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## Vindicating Douglas Feith

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THE VINDICATION OF A PUBLIC FIGURE ENGULFED IN CONTROVERSY DOESN'T GET MORE DRAMATIC THAN THAT OF the former undersecretary of defense, Douglas Feith. A report by the Pentagon inspector general issued last week found that the activities by Mr. Feith's Pentagon Policy office were all legal and the office's officials did not mislead the Congress. The report followed years of exceptionally ad hominem attempts by the left to discredit Mr. Feith, accusing him, in effect, of an attempt to mis-lead the Congress into its war declaration. The new report from the inspector general finds that nothing Mr. Feith did broke the law. The worst the report came up with is that some slides in a power PointPresentation presented to the White House were not properly vetted and cleared by the CIA.

This seemed too much for the Washington establishment. The Washington Post on Friday issued a story attributing to the Pentagon inspector general's report a raft of negative quotes about Mr. Feith, such as that Mr. Feith's office produced "reporting of dubious quality or reliability" and that the office "was predisposed to finding a significant relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda." The only hitch was that it turned out not to be true. The quotes were not from the Pentagon inspector general but from a two-and-a-half-year-old report of Mr. Feith's (and President Bush's) most implacable political enemies, Senator Levin, the Michigan Democrat. The Post on Saturday issued an elaborate, 248-word correction to the story.

The original Post article quoted the Pentagon inspector general as stating that Mr. Feith's office drew on "both reliable and unreliable reporting" to produce a link between Al Qaeda and Iraq "that was much stronger than that assessed by the IC [Intelligence Community] and more in accord with the policy views of senior officials in the Administration." But that was also from Mr. Levin's report. The Post's correction said that its original article "also stated that the intelligence provided by Feith's office supported the political views of senior administration officials, a conclusion that the inspector general's report did not draw."

In other words, there seems to be something in the ether in Washington that just has a hard time giving Mr. Feith his due. Even the inspector general's report seems to find fault — though nothing remotely illegal — with the notion that Mr. Feith's office took a skeptical view of the intelligence that was being circulated through the government in advance of the war. It suggested that the criticism Mr. Feith's office made of the intelligence community's product was itself an intelligence activity. It's a ridiculous suggestion. If we have learned nothing else from the history of the Iraq war it is that intelligence deserves to be criticized by policy officials, rather than blindly accepted.

Mr. Feith himself, in a statement on the latest developments, pointed out that the Commission on Weapons of Mass Destruction headed by Judge Silberman and Senator Robb specifically said that while "policymakers must be prepared to credit intelligence that doesn't fit their preferences, no important intelligence assessment should be accepted without sharp questioning that forces the community to explain exactly how it came to that assessment and what alternatives might also be true." Messrs. Silberman and Robb said that was "not 'politicization'" "but 'a necessary part of the intelligence process.'" Mr. Feith's statement said: "If the Inspector General's opinions about appropriate criticism were followed, they would discourage policy officials from asking tough questions about the quality of CIA work."

Which is the real nub of the whole contretemps, that, after all, takes place after a season in which the Central Intelligence Agency, in one of the greatest scandals in American history, has been working to undercut the policy of an elected administration. It's a sweet coincidence — if it is a coincidence — that all this comes to a head as Vice President Cheney's aide, I. Lewis Libby, is on trial in a case that at bottom arises from an effort of the administration to expose the CIA's shenanigans. Our own view is that, even if it takes time, the truth eventually will out. Those who reacted to the frustrations of this war with personal attacks on the honest and hard-working figures who participated in the policy debates that led up to the congressional war vote will be exposed, and those, like Mr. Feith, who risked all to ask the tough questions will get their recognition, all the sweeter for having had to wait for it.