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# Who's Spinning Intel?

**BY [Thomas Joscelyn](#)**

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LAST WEEK, the Washington Post ("Hussein's Prewar Ties To Al-Qaeda Discounted") covered the latest round in Senator Levin's ongoing struggle to prove that the connection between Iraq and al Qaeda was nothing more than a fiction. Levin has been at this game [for a while](#), and this time the Post's story centered on Levin's request for the declassification of a report written by the Pentagon's acting inspector general, Thomas F. Gimble. The report's conclusion: a Pentagon analysis shop, once headed by former Undersecretary of Defense Douglas J. Feith, "developed, produced, and then disseminated alternative intelligence assessments on the Iraq and al-Qaida relationship, which included some conclusions that were inconsistent with the consensus of the Intelligence Community, to senior decision-makers."

The inspector general determined that Feith's shop did nothing illegal, but still maintained that his office's analyses were "inappropriate." Why? According to the inspector general, Feith & Co. did not sufficiently explain that their conclusions were at odds with the CIA's (and the DIA's) judgments. That was enough for Levin to go on the attack once again.

But Levin's story, which was simply repeated without any real investigation by the Post or even the inspector general's office, relies on a false dichotomy. The senator now pretends that the CIA and other intelligence outfits had reached a rock-solid conclusion that there was no noteworthy relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda in 2002, but Feith's shop improperly pressed on. The Post summarized the inspector general's report as saying: "the CIA had concluded in June 2002 that there were few substantiated contacts between al-Qaeda operatives and Iraqi officials and had said that it lacked evidence of a long-term relationship like the ones Iraq had forged with other terrorist groups."

This is simply revisionist history at its worst.

Although there were certainly disagreements between the CIA and Feith's shop, both argued in 2002 that there was a relationship between Saddam's Iraq and al Qaeda. George Tenet, then the director of central intelligence, stated the CIA's position quite clearly in an [October 7, 2002 letter](#) to then head of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Senator Bob Graham (D-FL). Tenet explained, "We have solid reporting of senior level contacts between Iraq and al-Qaeda going back a decade." Iraq and al Qaeda "have discussed safe haven and reciprocal non-aggression." Tenet warned, "We have credible reporting that al-Qaeda leaders sought contacts in Iraq who could help them acquire WMD capabilities. The reporting also stated that Iraq has provided training to al-Qaeda members in the areas of poisons and gases and making conventional bombs." And, "Iraq's increasing support to extremist Palestinians, coupled with growing indications of a relationship with al-Qaeda, suggest that Baghdad's links to terrorists will increase, even absent US military action."

Tenet was far from alone in these assessments. Michael Scheuer, the one-time head of the CIA's bin Laden unit, also used to be certain that Iraq and al Qaeda were working together. Scheuer's first book on al Qaeda, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes*, which was published in 2002, went into [elaborate detail](#) about the support the Iraqi regime was providing to al Qaeda. Among the areas of concern was Iraq's ongoing support for al Qaeda's chemical weapons development projects in the Sudan.

In 2004, after fashioning a career as a critic of the Bush administration, Scheuer did an about face. He suddenly claimed that there was no evidence of a relationship. He even decided to re-write history--literally. He revised *Through Our Enemies' Eyes* to be consistent with his newly formed opinion by claiming he was simply mistaken.

The bottom line is that members of the CIA, including the Agency's director, certainly believed in 2002 that there was a relationship between the Iraqi regime and al Qaeda. And no matter what he says now, Senator Levin knows that. In a June 16, 2003 appearance on NewsHour, Senator Levin explained:

"We were told by the intelligence community that there was a very strong link between al-Qaida and Iraq, and there were real questions raised. And there are real questions raised about whether or not that link was such that the description by the intelligence community was accurate or whether or not they [note: "they" here refers to the intelligence community, not the Bush administration] stretched it."

The idea that Feith's analysts cooked up the connection, while the CIA shunned the very notion, is pure fantasy--a fantasy dreamed up by Senator Levin and some former CIA members who have repeatedly made clear their disdain for the Bush administration.

But all of this is almost entirely beside the point. Instead of focusing on Levin's "who said what in Washington" game, we'd be better served by focusing on the best evidence available: Saddam's own intelligence files. Here, the Post's account is thoroughly lacking.

The story leads off with this startling conclusion, purportedly gleaned from the inspector general's report:

"Captured Iraqi documents and intelligence interrogations of Saddam Hussein and two former aides 'all confirmed' that Hussein's regime was not directly cooperating with al-Qaeda before the U.S. invasion of Iraq "

Taking the denials of Saddam and his goons at face value is, of course, ridiculous. But exactly which "captured Iraqi documents" confirmed that Saddam's regime and al Qaeda were "not directly cooperating?" The Post doesn't say. And the inspector general did not perform a thorough review of the Iraqi intelligence documents captured during the Iraq war.

Here is just a small sample of what some of the Iraqi intelligence documents and other evidence collected in postwar Iraq has revealed:

1. Saddam's Terror Training Camps & Long-Standing Relationship With Ayman al-Zawahiri. As first reported in THE WEEKLY STANDARD, there is [extensive evidence](#) that Saddam used Iraqi soil to train terrorists from throughout the Middle East. Among the terrorists who received Saddam's support were members of al Qaeda's Algerian affiliate, formerly known as the GSPC, which is still [lethally active](#), though under a new name: al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

Joe Klein, a columnist for Time magazine and an outspoken critic of the Bush administration, has [confirmed the existence](#) of Saddam's terrorist training camps. He also found that Iraqi intelligence documents demonstrated a long-standing relationship between Saddam and al Qaeda bigwig Ayman al-Zawahiri.

Other evidence of Saddam's terror training camps was reported in a paper published by the Pentagon's Iraqi Perspectives Project. A team of Pentagon analysts discovered that Saddam's paramilitary Fedayeen forces were hosting camps for thousands terror of from throughout the Middle East.

2. A 1992 IIS Document lists Osama bin Laden as an "asset." An Iraqi Intelligence memorandum dated March 28, 1992 and stamped "Top Secret" lists a number of assets. Osama bin Laden is listed on page 14 as having a "good relationship" with the Iraqi Intelligence Service's section in Syria.

3. A 1997 IIS document lists a number of meetings between Iraq, bin Laden and other al Qaeda associates. The memo recounts discussions of cooperating in attacks against American stationed in Saudi Arabia. The document summarizes a number of contacts between Iraqi Intelligence and Saudi oppositionist groups, including al Qaeda,

during the mid 1990's. The document says that in early 1995 bin Laden requested Iraqi assistance in two ways. First, bin Laden wanted Iraqi television to carry al Qaeda's anti-Saudi propaganda. Saddam agreed. Second, bin Laden requested Iraqi assistance in performing "joint operations against the foreign forces in the land of Hijaz." That is, bin Laden wanted Iraq's assistance in attacking U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia.

We do not know what, exactly, came of bin Laden's second request. But the document indicates that Saddam's operatives "were left to develop the relationship and the cooperation between the two sides to see what other doors of cooperation and agreement open up." Thus, it appears that both sides saw value in working with each other. It is also worth noting that in the months following bin Laden's request, al Qaeda was tied to a series of bombings in Saudi Arabia.

The document also recounts contacts with Mohammed al-Massari, a known al Qaeda mouthpiece living in London.

4. A 1998 IIS document reveals that a representative of bin Laden visited Baghdad in March 1998 to meet with Saddam's regime. According to the memo, the IIS arranged a visit for bin Laden's "trusted confidant," who stayed in a regime-controlled hotel for more than two weeks. Interestingly, according to other evidence discovered by the U.S. intelligence community, Ayman al-Zawahiri was also in Baghdad the month before. He collected a check for \$300,000 from the Iraqi regime. The 9-11 Commission confirmed that there were a series of meetings (perhaps set up by Zawahiri, who had "ties of his own" to the Iraq regime) in the following months as well.

5. Numerous IIS documents demonstrate that Saddam had made plans for a terrorist-style insurgency and coordinated the influx of foreign terrorists into Iraq. In *My Year in Iraq*, Ambassador Paul Bremer says a secret IIS document he had seen "showed that Saddam had made plans for an insurgency." Moreover, "the insurgency had forces to draw on from among several thousand hardened Baathists in two northern Republican Guard divisions that had joined forces with foreign jihadis."

Cobra II, a scathing indictment of the Bush administration's prosecution of the Iraq war by New York Times authors Michael Gordon and General Bernard Trainor, offers additional detail about the terrorists who made their way to Iraq in advance of the war. "Documents retrieved by American intelligence after the war show that the Iraqi Ministry of Defense coordinated border crossings with Syria and provided billeting, pay, and allowances and armaments for the influx of Syrians, Palestinians, and other fighters."

Still another IIS document contains Saddam's orders to "utilize Arab suicide bombers" against the Americans. Saddam's agents were also ordered to provide these terrorists with munitions, cash, shelter, and training.

These are just five examples of the types of documents that have been discovered in postwar Iraq. There are many more examples not listed here. They all undermine the conventional wisdom that there was never any relationship between Saddam's Iraq and al Qaeda.

But you won't see Senator Carl Levin calling attention to any of these documents. And the Washington Post has shown no interest in bringing them to his attention either. Instead, Levin and the Post like to pretend that the relationship between Saddam and al Qaeda was cooked up by neoconservatives bent on war. The Post even initially--and incorrectly--reported that a copy of a memo from Feith's shop was leaked to THE WEEKLY STANDARD prior to war. (In reality, Stephen Hayes [reported](#) on the memo months after the war began. The implication of the Post's misreporting was clear: this was all about justifying war.

But instead of worrying about a memo written by Feith's analysts, perhaps the Post should take more interest in what Saddam's files have to say. They're a lot more interesting.

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