

Cheney's Sept. 14 'Big Lies' Backfire; Refuted Even by Bush

by Edward Spannaus and Jeffrey Steinberg

After lying low for months, Vice President Dick Cheney came out of the bunker and the Republican campaign fundraising circuit on Sept. 14, to make his first appearance since March on a Sunday talk show—NBC's "Meet the Press." Cheney did his best to "out-Goebbels Goebbels," claiming that the Iraq reconstruction was going well, that the budget-busting costs were anticipated in advance, and that Saddam Hussein had been linked to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Cheney's lying performance was so over the top, that President Bush, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and even the loose-lipped Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, all made public statements repudiating Cheney's 9/11 charges against Saddam Hussein. On a larger scale, Cheney's TV performance was a gross miscalculation. All Cheney accomplished, was to put himself back in the spotlight—so that he has once again become the target of attack and ridicule among the population and press. Cheney is becoming the biggest liability to the Bush re-election team, and that simple fact must be dawning on the President's campaign guru, Karl Rove.

The renewed Cheney flap erupted just days after Lyndon LaRouche's dramatic intervention into the California recall fight, in which the Democratic Presidential candidate, as he had promised, made Cheney the primary focus of attention—the key figure behind the imperial war policy abroad and the looting and stealing that underlies energy deregulation and related policies in America.

Two days after Cheney's "Meet the Press" appearance, a *Los Angeles Times* editorial, "Cheney in Wonderland," began: "Vice President Dick Cheney has long acted as though the best defense is a good offense, no matter what the damage to truth or common sense." The *Times* noted that Cheney put pressure on CIA analysts to deliver worst-case estimates about Iraqi capabilities, and then turned around and declared

that "it would have been irresponsible in the extreme" not to have acted on those same CIA estimates. "Even so," said the *Times*, "Cheney, in commenting about Iraq on Sunday during a rare television appearance, broke new ground. He not only defended the Bush Administration's record in rebuilding Iraq but he upheld sweeping, unproven claims about Saddam Hussein's connections to terrorism."

After noting that even Rumsfeld and his top deputy Paul Wolfowitz have backed down from some of their most egregious past lies, the *Times* concluded: "Cheney seems stuck in a time warp. He asserted 'major success, major progress' in Iraq, and that Americans were being welcomed as 'liberators' . . . Those in the Administration who seek help from Europe and elsewhere can only hope that Cheney's speech is seen as something for domestic consumption, a pep talk for the public that is footing the bill."

The next day, the *Sacramento Bee* editorialized on similar lines: "Cheney's 69% solution." Fourteen months before the next election, said the *Bee*, Cheney "sought to reassure Americans, 69% of whom, according to a recent opinion poll, believe the previous Iraqi regime had something to do with the 9/11 attacks, that they were right." Never mind the evidence and the statements by U.S. intelligence officials rejecting these claims. "Cheney wasn't addressing disbelieving spooks. He was speaking to all those potential voters . . . who need constant reassurance, against all evidence, that Saddam was part of the 9/11 plot—that the money and lives Americans are expending are worth the cost."

The "time warp" notion was also reflected in a *Washington Post* cartoon by Tom Toles, the first three panels of which show Cheney on TV saying: "Everything in Iraq is going according to plan." "All our claims: 100% accurate." "All our troop and money predictions: completely right." The fourth

panel has the newscaster saying: “Experts are analyzing this latest Cheney message for authenticity—although nothing on the tape indicates it was made in the past six months.”

Svengali Cheney

The NBC appearance also drew attention to Cheney’s role as the architect of the Iraq war and President Bush’s puppetmaster—which only LaRouche was saying a few months ago. A syndicated Knight-Ridder story said that “Cheney’s vigorous defense of U.S. policy during a television interview Sunday underscored his pivotal role in shaping President Bush’s approach to the region.” The article quoted a senior Administration official as saying that Cheney “has been the most powerful engine behind the Iraq policy from the start,” and adding: “If it weren’t for the Vice President, Powell would have a fighting chance against Rumsfeld”—referring to behind-the-scenes battles between Secretary of State Colin Powell and Cheney-allied Rumsfeld. Former Pentagon official Karen Kwiatowski, who worked in Undersecretary of Defense Doug Feith’s Office of Special Plans, is quoted saying that Cheney “planted the seeds and the seeds grew into what he wanted.”

Cheney’s allegations that Saddam Hussein might have played a role in the 9/11 attacks, stunned intelligence analysts and even members of the Administration, reported the *Boston Globe* on Sept. 16. The *Globe* quoted Vincent Cannistraro, former CIA chief of counterterrorism, that Cheney’s “willingness to use speculation and conjecture as facts in public presentations is appalling. It’s astounding.” Regarding Cheney’s resurrecting of the discredited allegation about Mohammad Atta meeting an Iraqi intelligence official in Prague, Cannistraro said: “If you repeat it enough times . . . then people become convinced it’s the truth.” The next day, *Globe* columnist Derrick Z. Jackson noted that, in the 2000 campaign, Cheney was the stealth Vice Presidential candidate, who supposedly brought “gravitas,” “weight,” and “integrity” to the Republican ticket; even described as “grandfatherly.” But, Jackson wrote: “Three years later, the stealth grandfather is the hired gun. His harm to America’s integrity is now incalculable. . . . Cheney’s claim that we have learned more, when we have learned nothing more, is one more lie in the chain of deception that convinced a critical number of Americans to support the invasion and occupation of Iraq—at the loss of nearly 300 American soldiers and thousands of Iraqi soldiers and civilians.” As to Cheney’s claim that he “misspoke” about Saddam having reconstituted nuclear weapons, Jackson concluded: “Cheney’s claim that he misspoke becomes yet another lie. Cheney once wowed the Washington elite with gravitas. With so many soldiers and civilians dead, his gravitas now leads to the grave.”

Congressional Dems Show Some Spine

Cheney’s Big Lie performance so angered some leading Congressional Democrats, that they abandoned their foolish

policy of focusing all their partisan attacks on a President George W. Bush incapable of decision-making or leadership, and finally zeroed in on the Vice President. On Sept. 16, Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) and Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.) both demanded Congressional hearings into Cheney’s ongoing financial ties to Halliburton, the Texas-based energy technology and construction firm that he chaired from 1995-2001, which has been the largest single recipient of no-bid contracts from the Bush Administration for work in postwar Iraq. Cheney receives an annual deferred payment from Halliburton; yet, in his “Meet the Press” interview, he lied outright, claiming that he had severed all ties to his former company and had never had anything to do with Halliburton’s lucrative Pentagon contracts while he was its chairman, or as Vice President.

Both Senators said that Cheney’s statements and the financial disclosures “reinforced the need for hearings”; a Daschle statement added, “The vice president needs to explain . . . the claim that he has ‘no financial relationship with Halliburton of any kind,’ [given] the hundreds of thousands of dollars in deferred payments from Halliburton.”

In a Sept. 12 letter to Joshua Bolten, Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Reps. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and John Dingell (D-Mich.) were even more explicit about the Cheney-Halliburton schemes. They demanded a detailed justification for President Bush’s Sept. 7 request for “an additional \$2.1 billion to rebuild Iraq’s oilfields.” The request was made without consulting with the Army Corps of Engineers, and, as Waxman and Dingell pointed out, “In March 2003, shortly before armed conflict began in Iraq, the Army Corps of Engineers gave Kellogg Brown & Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton, a sole-source contract to rebuild and operate the oilfields of Iraq.” In July, the Corps, in conjunction with Iraqi Oil Ministry officials, came up with a Final Work Plan, which projected a total cost of \$1.1 billion to get the Iraqi oil sector up to a level of 3 million barrels a day; yet the new Bush Administration supplemental request triples the estimated cost to over \$3 billion—the \$2.1 billion supplement, on top of \$948 million already paid out to Halliburton under the March 2003 sole-source contract.

Cheney’s Sept. 14 performance also prompted a number of media to showcase former Ambassador Joseph Wilson—who had been sent to Niger by the CIA in early 2002 to investigate allegations that Iraq was trying to purchase uranium ore known as “yellowcake.” This was triggered by Cheney’s inquiries to the CIA about the Niger yellowcake story. On the evening of Sept. 14, Wilson was interviewed on CNN, and he wrote an op-ed for the *San Jose Mercury-News* in which he accused the Bush Administration of “Alice in Wonderland” fabrications. On Sept. 16, Wilson was interviewed by Amy Goodman on Democracy Now!, an Internet website, and zeroed in on Cheney’s Sunday fib-fest, providing new details about Cheney’s role in the Niger yellowcake scandal.