

Now Introducing, the Office of Iranian Affairs (Formerly Doing Business as the Office of Special Plans)

Embedded Journalism and the Disinformation Campaign for War on Iran

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAN: THE NEXT WAR?](#)

According to Laura Rozen of the [Los Angeles Times](#), the Office of Special Plans has been reincarnated as the Office of Iranian Affairs, apparently housed in the same Pentagon offices inhabited by its predecessor and involving some of the same slimy personnel. Notably, Abram Shulsky, who headed the OSP under Douglas Feith, is back. His crew will be reporting to none other than Elizabeth Cheney, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, and daughter of the Vice President. Dick Cheney is generally understood to be the strongest advocate for an attack on Iran in the administration. (He is also, by the way, architect of Bush's "signing statements" appended to laws entitling him to ignore them. He is the man behind the throne, surrounded by neocon acolytes.)

As I wrote [last November](#), "it is too soon to speak of the 'twilight of the neocons' while [John] Hannah, [Stephen] Hadley, [William] Luti, [David] Wurmser, Elliott Abrams, John Bolton, John Negroponte and other neocons remain in power, with [Michale] Ledeen and [Abram] Shulsky still skulking about."

This was the same month that Democrats staged an abortive mini-rebellion in the Senate, demanding that the Intelligence Committee's long-delayed Phase II investigation focusing on Feith's OSP finally get off the ground. But this seems to have been deliberately delayed by the initiation of a separate in-house investigation of Feith's office by the Pentagon's inspector general. Feith's successor and fellow neocon Eric Edelman and Rumsfeld's intelligence chief Stephen Cambone are supposedly cooperating on that. I wouldn't expect any startling report detailing the disinformation campaign leading to the Iraq war anytime soon.

Meanwhile, Abram Shulsky, the neocon's neocon, a scholar of Leo Strauss and Machiavelli, who has written about the application of [Strauss's thought to intelligence](#), is back. The Straussians of course uphold the use of disinformation ("noble lies") to prepare the public for the difficult choices they, the Wise, have made. Already there is evidence for the deliberate planting of bogus stories planted in the press, such as occurred in the months leading up to the Iraq attack. Amir Tahiri's report on the front page of Canada's *National Post* about a religious dress code adopted by the Iranian parliament was immediately, eagerly embraced by State Department spokesman Sean McCormick, who at a May 19 press briefing was asked by James Rozen of Fox News the following:

QUESTION: On Iran, are you aware or is the Department aware of published

reports stating that the Iranian parliament this week passed a measure that would require non-Muslims to wear badges that identify them as such?

MR. MCCORMACK: I have seen the news reports. These have, I think, recycled over time. There is — as I understand it, there is a — some law currently in the parliament, the exact nature of which is unclear, so I'm not going to try to delve into giving a definitive comment or a detailed comment about something about which I don't have all the facts. That said, if you did have such an occurrence, whether it was in Iran or elsewhere, it would certainly be despicable.

QUESTION: Can I just follow up for a second on it?

MR. MCCORMACK: Go ahead.

QUESTION: You said that it's been something that, to your understanding, has been recycled over time. How long has the Department been following it or did you just become aware of these reports today for the first time?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, I've seen various news — similar news reports and I can't give you the exact dates, you know months ago, and they seem to be coming up again, based on the progression of — well, I guess, for lack of a better term — law through the Iranian parliament. The exact nature of that law is a little bit unclear and the exact motivations behind that are a little unclear. So I can't offer, like I said, a detailed comment about it.

QUESTION: Two more questions, if I might. What is the — what kinds of means does the Department have at its disposal for verifying the passage of laws in the Iranian parliament?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, certainly we have access to open source material and we also talk frequently with other countries who have diplomatic representation in Iran.

QUESTION: And is there an effort underway right now to ascertain more about this?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yes.

QUESTION: And why would it be despicable, if it were true?

MR. MCCORMACK: Well, I think it has clear echoes, James, of Germany in the — under Hitler, so I think that that's pretty clear. But again, you know, I don't want to delve too deeply into that because we don't have the facts.

Does anybody else smell the soggy sheets of embedded journalism here? The Canadian paper was retracting the sensationalistic story even as McCormick spoke. There is in fact discussion in the Iranian Majlis about a law specifying Islamic dress. There've been laws about appropriate dress in Iran for better or worse since the inception of the Islamic Republic, so this is nothing new. But *badges*? The disinformationists may have cooked that up recalling an effort by Afghanistan's Taliban in 2001 to require Hindus to wear yellow badges. Or maybe they were thinking about their own press badges.

I can just imagine some brainstorming session between the Office of Iranian Affairs guys and some Judith Miller-types.

“So what else can we do to equate Ahmadinejad to Hitler?”

“How about the dress code law?”

“Well, that’s an Islamic thing, like the dress code in Saudi Arabia.”

“We could say, *badges*.”

“Badges?”

“You know, like Star of David badges in Nazi Germany.”

“Do they really plan badges?”

“No, but remember the Taliban, how they put yellow badges on Hindus in 2001?”

“Yeah, in Afghanistan.”

“People will buy it. They won’t distinguish Afghanistan and Iran.”

“Yeah, and if the Afghans could do it, the Iranians could.”

“And the Germans.”

“Yeah, that works. Let’s try it.”

“The administration will comment on a press report. We’ll cover our ass and say we don’t have all the facts. But if it’s true, it’s awful.”

“Follow-up question will prompt the reference to the Nazis.”

“Yeah, that’s good. Let’s get on it.”

In the coming weeks I’d expect a rash of false reports emanating from the duplicitous fear-mongering apparatus straddling the press and the Bush administration as the western alliance heatedly debates Cheney’s plans to attack Iran, as Israel intensifies its campaign to encourage such an attack, and as U.S. efforts to legitimize the use of force through the UN Security Council run their course. Jorge Hirsch makes a good case for the possibility that the administration will accuse Iran of spreading bird flu into the west. Yes, it’s nuts. (Just as nuts as the reports by Martin Arostegui in [Insight Magazine](#) after 9-11 suggesting “evidence pointing to [Fidel] Castro’s involvement with the introduction of West Nile virus into the U.S. via migratory birds.” John Bolton and Pat Robertson have used such material to build a case for regime change in Cuba.)

Justin Raimondo of antiwar.com dissects a report in Israel’s most popular newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* to the effect that the Lebanese Shiite party Hizbollah, aligned with Iran, plans a terrorist attack on the World Cup soccer tournament in Germany. Here’s another story to watch warily. The Europeans only last year, reluctantly and under U.S. pressure, added Hizbollah to their list of international terrorist organizations. But demonizing Hizbollah is key to the U.S. and Israeli policy of effecting regime change in Syria and Lebanon. The still mysterious assassination last February of Rafiq Hariri was immediately attributed by U.S. officials to Hizbollah’s patron Syria. Iran is an even more important Hizbollah supporter.

There was a real attack by some Arabs on a sports event in Munich, Germany in 1972. Palestinian terrorists seized the Israeli athletes’ quarters and killed eleven. Maybe some are

thinking, “What if something like that happened again? People would be so outraged! And if we could blame *Iran*—well, enough said!”

The strategy is clear. Define a target as evil. Find some kind of connection with weapons of mass destruction—chemical, biological, nuclear—or just to low-tech “terrorism,” draw some sort of *Hitler* parallel and get strategically placed press people on board. Plant the stories, then cite them as though they were troubling news to you. Then cite “intelligence”—this mystical reservoir of wisdom restricted to the elite (rather like the *gnosis* of ancient mystery religions)—trusting that the foolish masses will accept it on faith, at least until the job’s all done and the noble lies are inevitably exposed. You can always scapegoat the intelligence community for any errors. It can’t, by its very nature, resist that scapegoating.

And maybe, just maybe, the neocon-led administration will stage something in Germany or elsewhere that could serve as another 9-11. In his *Universal Fascism* (1995), prominent neocon Michael Ledeen (widely accused of involvement in the Niger uranium forgery) wrote, “In order to achieve the most noble accomplishments, the leader may have to ‘enter into evil.’ This is the chilling insight that has made Machiavelli so feared, admired and challenging... [W]e [ordinary people] are rotten.... It’s true that we can achieve greatness if, and only if, we are properly led.”

What I’d call “proper leadership” at this point is calling for regime change in this country, through impeachment or more radical methods.

There is a race for time, a battle to create public opinion, lopsided given the mainstream press’s abject deference to the neocon project. There is no emotion stronger than fear, and the Bush administration so clumsy about everything else deploys this weapon with extraordinary deftness. In opposition the antiwar movement at its best wields critical reason, humanism, truth. However powerful the lies, that truth will ultimately out.

Sooner better than later.

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