB members and major war boosters—former CIA director James Woolsey and Kenneth Adelman—in ensuring that the so-called “intelligence” they developed reached a wide public audience outside the bureaucracy.

They also debriefed so-called “defectors” handled by the Iraqi National Congress (INC), an opposition umbrella group headed by Ahmed Chalabi, a long-time friend of Perle, whom the intelligence agencies generally wrote off as an unreliable self-promoter.

“They would draw up ‘talking points’ they would use and distribute to their friends,” said Kwiatkowski. “But the talking points would be changed continually, not because of new intel [intelligence], but because the press was poking holes in what was in the memos.”

The offices fed information directly and indirectly to sympathetic media outlets, including the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Weekly Standard* and FoxNews Network, as well as the editorial pages of the *Wall Street Journal* and syndicated columnists, such as Charles Krauthammer.

In inter-agency discussions, Feith and the two offices communicated almost exclusively with like-

minded allies in other agencies, rather than with their official counterparts, including even the DIA in the Pentagon, according to Kwiatkowski.

Rather than working with the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research, its Near Eastern Affairs bureau, or even its Iraq desk, for example, they preferred to work through Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security (and former AEI Executive Vice President) John Bolton; Michael Wurmser (another Perle protégé at AEI who staffed the predecessor to OSP); and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Elizabeth Cheney, the daughter of U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney.

At the National Security Council (NSC), they communicated mainly with Stephen Hadley, the deputy national security adviser, until Elliott Abrams, a dyed-in-the-wool neoconservative with close ties to Feith and Perle, was appointed last December as the NSC’s top Middle East aide.

“They worked really hard for Abrams; he was a necessary link,” Kwiatkowski said in an interview last month. “The day he got [the appointment], they were whooping and hollering, ‘We got him in, we got him in’.”

They rarely communicated directly with the CIA, leaving that to political heavyweights, including Gingrich, who is reported to have made several trips to CIA headquarters, and, more importantly, I. Lewis “Scooter” Lilly, Cheney’s chief of staff and national security adviser.

According to recent published reports, CIA analysts felt these visits were designed to put pressure on them to tailor their analyses more to the liking of administration hawks.

In some cases, NESAs and OSP even prepared memos specifically for Cheney and Libby, something unheard of in previous administration because the lines of authority in the vice president’s office and the Pentagon are entirely separate. “Luti sometimes

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would say, “I’ve got to do this for Scooter’,” said Kwiatkowski. “It looked like Cheney’s office was pulling the strings.”

Kwiatkowski said she could not confirm published reports that OSP worked with a similar ad hoc group in Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s office.

But she recounts one incident in which she helped escort a group of half a dozen Israelis, including several generals, from the first floor reception area to Feith’s office. “We just followed them, because they knew exactly where they were going and moving fast.”

When the group arrived, she noted the book that all visitors are required to sign under special regulations that took effect after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. “I asked his secretary, ‘Do you want these guys to sign in?’ She said, ‘No, these guys don’t have to sign in.’” It occurred to her, Kwiatkowski said, that the office may have deliberately not wanted to maintain a record of the meeting.

She added that OSP and MESA personnel were already discussing the possibility last January of “going after Iran” after the war in Iraq, and that articles by Michael Ledeen, another AEI fellow and Perle associate who has been calling for the United States to work for “regime change” in Tehran since late 2001, were given much attention in the two offices.

Ledeen and Morris Amitay, a former head of AIPAC, recently created the Coalition for Democracy in Iran (CDI) to lobby for a more aggressive policy there. Their move coincided with suggestions by Sharon that Washington adopt a more confrontational policy vis-a-vis Teheran.

Iran recently said it was prepared to turn over five senior al Qaeda figures, including the son of Osama bin Laden, who are currently in its custody, if Washington permanently shuts down an Iraqi-based Iranian rebel group that is listed as a terrorist organization by the State Department.

Pentagon officials, particularly in Feith’s office, have reportedly opposed the deal, which had been favored by the State Department, because of the possibility that the group, the Mujahadeen Khalq, might be useful in putting pressure on Tehran.

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