

# P A R T     O N E

## THE DISTINGUISHED UNDERSECRETARY



**DOUGLAS FEITH IS NOT** a well-known person outside Washington, D.C. His erstwhile title, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, is not an exciting one, nor was his prior career—a series of think-tank posts, low-level Pentagon appointments and faithful if mundane service in Republican administrations—designed to earn him the sort of shooting-star reputation that preceded figures like Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell.

Yet within the ranks of those who designed and prosecuted the invasion of Iraq, there is perhaps no more important functionary than Douglas Feith. Every lasting image of the two-year-old conflict bears his fingerprints.

A library in Baghdad burning, thousand-year-old copies of the Q'uran aflame.

A prisoner, naked and chained at the ankles, standing with arms outstretched before a grinning lieutenant, the soldier's thumb pointed skyward for the camera.

A report, buried until after the November election, that said promised and feared weapons of mass destruction, nuclear missiles, chemical bombs, were nowhere in Biblical Babylon to be found.

From the shock-and-awe prologue to the scandal-plagued present, Feith and his fellow war planners meticulously created, with a series of small decisions and bright ideas, some very large disasters.

President George W. Bush said in his 2003 State of the Union address that Saddam Hussein's agents had attempted buy weapons-grade uranium from Africa, an assertion discredited at the time he uttered it. Bush and his subordinates marketed the war by painting a picture of America at risk from Iraq's weapons, and Douglas Feith gathered, edited, and packaged intelligence to sell those false claims.

Central Intelligence Agency Director George Tenet presented a report to Vice President Dick Cheney in August 2002 describing links between Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. Tenet described pre-war intelligence on Iraq as a "slam-dunk." Feith gave Tenet that report, which Tenet was forced to repudiate a year later, shortly before his resignation.

Throughout the lead-up to the war, Feith and his civilian colleagues assembled a picture of the hypothetical conflict that relied almost exclusively on best-case scenarios. Their intelligence apparatus, created and operated separately from the CIA, mangled reports on weapons capabilities, misled the public—and by some accounts the President—and made decisions about troop numbers that went against the advice of commanders in the field.

Though Feith himself announced his resignation in January 2005, what he has done must not be forgotten. Helping to start an unjustified war, fostering an environment that permits

and even approves of torture, stain forward in time and will sully the reputation of the United States for years to come.

How did such an obscure job, occupied by a man most Americans have never heard of, become imbued with such significance, such grave responsibility? How did Douglas Feith come to be in such a position, and how did everything he touched turn so black?

The answer lies, in part, in the ideological culture in which Feith and many of his colleagues in the Bush Administration's defense department were immersed.

Born in 1954, Feith grew up in Philadelphia, scion of wealthy philanthropist Dalck Feith, a hard-line supporter of Israel's Likud party. After receiving his undergraduate degree at Harvard University and his law degree from Georgetown, the younger Feith made a name for himself as a policy analyst and writer for several conservative foreign policy organizations. He specialized in the subject of Middle East conflict.

The thrust of his commentary was that Israel could afford to make no concessions to the Palestinians, and that the country's long-term security depended on occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. During the 1970s he excoriated then-President Carter's efforts to make peace at Camp David, saying Arabs already had a state in Jordan and did not need another.

Feith's major government influence began in 1981, when he became the Reagan National Security Council's Middle East specialist. Among his colleagues were men who would become some of the country's most influential Republicans with regard to foreign policy: Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle.

Feith and Perle had particularly close ties; Feith served as Perle's special counsel when Perle was named assistant secre-

tary of defense under President Reagan in 1982, and Perle became Feith's mentor, the two working together often over the years. A former Republican Senate staffer and member of several prominent conservative organizations including the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs and the American Enterprise Institute, Perle serves on the Defense Policy Board, a group of advisers to Rumsfeld.

Under Perle's tutelage Feith steadily rose in government, leaving in 1986 for private law practice after two years as deputy assistant secretary of defense in charge of negotiations policy. For the next 15 years he worked as managing attorney for the Washington-based firm of Feith and Zell, PC. He also served as a consultant to the governments of Turkey and Bosnia, and opened an international consulting business with a foreign office in Israel.<sup>1</sup>

Feith, in this period, was not a strict Republican partisan; his views on American-Israeli relations led him to oppose Republicans as well as Democrats. In 1992 he, Perle and other conservatives formed the Committee on US interests in the Middle East, which advocated against President George H.W. Bush's policies on Israel.

During the early 1990s, while the Clinton administration was imposing a moratorium on nuclear testing and strengthening non-proliferation measures, Feith proposed in policy statements courses of American action that were ignored at the time, but now eerily echo present policy: He recommended the United States withdraw from the anti-ballistic missile treaty of 1972 and the 1993 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. He also opposed the United States joining the International Criminal Court, arguing it would allow other nations sovereignty over the US.

In 1997, in response to what they saw as a foreign policy adrift under President Clinton, a group of Feith's old colleagues from the Reagan and (first) Bush administrations founded the Project for a New American Century. The Washington think tank's guiding principles were support of the US as the world's sole superpower, and the country's right to determine its own military strategy, independent of other global powers.

The philosophy was known then—as it is now—as neo-conservatism, defined by the right-wing *Weekly Standard* as holding that:

First, patriotism is a natural and healthy sentiment and should be encouraged by both private and public institutions. Precisely because we are a nation of immigrants, this is a powerful American sentiment. Second, world government is a terrible idea since it can lead to world tyranny. International institutions that point to an ultimate world government should be regarded with the deepest suspicion. Third, statesmen should, above all, have the ability to distinguish friends from enemies ...

Finally, for a great power, the 'national interest' is not a geographical term, except for fairly prosaic matters like trade and environmental regulation. A smaller nation might appropriately feel that its national interest begins and ends at its borders, so that its foreign policy is almost always in a defensive mode. A larger nation has more extensive interests. And large nations, whose identity is ideological, like the Soviet Union of yesteryear and the United States of today, inevitably have ideological interests in addition to more material concerns. Barring extraordinary events, the United States will always feel obliged to defend, if possible, a demo-

cratic nation under attack from nondemocratic forces, external or internal.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of its founding, PNAC advocated four specific courses of action to re-establish America as a dominant force in the world:

- ▶ We need to increase defense spending significantly if we are to carry out our global responsibilities today and modernize our armed forces for the future.
- ▶ We need to strengthen our ties to democratic allies and to challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values.
- ▶ We need to promote the cause of political and economic freedom abroad.
- ▶ We need to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity, and our principles.<sup>3</sup>

The signatories to PNAC's statement of purpose reads like a who's who of the second Bush administration and its supporters. In addition to Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, the list includes:

- ▶ Paul Wolfowitz, who would become George W. Bush's deputy secretary of defense and serve in that capacity during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Along with Feith, he was one of the major planners of both conflicts.
- ▶ Elliott Abrams, former Reagan State Department official who pleaded guilty to misleading Congress during the Iran-Contra Scandal. Abrams was promoted in January 2005 to deputy National Security Advisor to President Bush.

- ▶ Gary Bauer, who directed Reagan's Office of Policy Development and later founded Our American Values, a socially conservative lobbying group. Bauer was an early contender for the Republican presidential nomination in 2005 but dropped out after a poor showing in the early primaries.
- ▶ William J. Bennett, self-described "virtues czar" and author, who led the National Endowment for the Humanities during Reagan's second term. The author of numerous books on morals and values in America, Bennett's hard-right rhetoric extolling conservative morality was undermined in 2003 by news that he lost more than \$8 million in Nevada casinos.
- ▶ Jeb Bush, George W. Bush's brother and current governor of Florida.
- ▶ Frank Gaffney, assistant secretary of defense for Reagan and current head of the Center for Security Policy, a non-profit organization that specializes in defense and foreign-policy analysis. Gaffney also is a columnist for the conservative *Washington Times*.
- ▶ Norman Podhoretz, editor of the right-wing journal *Commentary*, headed the US Information Agency's New Directions Advisory Committee under Reagan. He was a vocal backer of the war in Iraq.
- ▶ Stephen Rosen, former Harvard University Professor and later Douglas Feith's colleague in the second Bush Administration's Department of Defense.
- ▶ I. Lewis Libby, also known as Scooter, who became Vice President Cheney's chief of staff.