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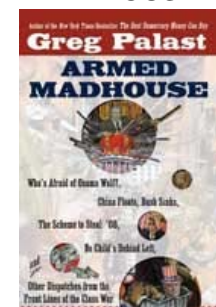
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# Pentagon confirms Iranian directorate as officials raise new concerns about war

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Current military and former intelligence officials remain concerned about a US-led strike on Iran, despite the recent appearance of diplomacy on the part of the US State Department and the offer of an incentives package to Iran.



Officials point to new developments, such as a recent meeting in Rome between an Iranian arms dealer and controversial neoconservative Michael Ledeen and the March creation of the Iranian directorate inside the Pentagon, as examples of recent events similar to the lead up with war in Iraq.

These officials also add that an as-yet uncompleted 'Phase II' investigation into pre-war Iraq intelligence suggests the same problems may recur when addressing Iran. They note that the Pentagon's Iranian directorate mirrors the so-called Office of Special Plans, which played a major role in feeding intelligence to the President that bolstered a case for war.

## Ledeen goes to Rome

A recent trip by Michael Ledeen to Rome has raised red flags among those concerned about a potential war with Iran. Some believe that Ledeen -- a long-time advocate of Iranian regime change -- was involved in the Niger forgeries scandal.

In late 2001, Ledeen, mid-east expert Harold Rhode and Pentagon analyst Larry Franklin (who later pleaded guilty to passing classified information to a Washington pro-Israel lobbying group) traveled to Rome to meet with Iranian arms dealer Manucher Ghorbanifar and various Italian, Iranian, and Egyptian intelligence agents. Not long after, documents falsely purporting that Iraq had attempted to buy yellowcake uranium surfaced in the international intelligence community, ending up at an Italian magazine, *Panorama*, for which Ledeen wrote periodic articles.

Ghorbanifar and Ledeen were directly involved in the Iran-Contra scandal of the 1980s, which implicated then-President Ronald Reagan, Vice President George H. W. Bush and the highest ranking members of the Reagan administration in the illegal sales of weapons to Iran.

Ledeen's recent visit to Rome and meeting with Ghorbanifar have created new concern that something is developing with regard to US plans for Iran. Ledeen, however, denies that his visit to Italy was anything other than a personal trip with his wife Barbara.

"I did not 'go to Rome.' I went to Naples to see the San Gennaro celebration and the opening of the Fontanelle cemetery after more than twenty years of closure," Ledeen wrote in an email to **RAW STORY**.

"You'll be able to read descriptions in my forthcoming book, *Virgil's Golden Egg and Other Neapolitan Miracles*," he added.

Ledeen, who has spent the last year working on a book about Naples, confirmed traveling to Rome as part of a visit to meet with friends. When asked if he had met with Ghorbanifar while in Rome, Ledeen confirmed the allegation by intelligence sources, but said that this

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visit was of a personal nature, unlike his previous visit.

"We visited various friends in Rome and Florence," Ledeen said.

"[Ghorbanifar] is a friend of mine, and so, as it has been for more than twenty years, I talk to him from time to time and I meet with him when our schedules intersect," Ledeen added.

Ledeen characterized the meeting as part of a "normal friendship."

"I would say on average I see him twice a year for a day or half a day," he said. "And it's not just him, it's sometimes his wife, his daughter... imagine! A normal friendship."

## Pentagon confirms Iran Directorate

Military and non-military intelligence sources have also raised worries over what some describe to as "the Iran group" and others as "the Iran working group" and still others as a "cabal" operating out of the Pentagon.

A recent [article](#) by Laura Rozen for the *Los Angeles Times* revealed the Pentagon has created yet another Office of Special Plans-type body called the Directorate for Iran, or the Iranian Directorate.

"The Pentagon's directorate began with six full-time staff members," Rozen reported. "But they can draw on expertise throughout the government, providing access to potentially hundreds of specialists."

The notorious Office of Special Plans – which focused on Iraq -- is now believed by most experts to have provided a secondary conduit of cherry-picked intelligence on Iraq to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the White House. ([More here](#))

One former intelligence official, wishing to remain anonymous for this article, described OSP in a mocking tone as a "separate channel of information."

John Pike of Global Security, a Washington-based intelligence clearinghouse, was less polite in his description of OSP.

"It was created to, as Dean Acheson urged Harry Truman, to scare hell out of the American people by making things a little bit clearer than the truth," he said.

Lt. Col. Barry E. Venable, a spokesman for the Pentagon, confirmed the creation of the directorate for Iran in both a phone conversation and an email message.

"As the State Department stated in early March (Daily Press Brief, Mar. 3), the U.S. Government is organizing itself better to address what Secretary Rice called 'one of the great challenges for the United States, a strategic challenge for the United States and for those who desire peace and freedom,'" Venable wrote.

"As a counterpart to the State Department's new Office of Iran Affairs, the Department of Defense has split off a new directorate for Iran-related policy issues from the existing Directorate of Northern Gulf Affairs in the Office of Near East and South Asia Affairs (NESA)," he added. "These regional policy offices fall within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs."

Venable also confirmed that the new directorate falls under the policy side -- more specifically -- under the new number three at the Pentagon, Eric Edelman. Edelman, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, holds the same position that Douglas Feith held when he ran OSP at the Pentagon in the lead-up to the Iraq war.

Moreover, sources say that the Iranian Directorate is staffed with many of the same people, including OSP's former director Abram Shulsky, and receives expert analysis from such controversial figures as Project for the New American Century member Reuel Marc Gerecht, who by all accounts was a failure as a CIA field officer. It also includes military personnel such as Ladan Archin, who appears to be serving in the Larry Franklin analyst role among a sea of think-tank operatives and neoconservative war hawks.

When asked specifically about Shulsky, Venable described his involvement as follows:

"Mr. Shulsky continues in his position as Senior Advisor to the USD

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(P), focusing on Mid-East regional issues and the [global war on terror].”

Ledeen says that he is not involved with the new Iran operation out of the Pentagon.

## **Iraq intelligence inquiry remains incomplete**

Former intelligence officials also point to a yet-to-be completed Phase II investigation of Iraq pre-war intelligence by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

“The committee continues its work on Phase II and hopes to complete it as soon as possible,” said Wendy Morigi, Communicators Director for Senator Rockefeller, Vice Chairman of the Intelligence Committee. “One of the key sections, however, which was to review the office of former Undersecretary Doug Feith, has been postponed by the Chairman until the Pentagon IG completes its own investigation.”

As previously reported by RAW STORY ([article here](#)), Phase II consists of several areas of focus that the Committee is investigating in order to determine Iraq pre-war planning and post-invasion failures -- specifically in five key areas:

-Whether public statements and reports and testimony regarding Iraq by U.S. Government officials made between the Gulf War period and the commencement of Operation Iraqi Freedom were substantiated by intelligence information;

-The postwar findings about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and weapons programs and links to terrorism and how they compare with prewar assessments;

-Prewar intelligence assessments about conditions to be expected in postwar Iraq;

-Any intelligence activities relating to Iraq conducted by the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluation Group (PCTEG) and the Office of Special Plans within the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; and

-The use by the Intelligence Community of information provided by the Iraqi National Congress.

The Office of Special Plans aspect of the investigation has been part of the reason for the delay in the delivery of Phase II by the Committee and is contingent on the Pentagon Inspector General's office concluding its own investigation.

The lack of a comprehensive report as to how the Pentagon conducted itself prior to the Iraq war, as well as afterward, raises suspicions among some still in uniform about the Pentagon's Iran Directorate's role going forward. Many see parallels between what is already known about the Office of Special Plans and what appears to be escalating activity surrounding Iran.

Trita Parsi, a specialist on Iranian foreign policy at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, told **RAW STORY** that “In the short term the risk for military confrontation [with Iran] has been reduced,” but cautions that “In the long run, however, unless there are talks taking place the risk for a military strike remains the same.”

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