



Transcript: Former Defense Undersecretary Douglas Feith on 'FNS'

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The following is a partial transcript of the Feb. 11, 2007, edition of "FOX News Sunday With Chris Wallace":

"FOX NEWS SUNDAY" HOST CHRIS WALLACE: Well, joining us now for an exclusive interview, the man at the center of the controversy about pre-Iraq war intelligence and how it was used by the Bush administration, former Undersecretary of Defense [Douglas Feith](#).

Mr. Feith, welcome to "FOX News Sunday".

FORMER UNDERSECRETARY OF DEFENSE DOUGLAS FEITH: Good to be with you.

WALLACE: The Pentagon inspector general issued a report Friday that was highly critical of your actions back in 2002. It says your office disseminated what it called, quote, "alternative intelligence assessments about links between [Saddam Hussein](#) and [Al Qaeda](#) that made the case for going to war."

Let's take a look if we can, here. While such actions — this is from the inspector general's report. "While such actions were not illegal or unauthorized, the actions were, in our opinion, inappropriate given that the products did not clearly show the variance with the consensus of the intelligence community and were, in some cases, shown as intelligence products."

Mr. Feith, were you giving the president, the vice president and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld the ammunition they wanted to go to war?

FEITH: What the people in the Pentagon were doing who were criticized by the inspector general was providing a critical look at the CIA's work on the Iraq-Al Qaeda connection.

And there was a sense on their part that the CIA was filtering its own intelligence to suit its own theory that the [Baathists](#) would not cooperate because they were secularists with the religious extremists of Al Qaeda, that they were not doing proper intelligence work, and our people were criticizing them, not putting forward an alternative intelligence analysis.

WALLACE: Now, who asked you to do that, and what were your marching orders?

FEITH: Well, as it turns out, there were actually several people who independently started working at lower levels of the government. One of them was an assistant to [Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz](#). Two of them worked in my office.

WALLACE: But did Rumsfeld — did Wolfowitz — ask you to undertake this project?

FEITH: Well, as I said, the fellow who worked for Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz was asked by the deputy secretary to do the work.

The two people in my office actually were doing — they kind of got into this project fairly spontaneously. One of them was doing a project that had started months earlier. It's the way the bureaucracy works. There were a number of elements that came together.

We then presented the briefing to Secretary Rumsfeld, and he directed that we present it to George Tenet at the CIA.

WALLACE: Okay. Let's talk about it, because the briefing was titled "Iraq and Al Qaeda Making the Case," and here are some of the highlights from your PowerPoint presentation. "Intelligence indicates cooperation in all categories, mature symbiotic relationship." "Some indications of possible Iraq coordination with Al Qaeda specifically related to 9/11."

And you said an alleged meeting between 9/11 hijacker [Mohamed Atta](#) and an Iraqi agent in Prague in April 2001 was a known contact.

Mr. Feith, all of that — all of that was wrong, wasn't it?

FEITH: No, not at all. There was substantial intelligence. I mean, evidence is a legal term not really appropriate here. There was a lot of information out there. Intelligence is very sketchy, and it's always open to interpretation.

On this issue, there were people who disagreed about the intelligence and the people in the Pentagon were giving a critical review. They were not presenting alternative conclusions. They were presenting a challenge to the way the CIA was looking at things and filtering its own information.

WALLACE: I have to tell you, I mean, when I — I mean, I read these as "mature symbiotic relationship", "known contact" — that sure sounds like conclusions.

FEITH: You're plucking language out of a briefing, the thrust of which was why is the [CIA](#) not accounting for information that it had that suggested an Iraq-Al Qaeda relationship when the CIA was excluding that information from its own finished intelligence at the time.

It was a criticism. It's healthy to criticize the CIA's intelligence. What the people in the Pentagon were doing was right. It was good government.

In fact, as the [Silverman-Robb Commission](#) has said, and as the Senate Intelligence Committee has said, we need more, not less critical reading of intelligence by policy people.

WALLACE: You say this wasn't wrong. Respectfully, sir, the Pentagon inspector general says parts of your analysis were not supported by available — let me finish — by available intelligence, and let me continue.

Take a look at this if you will. The 9/11 commission said, "We have seen no evidence that these or the earlier contacts between Iraq and Al Qaeda ever developed into a collaborative, operational relationship."

The 9/11 commission also concluded, "The available evidence does not support the original Czech report of an Atta-Ani meeting."

Mr. Feith, the Pentagon inspector general says some of your intelligence was not supported by the evidence that came from the intelligence community. The 9/11 commission said a number of your conclusions were wrong. And the Senate Intelligence Committee also said it was wrong.

FEITH: Nobody ever claimed that what the 9/11 commission said was — the case was wrong. In other words, we didn't dispute the — the 9/11 commission report said there was no...

WALLACE: But they disputed you, sir.

FEITH: No, they didn't. Nobody in my office ever said there was an operational relationship between Iraq and Al Qaeda. It's just not correct. I mean, words matter. And people are throwing around loose allegations, vague allegations, based on not reading the words carefully.

WALLACE: Mr. Feith, I'm just taking comments from your PowerPoint. You said some indications of possible Iraqi coordination with Al Qaeda specifically related to 9/11. You said that the Atta-Ani meeting in Prague in 2001 was a known contact.

FEITH: The people who did that briefing were taking the position that the intelligence community took originally. The CIA later changed its views on that meeting after the time relevant here.

There's an enormous amount of misinformation about this subject. Your quote from the 9/11 commission report is significant. That did not contradict my office. Nobody in my office ever claimed there was an operational relationship.

There was a relationship. That relationship was summarized on October 7th, 2002, by [George Tenet](#) in a letter that he sent, unclassified, to the Senate Intelligence Committee chairman, and it basically brought together what the CIA had been saying, what my people had been criticizing, and it summarized the Iraq-Al Qaeda relationship.

And we stood on that, and I think that that was the best information that the government had.

WALLACE: Mr. Feith, let's look at the timeline of what you did back in 2002. First, you briefed Secretary Rumsfeld on August 8th. Deputy Secretary Wolfowitz said that this was an excellent briefing.

On August 15th, 2002, you briefed CIA Director George Tenet. But in that case, you leave out a slide in your PowerPoint briefing that says that there are fundamental problems with the way the intelligence community is assessing the information.

If this is, as you claim, good government — let's challenge the intelligence — why would you leave that slide out of the briefing when you were directly confronting the intelligence community?

FEITH: Because the whole briefing was a challenge to the CIA. And we knew that the CIA might be very sensitive about it and might resent it, which it turns out they did.

But we presented it — we wanted to present it in the most constructive way. We thought that particular slide had some language that was a little harsh. So to make for a better meeting, we gave — the substance of that slide was represented in the meeting.

We wanted the words to be a little more collegial, so we took that out. It is of no significance at all, because...

WALLACE: But, Mr. Feith, you say it's of no significance. On September 16th, 2002, you briefed top White House officials, including Steven Hadley and [Scooter Libby](#).

FEITH: No, I didn't. The people who did the briefing.

WALLACE: Right. And you give them — first of all, you include that slide in that briefing, and you also give them information that the inspector general in his new report — this is the Pentagon inspector general — says is not supported by available intelligence.

And what's more, in this effort for good government, the CIA director isn't even told about the briefing and doesn't find out about it for two years.

FEITH: Yeah. Well, that's — it's interesting because [Steve Hadley](#) asked for the briefing in the presence of George Tenet's deputy. So this business that George Tenet didn't know about it is just factually wrong.

Or put it this way: If he didn't know about it, it's because his deputy didn't tell him about it. So that's nonsense.

Secondly, on this issue of the inspector general saying it wasn't supported by the intelligence, the inspector general's logic is circular. What he is saying is it varied from the intelligence community consensus. Well, of course.

The people in my office were doing the criticism of the intelligence community consensus. By definition, that criticism varied. If it didn't vary, they wouldn't have done the criticism.

It's absurd for the inspector general to say that what we did was not the best intelligence, not because he examined the underlying intelligence, because he didn't, and he admitted that to the Senate Armed Services Committee on Friday morning. What he said was it wasn't the best intelligence because it disagreed with the intelligence.

WALLACE: One final question. You say that this was all an effort at good government and, you know, that it's important to challenge the conclusions of the intelligence community.

In all of your effort of good government, all your effort at challenging, did you ever make the case against going to war? Did you ever make the case that Saddam Hussein was not a threat?

FEITH: Yes, absolutely, and in writing and I'm...

WALLACE: Was that part of the briefing to the top officials of the White House?

FEITH: That wasn't the — the topic of this briefing was a very specific topic, the Iraq-Al Qaeda connection. But the answer to your question emphatically is yes, and in writing, and it's been written about in many books.

We put together, in fact, all of the considerations for not going to war. Secretary Rumsfeld did that. It was a memo that he worked on over a long period of time.

WALLACE: But that wasn't in this briefing that went to...

FEITH: No, but that wasn't the topic of...

WALLACE: ... Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz and to the CIA...

FEITH: But the answer to...

WALLACE: ... and to Libby and to Hadley, correct?

FEITH: I'd like to make two quick points.

WALLACE: OK, because we've got to run.

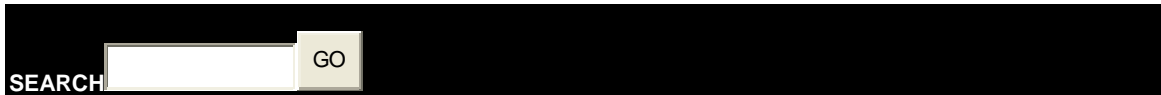
FEITH: In answer to your question did we ever make the case against the war, the answer is emphatically yes, and we explained what we thought all the problems would be in going to war, because we wanted the president to know that.

Secondly, on this particular briefing, the very same one that the inspector general criticizes, the Senate Intelligence Committee said policy officials acted professionally, played by the intelligence community rules and asked questions that actually improved the CIA's products.

It was good government. The government needs more critical looking by policy people at intelligence.

WALLACE: Mr. Feith, we're going to have to leave it there. We want to thank you so much for coming in today and answering all our questions.

FEITH: Thank you.



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