

## Career officer does eye-opening stint inside Pentagon

By Karen Kwiatkowski, a recently retired Air Force Lieutenant colonel.

After eight years of Bill Clinton, many military officers breathed a sigh of relief when George W. Bush was named president. I was in that plurality. At one time, I would have believed the administration's accusations of anti-Americanism against anyone who questioned the integrity and good faith of President Bush, Vice President Cheney or Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

However, while working from May 2002 through February 2003 in the office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Near East South Asia and Special Plans (USDP/NESA and SP) in the Pentagon, I observed the environment in which decisions about post-war Iraq were made.

Those observations changed everything.

What I saw was aberrant, pervasive and contrary to good order and discipline. If one is seeking the answers to why peculiar bits of "intelligence" found sanctity in a presidential speech, or why the post-Hussein occupation has been distinguished by confusion and false steps, one need look no further than the process inside the Office of the Secretary of Defense. I can identify three prevailing themes.

- Functional isolation of the professional corps. Civil service and active-duty military professionals assigned to the USDP/NESA and SP were noticeably uninvolved in key areas of interest to Undersecretary for Policy Douglas Feith, Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld. These included Israel, Iraq and to a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia.

When the New York Times broke the story last summer of Richard Perle's invitation of Laurent Muraviec to brief the Defense Policy Board on Saudi Arabia as the next enemy of the United States, this briefing was news to the Saudi desk officer. He even had some difficulty getting a copy of it, while receiving assignments related to it.

In terms of Israel and Iraq, all primary staff work was conducted by political appointees, in the case of Israel a desk officer appointee from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and in the case of Iraq, Abe Shulsky and several other appointees. These personnel may be exceptionally qualified; Shulsky authored a 1993 textbook *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*.

But the human resource depth made possible through broad-based teamwork with the professional policy and intelligence corps was never established, and apparently, never wanted by the Bush-Cheney-Rumsfeld organization.

- Cross-agency cliques: Much has been written about the role of the founding members of the Project for a New American Century, the Center for Security Policy and the American Enterprise Institute and their new positions in the Bush administration. Certainly, appointees sharing particular viewpoints are expected to congregate, and an overwhelming number of these appointees having such organizational ties is neither conspiratorial nor unusual. What is unusual is the way this network operates solely with its membership across the various agencies -- in particular the State Department, the National Security Council and the Office of the Vice President.

Within the Central Intelligence Agency, it was less clear to me who the appointees were, if any. This might explain the level of interest in the CIA taken by the Office of the Vice President. In any case, I personally witnessed several cases of staff officers being told not to contact their counterparts at State or the National Security Council because that particular decision would be processed through a different channel. This cliquishness is cause for amusement in such movies as *Never Been Kissed* or *The Hot Chick*. In the development and implementation of war planning it is neither amusing nor beneficial for American security because opposing points of view and information that doesn't "fit" aren't considered.

- Groupthink. Defined as "reasoning or decision-making by a group, often characterized by uncritical acceptance or conformity to prevailing points of view," groupthink was, and probably remains, the predominant characteristic of Pentagon Middle East policy development. The result of groupthink is the elevation of opinion into a kind of accepted "fact," and uncritical acceptance of extremely narrow and isolated points of view.

The result of groupthink has been extensively studied in the history of American foreign policy, and it will have a prominent role when the history of the Bush administration is written. Groupthink, in this most recent case leading to the invasion and occupation of Iraq, will be found, I believe, to have caused a subversion of constitutional limits on executive power and a co-optation through deceit of a large segment of the Congress.

I am now retired. Shortly before my retirement I was allowed to return to my primary office of assignment, having served in NESAs as a desk officer backfill for 10 months. The transfer was something I had sought, but my wish was granted only after I made a particular comment to my superior, in response to my reading of a February Secretary of State cable answering a long list of questions from a Middle Eastern country regarding U.S. planning for the aftermath in Iraq. The answers had been heavily crafted by the Pentagon, and to me, they were remarkably inadequate, given the late stage of the game. I suggested to my boss that if this was as good as it got, some folks on the Pentagon's E-ring may be sitting beside Hussein in the war crimes tribunals.

Hussein is not yet sitting before a war crimes tribunal. Nor have the key decision-makers in the Pentagon been forced to account for the odd set of circumstances that placed us as a long-term occupying force in the world's nastiest rat's nest, without a nation-building plan, without significant international support and without an exit plan. Neither may ever be required to answer their accusers, thanks to this administration's military as well as publicity machine, and the disgraceful political compromises already made by most of the Congress. Ironically, only Saddam Hussein, buried under tons of rubble or in hiding, has a good excuse.