

Feith's Unsurprising Revelations

By Gareth Porter - (*Inter Press Service*)

Three weeks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, U.S. Defense Secretary [Donald Rumsfeld](#) established an official military objective of not only removing Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime by force, but also overturning the regimes in Iran, Syria, and four other countries in the Middle East, according to a document quoted extensively by former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy [Douglas Feith](#) in his recently published account of Iraq War decisions.

Feith's retelling further indicates that this aggressive U.S. aim of remaking the map of the Middle East by military force and the threat of force was supported explicitly by the country's top military leaders.

Feith's book, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*, released in April, provides excerpts of a paper that Rumsfeld sent to President George W. Bush on September 30, 2001, calling for the administration to focus not on taking down Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network, but rather on the aim of establishing "new regimes" in a series of states by "aiding local peoples to rid themselves of terrorists and to free themselves of regimes that support terrorism."

Quoting that document, Feith deletes the names of all of the states to be targeted except Afghanistan, inserting the phrase "some other states" in brackets. In a related Pentagon "campaign plan" document, the Taliban and Iraq are listed as "state regimes" against which "plans and operations" might be mounted, yet the names of four other states are blacked out "for security reasons."

In his 2003 book *Winning Modern Wars*, Gen. Wesley Clark, who commanded the NATO bombing campaign in the Kosovo War, recalled being told by a friend in the Pentagon in November 2001 that states that Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defense [Paul Wolfowitz](#) wanted to take down included Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, Sudan, and Somalia.

Clark wrote that the list also included Lebanon, and now Feith reveals that Rumsfeld's paper called for getting "Syria out of Lebanon" as a major goal of U.S. policy.

After a recent public appearance, when asked by this reporter which countries' names were deleted from the documents, Feith cited security reasons for the deletion. But when asked which of the six regimes on Clark's list were included in the Rumsfeld paper, he replied, "All of them."

Rumsfeld's paper was given to the White House only two weeks after Bush approved a U.S. military operation in Afghanistan directed against bin Laden and the Taliban regime. Despite that decision, Rumsfeld's proposal called explicitly for postponing U.S. air strikes and the use of ground forces in

Afghanistan.

Instead, the Rumsfeld paper argued that the United States should target states that had supported anti-Israel forces, such as Hezbollah and Hamas. It urged that the United States "capitalize on our strong suit, which is not finding a few hundred terrorists in caves in Afghanistan, but in the vastness of our military and humanitarian resources, which can strengthen the opposition forces in terrorist-supporting states."

Feith describes the policy outlined in the paper as consisting of "military action against some of the state sponsors and pressure—short of war—against others."

Rumsfeld's plan represented a Pentagon consensus that included the uniformed military leadership, according to Feith. He writes that the process of drafting the paper involved consultations with the outgoing Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Henry Shelton and the incoming Chairman Gen. Richard Myers.

Myers helped revise the initial draft, Feith writes, and Gen. John P. Abizaid, who was then director of the Joint Staff, enthusiastically endorsed it in draft form. "This is an exceptionally important memo," wrote Abizaid, "which gives clear strategic vision." In a message quoted by Feith, Abizaid recommended to Myers that "you support this approach."

After the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, Abizaid was promoted to chief of Central Command, with military responsibility for the entire Middle East.

Neither Myers nor Abizaid, both of whom are now retired, responded to e-mails asking for comments on Feith's account of their roles in the process of producing the Rumsfeld strategy.

Rumsfeld's aides also drafted a second version of the paper as instructions to all military commanders in the development of "campaign plans against terrorism." This document was a joint effort by Feith's office and by the Strategic Plans and Policy directorate of Abizaid's Joint Staff. It followed the broad outlines of the paper for Bush, arguing that the enemy was a "network" that included states that support terrorism and that the Defense Department should seek to "convince or compel" those states to cut their ties to terrorism.

The Pentagon guidance document called for military commanders to assist other government agencies "as directed" to "encourage populations dominated by terrorist organizations or their supporters to overthrow that domination."

That language was adopted because the campaign planning document was issued as "Strategic Guidance for the Defense Department" on October 3, 2001—just three days after the Rumsfeld strategy paper had gone to the president.

Bush had not approved the explicit aim of regime change in Iran, Syria, and four other countries proposed by Rumsfeld. Thus, Rumsfeld adopted the aggressive military plan targeting multiple regimes in the Middle East for regime change even though it was not White House policy.

The Defense Department guidance document made it clear that U.S. military aims in regard to those states would go well beyond any ties to terrorism. The document said that the Defense Department would also seek to isolate and weaken those states and to "disrupt, damage or destroy" their military capacities—not necessarily limited to WMD.

The document included as a "strategic objective" a requirement to "prevent further attacks against the United States or U.S. interests." That language, which extended the principle of preemption far beyond the issue of WMD, was so broad as to justify plans to use force against virtually any state that was not a client of the United States.

The military leadership's strong preference for focusing on states as enemies rather than on the threat from al Qaeda after 9/11 continued a pattern of behavior going back to the Bill Clinton administration.

After the bombing of two U.S. embassies in East Africa by al Qaeda operatives, State Department counterterrorism official Michael Sheehan proposed supporting the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan against bin Laden's sponsor, the Taliban regime. However, senior U.S. military leaders "refused to consider it," according to a 2004 account by Richard H. Shultz Jr., a military specialist at Tufts University.

A senior officer on the Joint Staff told State Department counterterrorism director Sheehan he had heard terrorist strikes characterized more than once by colleagues as a "small price to pay for being a superpower."

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