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## Pentagon Office Home to Neo-Con Network

by Jim Lobe

WASHINGTON - 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 neo-conservative political appointees that circumvented normal inter-agency 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 Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda.

Retired intelligence officials from the 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 neo-conservative ideologues and activists who worked with other Bush political appointees 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 included Michael Rubin, a Middle East specialist previously with the neo-conservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI);

David Schenker, previously with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP); Michael Makovsky; an expert on neo-con icon Winston Churchill and the younger brother of David Makovsky, a senior WINEP fellow and former executive editor of pro-Likud 'Jerusalem Post'; and Chris Lehman, the brother of the John Lehman, a prominent neo-conservative who served as secretary of the navy under Ronald Reagan, according to Kwiatkowski.

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.

Also like Feith, several of the appointees were protégés of Richard Perle, an AEI fellow who doubles as chairman until last April of Rumsfeld's unpaid Defense Policy Board (DPB), whose members were appointed by Feith, also had an office in the Pentagon one floor below the NESA offices.

Similarly, Luti, a retired naval officer, was a protégé of another DPB board member also based at AEI, former Republican Speaker of the 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 Saddam 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 "intelligence" they developed reached a wide public audience outside the bureaucracy.

They also debriefed "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 the 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 neo-con 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 told IPS Wednesday. "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 the CIA headquarters, and, more importantly, I Lewis "Scooter" Lilly, Vice President Dick

Karen Kwiatkowski:  
*"It looked like Cheney's office was pulling the strings"*.  
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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, NESA 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 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 which all visitors are required to sign under special regulations that took effect after the Sep. 11, 2001 attacks. "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, she 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 of "going after Iran" after the war in Iraq last January and that articles by Michael Ledeen, another AEI fellow and Perle associate who has been calling for the U.S. 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 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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