

Updated 04 Jun 2003



United States Department of Defense

News Transcript

On the web: <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030604-0248.html>Media contact: media@defenselink.mil or +1 (703) 697-5131Public contact: public@defenselink.mil or +1 (703) 428-0711**Presenter:** Douglas J. Feith, USD (Policy)**Wednesday, June 4, 2003 - 8:38 a.m. EDT**

DoD Briefing on Policy and Intelligence Matters

(Briefing on policy and intelligence matters. Participating were Douglas J. Feith, under secretary of defense for policy, and William J. Luti, deputy under secretary of defense for special plans and Near East and South Asian affairs.)

Feith: Good morning.

Bill, do you want to join me up here?

The reason that we were interested in meeting with you this morning is to help lay to rest some stories that have been circulating about the Defense Department that are not true and are beginning to achieve the status of urban legends. So we thought we would try to help straighten the record out.

There are four issues that I think I'd like to address. One is this so-called, or alleged intelligence cell and its relation to the Special Plans Office. Secondly is the issue of intelligence judgments regarding Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Third is the department's alleged intent to topple the Iranian regime, about which there have been a number of inaccurate news stories. And finally, our policy and the Defense Department's views on the organization called the MEK, the Mujahedeen e Khalq, an Iranian terrorist group. And I'd like to start with a review of some of these items, and then my colleague, Bill Luti and I will be happy to take some of your questions.

On this so-called intelligence cell, which has been hyped in various publications as a Department of Defense effort to create a unit that would somehow substitute for the CIA, I'd like to give you what actually is the story. After the September 11th attack, I identified a requirement to think through what it means for the Defense Department to be at war with a terrorist network. This was an unusual circumstance -- warfare has traditionally been against nation states -- and we understood that it presents a number of peculiar conceptual challenges to be at war with a network, or as I've described it as a network of networks of terrorist organizations.

So, I asked for some people to think through -- first of all, to review the large amount of intelligence on terrorist networks, and to think through how the various terrorist organizations relate to each other and how they relate to different groups that support them; in particular, state sponsors. And we set up a small team to help digest the intelligence that already existed on this very broad subject. And the so-called cell comprised two full-time people. This is why you see that I think it's almost comical that people think that this was set up as somehow an alternative -- (Chuckles.) -- to the intelligence community or to the CIA. I mean, it was two full-time people. They drew from time to time on assistance from a few others. I mean, altogether, we're talking about four people, five people, you know, at one time or another, doing the work.

The team began its work in October of 2001. It was not involved in intelligence collection. Rather, it relied on reporting from the CIA and other parts of the intelligence community. Its job was to review this intelligence to help digest it for me and other policymakers, to help us develop Defense Department strategy for the war on terrorism. And as I said, it looked at these interrelationships among terrorist organizations and their state sponsors. It did not confine its review to Iraq or al Qaeda. I mean, it was looking at global terrorist networks and the full range of state sponsors and other sources of support for terrorist groups. Its main conclusion was that groups and states were willing to cooperate across philosophical, ideological lines.

So, it came up with the -- a number of interesting connections of where, for example, Sunni and Shi'a groups cooperated, or religious-based groups cooperated with secular groups or states. And so it showed that we cannot simply assume that the only cooperation that existed in the world among terrorist groups and their sponsors was on some kind of pure ideological or philosophical lines. I mean, this is not that shocking for anybody who remembers that, for example, the Nazis and the Soviets had a strategic alliance also. But it was a very important point, because there was a lot of debate in government circles and in academic circles about whether these different groups do in fact cooperate across these philosophical lines.

I think what has become the focus of a lot of the press stories about this is the fact that in the course of its work, this team, in reviewing the intelligence that was provided to us by the CIA and the intelligence community, came up with some interesting observations about the linkages between Iraq and al Qaeda. And when they did, and they brought those to the attention of top-level officials here in the department, and we arranged for a briefing of these items to Secretary Rumsfeld, he looked at that and said, "That's interesting. Let's share it with George Tenet." And so some members of the team and I went over, I think it was in August of 2002, and shared some of these observations. And these were simply observations of this team based on the intelligence that the intelligence community had given to us, and it was just in the course of their reading it, this was incidental to the purpose of this group. But since they happened to come up with it and since it was an important subject, we went over, shared it with George and people at the CIA. My impression was it was pretty well received, and that was that. It was one meeting.

There have been a number of misperceptions about this team. One of them is that, there have been several press articles that have identified this team with the Special Plans Office in Dr. Luti's organization. Dr. Luti is the deputy under secretary of defense for -- let me get it right --

Luti: Special Plans and Near Eastern/South Asian Affairs.

Feith: Special Plans and Near Eastern/South Asian Affairs.

Luti: Twenty-seven countries.

Feith: And this intelligence cell -- alleged -- which is this team that did this particular project, which was not an intelligence project -- it was a matter of digesting other people's intelligence products -- this team is not -- was not part of that office; wasn't related to it. In fact, the team stopped doing its work -- basically, once we had that meeting with the CIA and the team had given us a report on these terrorist network interconnections, there was no team anymore. And they stopped doing their work before the Special Plans Office, if I have it straight, was actually created within Dr. Luti's organization.

Q: (Off mike.)

Luti: October of 2002. We had -- a decision was made in August of 2002 to reorganize, and Doug will explain to you why. But those are the dates.

Q: And that team stopped in August 2002?

Feith: Roughly. The -- (Chuckling.) -- and the Special Plans Office was called Special Plans, because at the time, calling it Iraq Planning Office might have undercut the -- our diplomatic efforts with regard to Iraq and the U.N. and elsewhere. We set up an office to address the whole range of issues regarding Iraq planning.

Luti: And if I may, it's clear to make a distinction; it's a policy planning office, just like -- in my shop, I have essentially three directorates: A Middle East directorate with a handful of people working, a South Asia directorate with a handful of people working, and I used to have a Northern Gulf directorate, which we expanded to meet the incredibly stepped-up requirements in the summer and fall of last year to deal with Iraq. We needed help, we needed people. So, we expanded it. And that's what I do -- policy planning.

Feith: So, I mean, there have been some people who have kind of concocted a goulash of snippets about this team that was working on the terrorist interconnections and the Special Plans Office, and they mixed them up when there's no basis for the mix.

As I mentioned, this team that was doing the terrorist analysis was not focused on Iraq. I mean, they focused -- they did not have a narrow focus. It was a global -- it was a global exercise, even though this particular report that -- briefing, I should say, that was prepared and given to the CIA focused on Iraq and al Qaeda because, as I said, that kind of fell out incidentally from the work that they were doing on global terrorist networks.

Third, there are some press accounts that have tied the team to what is called the intelligence collection program, which was a program for debriefing Iraqi defectors over recent years. And in fact the team had nothing to do with that program or the transfer of the management of that program from the State Department to the Defense HUMINT [Human Intelligence] Service.

And the -- with regard to this intelligence collection program, the reports that were obtained from the debriefings of these Iraq defectors were disseminated in the same way that other intelligence reporting was disseminated, contrary to one particular journalist account who suggested that the Special Plans Office became a conduit for intelligence reports from the Iraqi National Congress to the White House. That's just flatly not true. And in any event, that was a Defense Intelligence Agency/Defense HUMINT Service function, and not -- it was not anything that was run out of the policy organization. So again, this is part of the goulash of inaccuracies.

And then finally there were some accounts that asserted that the team dealt with the weapons of mass destruction issue, and there have been a number of stories in recent days that suggested that this was a team that somehow developed the case on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and it didn't -- I mean, it -- and that is also flatly not true. The team was focused on terrorist networks; it was not focused on weapons of mass destruction.

Now on this issue of intelligence judgments -- now to get to my second topic, the intelligence judgments on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, Secretary of State Powell talked about our intelligence sources when he gave his presentation on February 5th to the U.N. Security Council. He

played tapes of Iraqis who were discussing -- these were intercepts of Iraqi communications in which there were discussions of the concealing of weapons of mass destruction from U.N. inspectors. Secretary Powell cited the reports of witnesses and informants. He discussed the U.S. government's knowledge of Iraq procurement efforts in the weapons of mass destruction field. And he cited the old U.N. inspectors' organizations reporting on weapons of mass destruction, for which Iraq had never accounted adequately.

And these judgments were based on intelligence that -- intelligence reports and intelligence analysis that not only went back years but predated this administration. In February 1998 President Clinton said, "Iraq continues to conceal chemical and biological weapons and the missiles that can deliver them, and Iraq has the capacity to quickly restart production of these weapons." Secretary of Defense Cohen, in -- also in 1998, said, "I believe that Iraq is developing them, because they've used them in the past. The acquisition of these types of weapons does make Saddam Hussein a major player in the region. He's concerned about the power, and the opportunity to have nuclear or biological or chemical weapons gives him the status and the ability to project that power to intimidate the neighbors in the region." And there are similar quotations from Vice President Gore and others.

The -- it -- from our perspective, it's pretty clear that the intelligence community's judgments concerning Iraqi weapons of mass destruction did not undergo a major change between the Clinton and Bush administrations. And that's -- without regard to the issue of whether the officials from the previous administration agree or disagree with the policies of this administration about how to deal with the problem, the basic intelligence reports did not undergo any kind of change from the previous administration to this one.

On the third point that I raised, on this issue of reports about the department's attitude toward toppling the Iranian regime, there was a recent Financial Times article that grossly misrepresented Secretary Rumsfeld's views on Iran. It is true that the United States government wants Iran to turn over all al Qaeda members currently in Iran and to comply with its obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. But as for the future of the Iranian government, that's a matter to be decided by the Iranian people. And our policy is what President Bush has said: that we see Iranian citizens risking intimidation and death as they speak out for liberty and human rights and democracy. Iranians, like all people, have a right to choose their government and determine their own destiny, and the United States supports their aspirations to live in freedom. And everything that we have done and that we support in this department is consistent with and captured in that statement by the president. And it's not good to be reading inaccurate descriptions of what our policy is on Iran.

A sub-point on that is the last point that I wanted to address in these opening remarks, and that is the issue of the policy toward the MEK, the Mujahedeen e Khalq. The United States has designated the MEK a foreign terrorist organization; it is on the State Department's list of such organizations. Accordingly, we demanded the surrender of MEK forces in Iraq. That demand is being complied with, and the MEK forces are being disarmed.

Now, earlier in the war, a U.S. commander on the ground reached a temporary cease-fire with the MEK which he justified on the grounds that it enabled our forces to contain the MEK forces in cantonment areas, while not having to fight against them or to actively disarm them. And it was also a way of making sure that these MEK forces were not going to get into a clash with the pro-Iranian forces. There were a number of different groups floating around in Iraq that were not under our control, and we didn't want them clashing in a way that could interfere with our operations.

Now, because of that local decision to work out this temporary arrangement, there were some

people who believed that we were giving the MEK special treatment, and there were even news stories that said that the Defense Department planned to use the MEK as a Northern Alliance-type organization -- making the analogy to Afghanistan -- as a Northern Alliance-type organization against the government of Iran. There never was such a plan. We will not do that. We view the MEK as a terrorist organization and we are treating it as such.

And with that, I will be happy to take your questions.

Q: On Iran, you made the point that the administration supports the aspirations of the Iranian people. The question seems to be how far are you going -- that's important to what kind of support you're talking about, and people are speculating that you could go as far as supporting by either actively undermining the existing government or by taking military action. And can you define exactly how far you would go?

Feith: Our policy is to urge the Iranians, as the president has done publicly and as other top administration people have done, to urge them to stop their support for terrorism -- Iran is one of the world's leading supporters of terrorist organizations -- to comply with their obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and stop the development of nuclear weapons. And we know that there is widespread unhappiness in the country about the failures of the clerical regime. And the president has expressed his sympathy with the aspirations of the Iranians to have a free country. And that's our policy. And that's what we're willing to say and do.

And there are a lot of countries in the world who are coming increasingly to understand the dangers that this state support for terrorism and the development of nuclear weapons by countries that are not supposed to be developing them -- that represents the international security. And so, we're getting increasing international support for this kind of an approach. And we hope that the Iranians will change their policies.

Q: [And now] to the intelligence, one of the more puzzling aspects of all of this for a lot of people is the Niger letter, and why U.S. officials seem so willing to accept and promulgate what appears to people who were knowledgeable about it to have clearly been a forgery. Can you explain -- and there's been a couple of congressional requests for information about that. Can you shed some light on that?

Feith: I mean, I'm aware of it in general. I don't know how much light I could shed on it.

Luti: No, no, I can't either. No. I believe that that is an issue between the source of the document and the analysts in the government in the intelligence community, and they're sorting that out. We're not particularly as policy people involved in that process.

Q: I want to challenge your assumption here that the intelligence has remained consistent throughout the '90s. This administration, starting in September, painted the picture of an imminent threat from weapons of mass destruction, yet the DIA -- this is -- and this is something that U.S. News and World broke [a past sentence of] of this week, said in September, there's no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons. Just square the circle. You say the intelligence has been consistent, but yet you painted a much more imminent threat than anybody in the Clinton administration did during the '90s.

Feith: I think what we -- what we have been stressing is that September 11th highlighted the special dangers that come from the connection of weapons of mass destruction to state sponsors of terrorism. The September 11th attack forced a lot of people to rethink the dangers of both terrorism and weapons

of mass destruction in light of the possible connection between the two. And the willingness of terrorist organizations to do as much damage as they possibly can was something that was driven home, you know, powerfully, by the September 11th attack. And the recognition that if a terrorist organization, perfectly willing to do as much damage as it possibly can, could get its hands on weapons of mass destruction from one of the state sponsors that is otherwise providing support to it, then the possibility exists, the danger exists that you could have an attack that would kill many times the number of people that were killed on September 11th.

So that caused a reassessment of the nature of the threat and the risk. That's a different issue from the analysis of whether one believes that the Iraqis possessed the capability to use chemical weapons, biological weapons; whether they had a program that was aiming toward the development of nuclear weapons. On the basic question of whether the Iraqis had the capability, I don't think there was any kind of major discontinuity in the analysis over the years from the intelligence community.

Q: Well let me push back then, because Rumsfeld, starting in September, and the president talked about that they had a capability. They had -- they produced -- they have weapons; they have this; they have that. That was a lot stronger than the Clinton people or the intelligence community publicly talked about in the '90s, and your DIA is even saying this now in September of '02, raising questions about we don't have reliable information.

Feith: As I -- I mean, I quoted from -- President Clinton said, in 1998, Iraq continues to conceal chemical and biological weapons. And the U.N., in its report, I believe it was in January of '99, when UNSCOM [United Nations Special Commission] shut down its operations, said that there were large quantities of chemical and biological weapons materials that were unaccounted for. And this was precisely the point that President Bush stressed in -- and I don't remember whether it was in his U.N. speech or his State of the Union speech, but he made a major focus on what the UNSCOM report from 1999 said about chemical and biological weapons in Iraq.

So, I mean, this is -- this was not news. I mean, a number of the recent stories have suggested that the basic question of whether the Iraqis -- whether there was intelligence to support the conclusion that the Iraqis had these weapons, there have been a number of stories that have suggested that this whole issue arose in recent months, and it didn't, it went back years.

Q: I think the question is that the issue -- you put a finer point on it than in past years and you raised the bar in terms of what Iraq allegedly had, and now we're seeing that they might not have had what you allegedly said they did.

Feith: Well, we'll see. We'll see what they had.

But the main thing that I think was different in the way this administration talked about the issue from the past, were the conclusions, the strategic conclusions that we came to as a result of the September 11 attack, and the particular strategic problems that arise from a recognition that you can't rely to the extent that we did in the past, or that at least some people did in the past, you can't rely on deterrence to deal with the problem of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of state sponsors of terrorism because the possibility that those state sponsors might employ chemical weapons or biological weapons by means of a terrorist organization proxy means that they could use the weapons without leaving their fingerprints, as it were, on the attack. And that meant that the traditional deterrence approach was not adequate.

Q: If I could just go back, Mr. Secretary, and look at the relationship -- I think three key

relationships you have tried to -- (inaudible) -- I think; the one between the intelligence team and the special plans office, the intelligence team the Iraqi exile project, and the intelligence team and the assessment on weapons of mass destruction. Let me make sure I understand this now. The team is going to put out a report that's going to become a part of a larger body of material that policymakers, including those in the special plans office, would look at, right? So it's not to say while they may not have been resident in the same office, I would -- it certainly sounds like special plans would be aware of and would -- and have available those reports that they make, right? I mean, they would --

Feith: If the -- yeah, I mean, if the connection is that a team that is analyzing a policy problem by looking through a lot of intelligence is going to generate a briefing that is going to come to the attention of various offices -- I mean, that's true. That connection exists. There were various offices that were informed by, you know, that briefing.

Q: And given the importance that this team had within your office, would it not also be logical that the special plans office would give its -- whatever reports came from the team special significance? And this is something you're looking at, you created especially to look at the intelligence in a different way --

Feith: No, no, you see, it was not created to look -- there is this idea -- again, there have been a number of press stories that have said that the reason this team was created was because we wanted the intelligence looked at in a different way. That's not true. It was -- what happened was, on September 11th we were attacked, and the president announced we are in a global war against terrorism. And the office that's responsible for strategy is my office. And we asked ourselves: What does it mean to be at war against terrorism? What -- and how is this different from previous wars conceptually? How does one develop a strategy for fighting an international network?

So it just was kind of an obvious thing to do. I asked for some people to review the existing intelligence on what do we know about the nature of these terrorist networks. This was not because we were dissatisfied with, as some of the news stories have suggested -- it's not because we were dissatisfied with the intelligence or the intelligence analysis. It was because we needed people looking at that intelligence, good intelligence produced by the CIA and other agencies -- we needed people looking at it from the point of view of what do we need to understand from this intelligence about these connections to allow us to develop a Defense Department strategy for the war on terrorism.

Q: That's looking at intelligence in a different way, with a different perspective.

Feith: Well -- but I mean, not as --

Q: (Off mike.)

Feith: -- but it's been portrayed as this was done --

Q: They did not find their own intelligence. They took existing intelligence, given this new perspective, given this new focus you've asked them to address, and said, "Here. Here's a new way of looking at it." Right? That's what you asked for.

Feith: You could say that, except the way it --

Q: All right. Let me move on to my second point, then.

Feith: Well, let me just say, the way it's been portrayed in a number of stories was that this was set up because there was dissatisfaction with what the intelligence community had done. That's not true. It was set up because we had a different function to be performed; we had a different mission to be performed. We had to develop a strategy to fight the global war on terrorism. And so, we needed to take this material and review it in that light.

Q: Point two, on the Iraqi exile project. While these guys didn't run, obviously, the interrogations or anything, they obviously took the information that was provided for them from those interviews, right? And they looked at it and they put it in a larger context, as well. That's part of the existing intelligence, no? Part of their definition?

Luti: No, Eric (sp), who took those reports and looked at them?

Q: The team.

Luti: No, no.

Q: They were ignorant of that when they did their analysis?

Luti: No, the information collection program was removed from the State Department and deposited into Defense HUMINT Service to ensure that proper tradecraft was used, accounting procedures. And it was a program to interview Iraqi defectors.

Q: Right.

Luti: The INC would remove them from Iraq to a different location. DHS [Defense HUMINT Service] teams would go to that location, debrief them according to the tradecraft -- all the professional tradecraft that's required -- and then they would write a report. Those reports would go into the intelligence system, writ large --

Q: Right. And that would be one of the many things that this team would look at, right, and draw upon for your -- for the tasks that they were assigned, correct?

Feith: There were lots [of customers] throughout the building --

Luti: Many customers, not only --

Q: Were those reports given any extra weight or significance by this team that you're aware of?

Luti: The information collection program was moved into the Defense HUMINT --

Q: That's a mechanical issue. I'm asking about the report that they produced, giving the fresh information that Iraqi exiles are providing. And that's now going into the system. Among all of the other things that they're going to look at, does the team hone in on these type of reports as a special source and give them that hint of added significance, that you're aware of? That's essentially what the accusation --

Luti: No more than -- in fact, I'm trying to remember when --

Q: (Inaudible.) -- you weigh it -- the intelligence that is coming from defectors was given unusual
<http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprint.cgi?http://www.defenselink.mil.../tr20030604-0248.htm> 6/4/03

and disproportionate weight among all the other sources.

Luti: I don't know.

Q: Do you agree with that?

Luti: No. I don't know what the basis of that charge -- no, no, there's been no basis for that. None whatsoever.

Q: But the third point was you said there's no connection between this team and WMD. But you've just said that the relationship between terrorists and terrorist states and WMD has been -- is -- that was -- demonstrated how they --

Feith: No, I didn't mean no connection between the team and WMD. If I said that, I misstated it. What I said is it was not the purpose or the special focus of this team to look at WMD. Its focus was to look at terrorist networks and the connection.

Q: (Inaudible.) -- terrorist networks, and you've just explained how what 9/11 demonstrates is that terrorist networks and WMD and their acquisition thereof are importantly intertwined. And so, how do you not look at WMD when you're looking at terrorist networks in the case of Iraq?

Feith: No, I didn't mean to suggest that they didn't look at WMD at all. I'm saying that the mission that this team was given was not: Look at WMD. The mission that they were given was: Help us understand how these different organizations relate to each other and to their state sponsors.

Q: That may not have been their stated mission, but certainly that's one of the things they found, right?

Feith: I imagine -- yes, I imagine that they looked at WMD along with other stuff. All I'm saying is it was not as it is portrayed in a number of erroneous press stories that we've read. It was not the purpose of this group to focus on the WMD issue.

Staff: Sir, I hate to bring this to a close, but I know you're at the end of your time here. Maybe you can take one or two more.

Q: Critics have raised the issue of the slanting of intelligence findings, the alleged slanting, basically to conform with the views of top policymakers. Can you say what pressure, if any, was put on intelligence analysts in the CIA, DIA, anywhere else, to endorse the view of Iraq possessing chemical and biological weapon stockpiles and reconstituting the nuclear weapons program as an imminent threat to U.S. interests? And can you rule out that intelligence analysts may have perceived that this pressure existed, whether it did or not?

Feith: I know of no pressure. I can't rule out what other people may have perceived. Who knows what people perceive? I know of nobody who pressured anybody. We have a -- we have a normal and, I think, useful interchange between the intelligence community and its customers, basically the policy community. It is not a one-way transmission. If people understand the way intelligence -- the intelligence agencies relate to their customers, they understand that it's -- there's a process of back and forth where we get reports, I get a briefing every morning. I know that Secretary Rumsfeld has talked about this too. I mean, we're all, I think, in the same boat, those of us who get daily briefings from the CIA. I get a briefing. As I'm being briefed, questions occur to me. I ask for clarification of items. I

sometimes say, "Well, that's an interesting point. That suggests that it might be good to get a report on x, y, and z. And I'd like to learn more about that." And those questions go back and they produce additional work and reports. And the intelligence community prides itself on being responsive when its customers raise questions and make requests for additional information or clarification or tables or historical perspective on some topic. I mean, things go back and forth all the time. And, I mean, that is the way a good system works.

And in this particular case, we, as customers, were analyzing this information about terrorist networks, and when we happened to come up with some interesting observations, we took them back and gave them to the intelligence community. And I must say, I was very pleased with the response that we got. I mean, people over there said that's -- you know, that's worthy of looking at and study. And I think that, you know, that George Tenet received it very well and found it useful.

Q: Two questions. Are any of the people who were on the intelligence team, which you said is now no longer doing that work, are any of those people still paid by the department and perhaps in other parts of your organization basically doing that same work on other topics? That's my first question. Are any of those people still there doing that work, perhaps on Iraq or on WMD?

And my second question, I am really puzzled why you two gentlemen are exactly doing this briefing today. Neither of you are well known to come down here and talk about what you read in the news media. Were you asked to do this briefing by Secretary Rumsfeld, by the White House, by Torie Clarke? Do you have any sense that there's some article coming out somewhere in the news media that you're trying to respond to ahead of time?

Feith: On the latter question first, there have been enough articles that have come out already on these subjects that have been inaccurate that -- and it's quite clear that some of the articles that are inaccurate are getting reverberations in numerous other articles that clearly are derivative of the mother lode of inaccuracies here and there. And we just -- and since it directly relates to our office, we just thought it might be useful to straighten the record out. So --

Q: So this briefing was your idea?

Feith: This briefing was my idea. And -- I mean, I hope it is in the nature of a public service.

Now, the first question you asked was --

Q: Is anybody who was on that intelligence team doing that work still --

Feith: Well, as I mentioned before you arrived, the --

Q: No, I was here.

Feith: Oh. Okay. The team that has gotten so much attention was two people, full-time. (Chuckling.) I mean, this is much less than one would infer from a lot of the press coverage of it. And altogether, as I said, there might have been a half a dozen people who were in and out, working either on the team full-time, part-time.

Q: (Off mike.) --

Feith: And some of those people -- because some of them were Reserve officers, so I mean, I think
<http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprint.cgi?http://www.defenselink.mil.../tr20030604-0248.htm> 6/4/03

they're -- they've moved on, but some of them are people who are still in the government.

Q: May -- what I'm not understanding is, are any of those half dozen people -- bluntly, what I'm trying to ask -- doing the same work, perhaps not in an assembled team --

Feith: No, this was a project.

Q: I understand that.

Feith: So the answer's no.

Q: But the question is, I want to make sure there's no bureaucratic misunderstanding. That team has been disbanded. That label is gone. But is that work, candidly, going on somewhere else?

Feith: "Disbanded" is a peculiar term to apply. They had a project. They finished their project.

Q: And the project -- fine. The project is done. Nonetheless, is that work of reviewing information still going on in your organization? Is that basic task --

Feith: I would say that there are hundreds and hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people in this building who review intelligence for policy purposes every day. So that work is ongoing by thousands of people in this department.

Q: So why did you need these special people?

Feith: As I explained, we had a particular requirement to review the existing intelligence, to help us develop the strategy for the Defense Department for the global war on terrorism.

(Cross talk.) I'll take one last question here. This lady has had her hand up.

Q: And couple of -- (Inaudible.) -- here. These two people you say you had managed to come up with a link, you say, between al Qaeda and Iraq -- using the same intelligence, because you didn't gather intelligence -- that the CIA hadn't really come up with, and then you present this to George Tenet. Is that just coincidental that these two -- was their analysis more intense?

Feith: I don't think it's all that unusual or hard to understand. If a large amount of material is reviewed by fresh eyes -- I mean, this -- I think this would apply to -- you know, any intelligent people sitting down with this pile of intelligence, looking it over, reading it over, has a chance of finding certain things in it. I mean, ask yourself why new history books get written about old events. I mean, people look over very often the very same material. But in light of experience or just because they see something that nobody had seen before, certain connections become clear or appear, and, you know, new hypotheses get developed and new facts surface. I mean, it's not that mysterious. It's just -- there was an enormous amount of intelligence about terrorist networks that had been developed for many years before September 11th. And the idea that we would look at it again in light of September 11th and maybe see some new things in it shouldn't be that surprising.

Q: But you act as if the other intelligence agencies weren't looking at it that way.

Feith: No, they were. I -- no, I'm not acting that way.

Q: Only in post-9/11. So why --

Feith: They were too, but, I mean, I don't know why it should surprise anybody that any given group of people looking at a mass of material might come up with a few interesting insights that other people didn't come up with.

Q: And in --

Q: Why not just hire the CIA to do it then? I mean, that's what they do full time.

Feith: Because, well --

Q: (Inaudible.) -- the DIA, and you have to get in your own people and say, "This is what we're looking for. Go find it."

Feith: No. Nobody -- nobody helped -- see, this suggestion that we said to them -- "This is what we're looking for. Go find it." -- is precisely the inaccuracy that we are here to rebut.

Q: Can I just do one final one. Can I just --

Q: Can you give us an example of information that they found that did not fit those scenarios; that did not say there was an imminent danger; that did not present the facts that there was a belief that they were -- had an active and ongoing weapons of mass destruction program? Was that a part of what they found --

Feith: No, as I told you, the main thing that the briefing of this team produced was not this Iraq-al Qaeda connection. That was incidental. The main thing that the team produced was it helped -- it helped educate a lot of people about the fact that there was more cooperation and interconnection among these terrorist organizations and state sponsors across ideological lines than many people had appreciated before. That was really -- I mean, to sum it up in a sentence, that's it.

Q: Just one final point. What do think now of --

Feith: And this is her final point.

Q: (Laughs.) What do you think of the intelligence now? You said we'll see about the weapons of mass destruction, and yet some of the intelligence thus far that the United States was told about has been wrong. The Iraqis didn't use chemical weapons when American troops advanced. The first 200 sites you've checked that were suspected sites for weapons of mass destruction had nothing. You're backing away from some of the other sites, unless you get further intelligence. Can you assess the intelligence thus far?

Feith: The process of gathering information about the Iraqi programs is underway. I'm not going to come in and preempt the careful work that's being done. As you all know, there's a major new team going over to make systematic and comprehensive the work on studying what exists in Iraq and what became of this and that, about which we had information regarding the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction programs. They'll do their systematic and comprehensive work, and they'll come back and report.

Q: Can we talk about the last couple of months, though?

Feith: Thank you all.

Q: What about the last couple of months?

Feith: I'm not going to preempt what the team is -- (Off mike as he leaves the podium.)

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