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# Senator Ahab

In a reasonable world, Douglas Feith would have received an apology late last week from Senator Carl Levin. But the obsessive Democrat won't let go of his story that the Bush Administration "politicized" pre-war Iraq intelligence no matter how many times the facts disprove it. Senator Ahab is now going even further and suggesting behavior standards that would make the U.S. intelligence bureaucracy less accountable to elected officials; this could get Americans killed.

The familiar accusation against Mr. Feith is that the former Undersecretary of Defense was responsible for all the government's intelligence failures on Iraq because his office had the temerity to review and critique intelligence on the relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda. His alleged pressure to find a strong link is said to have so influenced apparently weak-kneed CIA analysts that they made a false case for war. Senate Intelligence Chairman Jay Rockefeller went so far as to accuse Mr. Feith of "running a private intelligence failure [sic], which is not lawful."

This preposterous narrative has already been debunked many times -- notably in a bipartisan report from the Senate Intelligence Committee itself. That 2004 report found that not only had CIA analysts not been pressured to change their views but that Mr. Feith's review had sometimes "actually improved the Central Intelligence Agency's products." A year later the Robb-Silberman commission also found no evidence that prewar intelligence had been politicized. And last week the Defense Department's Inspector General delivered to Congress a report that likewise exonerates Mr. Feith of doing anything unlawful and acknowledges that his actions were authorized by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of Defense.

But instead of moving on to more important things, Mr. Levin is still chasing his great white whale. He's grabbed on to an odd bit of editorializing by the Inspector General that Mr. Feith "was inappropriately performing Intelligence Activities . . . that should be performed by the Intelligence Community."

"Inappropriately"? What on Earth does that mean? The charge is so vague that it has the air of a political sop that Acting Inspector General Thomas Gimble tossed to Mr. Levin to avoid being hauled in front of the Senate and accused of a cover-up. The myth persists that Inspectors General are King Solomons who are above politics, but in this case Mr. Gimble split the baby, and in a way that could harm U.S. security.

He and Mr. Levin are essentially saying that officials appointed by an elected President aren't allowed to question the "consensus" of the "intelligence community." Yet the work of Mr. Feith's office on al

Qaeda had nothing to do with what everyone now concedes was the main intelligence failure on Iraq, which was the lack of WMD stockpiles. Former CIA Director George Tenet said it was a "slam dunk" that Saddam Hussein had such stockpiles, and it was this intelligence "consensus" that the Bush Administration relied on in making its main case for war. Any links between al Qaeda and Iraq is a separate issue that was barely mentioned in the run-up to war.

Make no mistake, the people "politicizing" intelligence here are Senators Levin and Rockefeller, whose smears against Mr. Feith will have a chilling effect on anyone who wants to question "consensus" judgments in the future. This is dangerous, because if recent experience has taught us anything it is that we need far more such questioning.

It was the intelligence community that *underestimated* Saddam's nuclear capabilities before the first Gulf War, only to overestimate them later. It was the CIA "consensus" that also vastly overestimated the strength of the Soviet economy even as Moscow was about to sue for peace. Before 9/11 it was also the intelligence consensus -- led by former CIA Near East chief analyst Paul Pillar -- that terrorism was a minor and manageable problem. Too bad Mr. Feith and his team weren't around to scrub those judgments.

We learned much of what we know about intelligence from the late, great Cold War strategists, Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter. And what they taught was that in the intelligence business almost nothing is certain. Albert Wohlstetter especially disliked "national intelligence estimates," which were always the product of lowest-common-denominator judgments -- or group-think. These judgments, in turn, often lead to public pronouncements that claim a degree of certainty that simply doesn't exist -- and then to charges of "politicizing" intelligence when those judgments turn out not to be true.

Messrs. Levin and Rockefeller may enjoy scoring partisan points. But their nasty obsession with Mr. Feith will have the effect of endorsing more group-think as the last, best word in intelligence -- and will lead to more Iraqs and more 9/11s.

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