

# Conscientious Objector

A senior Air Force officer watches civilians craft the war plan.

By Karen Kwiatkowski

*Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski, a former Pentagon insider, continues her revelations in this second of a three-part series.*

BY THE END of the summer of 2002, our Near East South Asia (NESA) office spaces were beginning to get crowded. Several senior people, including Abe Shulsky had moved into some of the enclosed front offices, and the cubicles were entirely filled, as were some less than ideal workspaces in the hallway.

Chatter swirled, and word went out that NESA was looking for additional space. By late August, a large office was located upstairs on the fifth floor. At a staff meeting, we were told that the expanded Iraq desk would become the Office of Special Plans and would move out. We were told not to refer to this office as the Office of Special Plans and, if pressed, we were also not to confirm that it was the expanded Iraq desk. This instruction came across as both surreal and humorous. When someone asked whether we could tell our Joint Staff counterparts, Bill Luti said no, to deny knowledge of the organizational shift. In my experience, our canny, connected, and cynical Joint Staff counterparts probably already knew more about it than we did, and this suspicion was later confirmed in conversations with some of them.

The subterfuge was not necessary in any case, as several weeks later Luti was announced as the new Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, NESA and Special Plans, allowing him to work

directly for Undersecretary Doug Feith. Luti had always seemed to work directly for Feith. In one staff meeting, interrupted by a call from Feith's office, Luti, in his famously incautious manner, proclaimed to all present, that Feith couldn't wipe his ass without his [Luti's] help.

The establishment of the Office of Special Plans, under Abe Shulsky, and including several military folks, a civil servant or two, and the larger group of neocon-friendly appointees or contractors, meant to the rest of us that we would have more space and a reduction in cross-regional chatter. The Iraq-war planning aspect would now be isolated from the rest of NESA and would establish its own rhythm and cadence, separate from the non-political-minded professionals covering the rest of the region. In planning a war, loose lips sink ships, and if anyone didn't remember this World War II slogan, the Pentagon had several posters in common areas to remind us. (Interestingly, the planning and execution of wars—writing and implementing war plans—is the function of the Combatant Commander, with the Joint Staff as chief technical advisor and the Undersecretary of Policy as policy advisor. The Secretary of Defense approves, but combatant commanders work directly for the president. Nowhere in OSD should one, by law, custom, or common sense, find people busy developing and writing war plans, even if they are special.)

If they were not writing war plans, the Office of Special Plans did produce something related to the upcoming war.

By August, only the Pollyannas at the Pentagon felt that the decision to invade Iraq, storm Baghdad, and take over the place (or give it to Ahmad Chalabi) was reversible. What was still being worked out at that time was the propaganda piece, a sustained refinement of the storyline that had been hinted at in neoconservative circles and the White House for months, even years. Based on the successful second leak of the war plans in July, Washington's initial reactions of "Oh, no—so many troops!" was shaped masterfully by the Pentagon publicity machine with offended and vociferous denials of the stories, claiming that the operation would not require nearly that many troops. It was a propaganda coup of understated elegance and razor-edged acumen.

That genius, in some ways, was due to Abe Shulsky. A kindly and gentle-appearing man who would say hello in the hallways, he seemed to be someone with whom I, as a political-science grad student, would have loved to sit over coffee and discuss the world's problems. Seeing me as a uniformed and relatively junior officer, I doubt he entertained similar desires. In any case, he was very busy. I didn't see much of what Abe did on a daily basis, but I know that he approved a particular document produced by the Office of Special Plans for the staff officers in Policy. Desk officers write policy papers for our senior officers to help prepare them for meetings, speeches, or events where they will need to communicate U.S. security policy. In early Septem-

ber, after the OSP had been established, we were told via staff meetings and e-mails that whenever we wrote something that might include reference to the Iraq threat, and WMD and terrorism in general, we would now inform OSP and request their talking points. The actual contact point was Air Force Col. Kevin Jones. On a number of occasions from September through January, I e-mailed or called Colonel Jones and requested the latest version of the talking points. On several occasions, they weren't available in an approved form, and we waited for Shulsky's OK. This crafting and approval of the exact words to use when discussing Iraq, WMD, and terrorism were, for most of us, the only known functions of OSP and Mr. Shulsky.

As a desk officer, having a patented set of words to copy meant less to research, and I welcomed the talking points on principle. Then I made the mistake of reading them. They were a

seriously weakened by war and sanctions and weekly bombings over the past 12 years and in fact was plotting to hurt America and support anti-American activities, in part through terrorists. His support for the Palestinians and Arafat proved his terrorist connections, and, basically, the time to act was now. This was the gist of the talking points, and they remained on message throughout the time I watched them evolve.

But evolve they did, and the subtle changes I saw from September to late January were revealing as to what exactly the Office of Special Plans was contributing to national security. Two key types of modifications would be directed, or approved, by Abe Shulsky and his team of politicians. First was the deletion of entire references or bullets. The one I remember most specifically is when they dropped the bullet that said one of Saddam's intelligence operatives met with Mohamed Atta in Prague and

ments of Saddam's readiness and capability in the chemical, biological, or nuclear arena. Others were altered over time to match more exactly something Bush or Cheney had said in recent speeches. One item I never saw in our talking points was a reference to Saddam's purported attempt to buy yellowcake uranium in Niger. The OSP list of crime and evil included a statement relating to Saddam's attempts to seek fissionable materials or uranium in Africa. (Our point, written mostly in the present tense had conveniently omitted dates of the last known attempt, some time in the late 1980s.) I was later surprised to hear the president's mention of the yellowcake in Niger because that indeed would be new, and in theory might have represented new actual intelligence, something remarkably absent in what we were seeing from the OSP.

During the late summer and fall I was industriously trying to get our overdue bilateral visits with Morocco and Tunisia back on schedule. There must have been clues throughout the fall that I was less than politically reliable. On the wall behind my desk, I had a display of cartoons and articles questioning the legality and justness of pre-emptive wars, images of neoconservatives gone wild, and other antiwar humor. I had plenty of visitors, and even folks who I had pegged as a little too imperialist for my taste enjoyed my personal wailing wall. But as winter approached, the propaganda campaign gained ground, Congress bought in, my sense of humor darkened, and the cartoons selected for the wall got angrier. It was becoming clearer that, after a year, the Afghan campaign was not proceeding as promised, and Iraq having been falsely advertised and politically manipulated would be even uglier and deadlier. And no one in the Pentagon with any political or moral power seemed to care. ■

*To be continued*

## APPROVAL OF THE **EXACT WORDS TO USE** WHEN DISCUSSING **IRAQ, WMD, AND TERRORISM** WERE, FOR MOST OF US, THE ONLY KNOWN FUNCTIONS OF OSP AND MR. SHULSKY.

series of bulletized statements, written in a convincing way, and at first glance, they seemed reasonable and rational. Up to a point. Saddam Hussein had gassed his neighbors, abused his people, and was continuing in that mode, a threat to his neighbors and to us. Saddam Hussein tried to shoot at our aircraft when they enforced the no-fly zone. Saddam Hussein had harbored al-Qaeda operatives and offered and probably provided them training facilities. Saddam Hussein was pursuing and had WMD of the type that could be used by him, in conjunction with al-Qaeda and other terrorists, to attack and damage American interests, Americans, and America. Saddam Hussein had not been

that this was salient proof that Saddam was in part responsible for the 9/11 attack. It lasted through several revisions, but after the media reported the claim as unsubstantiated by U.S. intelligence, denied by the Czech government, and that the location of Atta had been confirmed to be elsewhere by our own FBI, that particular bullet was dropped entirely from our "advice on things to say" to senior Pentagon officials when they met with guests or outsiders.

The other type of change to the talking points was along the lines of fine-tuning and generalizing. Much of what was there was already so general as to be less than accurate. Some bullets would be softened, particularly state-

# Party Pioneer

Al Smith, Barry Goldwater and ... Howard Dean?

By Martin Sieff

IS HOWARD DEAN indeed the Republicans' dream Democrat, George McGovern or Eugene McCarthy come again, yet another pure, naïve warrior doomed to lead the Democrats either into schism or decades in the wilderness? Or might he just be something more?

In fact, the evidence is already overwhelming that he is going to be far more than McCarthy, the famous Democratic insurgent candidate against Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War in 1968. First, McCarthy rallied his core support from rebellious, young, long-haired baby-boomer students. Dean appeals to millions of those very same baby boomers, but they are now the middle-aged core of middle-class America rather than its challenging peripheral outsiders.

Second, McCarthy had no economic platform worth the name. He opposed Vietnam on grounds of idealistic principle and had nothing to say to pocket-books or bellies. He had no serious self-interest pitch for any sizeable portion of the electorate. Dean, by contrast, has strong economic rhetoric that speaks to the fiscally literate concerns of the middle class, and he has adapted it to speak to working-class Democrats.

Third, McCarthy was painted by LBJ and the Republicans of the day as a whining loser on Vietnam. But the same charges already look unlikely to stick to Dean, though Karl Rove will certainly try. The 1968 election came when the 27-year national consensus to send scores of thousands of American boys to die continents away in wars of ideology was

still strong, though it was certainly fraying. Since Vietnam, a far different national consensus, shaped by Ronald Reagan, has governed the commitment of American troops to wars around the world. That consensus has been: in fast, get a decision fast, don't get bogged down, don't suffer serious casualties, and then get out fast. Every one of those principles has already been broken in Iraq.

Finally, Gene McCarthy emulated William Jennings Bryan in turning a political campaign into a *kulturkampf*—a cultural war against the American mainstream. And the mainstream responded by rejecting him. Had he won his party's presidential nomination at the tumultuous 1968 Chicago convention, it is likely he would have gone down to defeat at the hands of Richard Nixon as catastrophically as Sen. George McGovern—an authentic war hero, no less—did four years later. Whether or not he is, Dean is campaigning as a middle-class moderate, not its antithesis. But if he is no Gene McCarthy, then who is he?

Dean is the Democrats' Barry Goldwater. Goldwater, after all, was an idealistic insurgent who astonished a complacent east-coast establishment out of touch with the party's grassroots activists and its historic principles and values. Goldwater lost in an historic landslide to Lyndon Johnson

in 1964 but in the process revitalized a Republican Party that had been in the doldrums since Herbert Hoover led it there 34 years before, at the height of the Great Depression. But the real significance of Howard Dean's campaign and the fervent support it is already generating dates back earlier than that.

Here is the political fairytale. There was a gallant prince, a repeatedly re-elected governor of a Northeastern state to be exact. He did not exactly look like a prince or a president. He was a mouthy smart aleck who acted like he had stepped straight off the sidewalks of New York City, which indeed he had. But he developed a fervent support among a vast political constituency that had not voted Democratic in more than 30 years. They recognized that he understood their life and death concerns and advocated policies that would save their

