

**A Word for Chris Wallace**  
**By: Douglas J. Feith**  
**Wednesday, February 21, 2007**

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*Defending my credibility from a report on "right-wing" Fox News.*

Here's the email I sent today to Chris Wallace of Fox News Sunday:

Chris - On yesterday's show, you quoted my February 11 on-air statement that my former office did not claim an operational relationship between Iraq and al Qaida. You then read from a Weekly Standard article and implied it contradicted that statement. I wish you had asked me about this matter before you aired it, because you wrongly attacked my credibility.

What you quoted from the Standard was not my words. It was the magazine's interpretation of what it says was a document I sent to the Senate Intelligence Committee. The Standard does not even claim to be quoting my document at that point, and yet you attribute the words to me. That is not fair.

Your error occurs as part of a hot political debate about pre-Iraq-war intelligence. Senator Levin and others have been asserting that there was no Iraq-al Qaida relationship at all. They have attacked me on the grounds that I said there was one, while the CIA said there wasn't. But that is not true. The CIA clearly, repeatedly and even publicly said there was an Iraq-al Qaida relationship. See, for example, George Tenet's Oct. 7, 2002, letter to Senator Graham, attached below.

As we discussed, my office objected to CIA analysts suppressing information that did not fit their favored theory that Saddam and his secularist regime would not cooperate with al Qaida religious extremists. We highlighted CIA reports that appeared inconsistent with that theory and wanted their substance accounted for in documents given to policy makers. We were right to ask for this.

The list from my office that was the subject of the Standard article was classified. No one in the Pentagon has ever commented on whether the purported quotations are accurate because the list remains classified. So I can comment on it only generally.

What was that list? It was part of an answer to a question-for-the-record from Senators on the Intelligence Committee. It identified a number of intelligence reports on the Iraq-al Qaida relationship.

The Senators had requested a list of those reports that Pentagon officials had said were being ignored or downplayed by CIA analysts. The bulk of the list was not commentary by my office but summaries of CIA reports and quotations from them. Once again, the sentence you read on the air was the Weekly Standard's interpretation of CIA reports it claims were cited and summarized in my office's list. Without commenting on the accuracy of any particular phrase in the Standard article, I want you to know that some key words that appeared there - "operational" and "alliance," for example - represent not conclusions of mine contested by the CIA, but quotations from CIA products.

Of course, a report that something happened does not mean that it actually happened. In listing the CIA reports, we were not saying that all the reports are correct. Our point was simply that the CIA had reports that did not fit within the theory that the Baathists would never cooperate with the jihadists. We urged the CIA analysts to account in their finished products for all relevant reporting and not discuss only the information that fits some analysts' theory. We were right to call for this.

The list was written in October 2003, months after Saddam's overthrow. It was not part of the case for going to war. It was not written for anyone in the administration but rather for the Senators who asked for it.

Because aspects of this controversy get jumbled together, I want to clarify a point about an earlier piece of work: the Iraq-al Qaida briefing my staff gave to Mr. Hadley and Mr. Libby in September 2002. On the air last week, you asked me about the words "mature and symbiotic." While reasonable people can always dispute a given adjective, you should note that the second bullet on Iraq and al Qaida in Tenet's letter below talks of a ten-year relationship, which at least arguably supported the word "mature." And the next several bullets talk of reciprocity, safe haven and training, which could support the word "symbiotic."

The IG told a Senate committee on February 9 that he never actually took a comprehensive look at the underlying intelligence on the Iraq-al Qaida relationship - and he never judged the "validity" of our criticism of the CIA. His admission made nonsense of his opinion that, by saying there were "fundamental problems" with the CIA's work here, we "undercut" the intelligence community. He is saying we "undercut" the CIA whether or not we were correct in our criticism. And he is saying, in circular fashion, that Pentagon material was not fully supported by the intelligence simply because it was at "variance from the intelligence community consensus."

These were complex matters debated in the months after 9/11 in good faith by serious people who were trying to make our country safer. It is wrong for you to mis-describe and incorrectly attribute words to attack someone's credibility. Senator Levin has lately been using the confusion he has helped create about the facts of this matter to make the false argument that President Bush "lied" our country into war. A good journalist like yourself should get his words and facts straight, not reinforce that false argument.

My February 11 statement was correct. I think you owe me an apology. Your comments yesterday were an ill-informed and ungrounded attack on my honesty. Whenever you publish the video or transcript of those comments, you are compounding the harm.

Yours truly,  
Douglas J. Feith

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Douglas J. Feith was the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy for President George W. Bush from 2001-5.