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## Borking Doug Feith

Much of the continued controversy over the recent Pentagon inspector-general's report on pre-Iraq war intelligence focuses on whether former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Doug Feith's office acted "misleadingly" — the word used by Sen. Carl Levin, Chairman of the Armed Services Committee — or perhaps even "unlawfully" — as Sen. Jay Rockefeller, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, has claimed may be the case.

The fact is that the inspector general has absolved Mr. Feith of misleading Congress, the most serious accusation that had been leveled against him. The IG notes that Mr. Feith's actions "were not illegal or unauthorized." Mr. Feith instead stands rebuked by the IG for doing nothing more than having his team conduct a single briefing, which Mr. Feith's office was authorized by his superiors to do, but which the IG says was "inappropriate."

The heart of the charge is that the briefing, though presented by non-intelligence officials, might have been misunderstood as an intelligence briefing. Those who want to magnify the IG's narrow and technical point into a grand charge of manipulation of intelligence tend not to mention that the contested briefing was presented to then-Deputy National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley and I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby of the vice president's office, two individuals who would clearly not confuse Mr. Feith's staff with an intelligence team. Oddly, Messrs. Hadley and Libby were not interviewed for the IG's report.

Despite the nonevent this episode appears to be, it is unlikely that Messrs. Levin and Rockefeller will let it go. The reason is politics, not policy. Mr. Feith was a prominent advocate of President Bush's decision to go to war with Iraq. He is paying a partisan political price for it, partly as a surrogate for the president and the Republican Party in the context of the 2008 presidential

campaign.

Simply put, Mr. Feith's office did not do anything on this issue which justifies the assault that congressional Democrats have mounted against him because he stands as an embodiment of Mr. Bush's policy toward Iraq. The substance of the policy debates over Iraq are not our concern in writing this piece although it is obvious that Iraq is in currently in deep trouble. Instead, we worry that the Democrats' selective use and misuse of the IG's report will lead to wrong and harmful conclusions about how policy-makers should approach intelligence.

Is it actually "inappropriate" or wrong for policy-makers to challenge the consensus views of the Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence community as a whole? The IG report seems to say yes.

Given the intelligence fiasco regarding WMD in Iraq, who could argue that? Policy-makers are consumers of intelligence, one of many inputs into foreign policy deliberations. Intelligence analysts do not have the responsibility for policy decisions — their job is to inform those decisions. Most policy-makers we have known over the decades in the executive branch and Congress, Republicans and Democrats, regularly take issue with the information and assumptions provided by the intelligence community. Of course, they should do just that. Indeed, the oversight responsibilities of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees, especially since September 11, are to ensure that the intelligence community is providing the best possible product.

The response by critics may be that intelligence analysis should be left solely to intelligence professionals, and they will wrongly point to Mr. Feith's case to support their view. But another episode usefully highlights what is at stake.

The story of former Secretary of State Colin Powell's speech to the United Nations in February 2003 is now well known. Many key intelligence "facts" presented by Mr. Powell, a man of great integrity, as proof of Iraq's WMD program have since been exposed as unprovable or wrong. Mr. Powell and his team reportedly spent many hours culling the intelligence on Iraq's WMD programs with the CIA analysts, pressing for the best they had. He now may wish that he had had more time to scrub the CIA products. Mr. Powell, and all who hold or have held comparable responsibilities for national security policy, would guard that right to challenge intelligence assessments when the stakes are so high.

Our national security decision-making process should not be a casualty of partisan politics over Iraq. It is no knock on the intelligence community that decision-makers should be discriminating in the information that informs our most serious decisions about national security policy. Intelligence information is by its nature incomplete and analysis based on intelligence speculative. Those who now assert that policy-makers should have no role in challenging and judging intelligence should think of Iraq WMD, Mr. Powell as well as Mr. Feith, and, most importantly, what is best for the United States.

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