

‘Plumbers’ Are Under Investigation in Cheney-Gate

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The triumphant neo-conservative claim trumpeted throughout U.S. media on Nov. 14—that links between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda had been “conclusively proven” by a memo from Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith to the Senate Intelligence Committee—rapidly went the way of all previous such cooked claims from Vice President Dick Cheney’s faction in Washington. But more, this claim had, by Nov. 17-18, boomeranged into its opposite: a Defense Department denial of the claim itself; an eruption of official demands to investigate who passed this classified document to the waiting neo-con press; the likely revival of the Intelligence Committee probe which had been shut down on Nov. 7 “to save Cheney’s neck”; and the escalation of “Cheney-gate” itself, by the exposure of what appear to be “plumbers’ ” operations to steal sensitive documents from the Cheney faction’s opponents.

The boomerang was part of what Democratic Presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche called “the start of the hot phase” of his Presidential campaign—focussing on the Jan. 13 Washington, D.C. Democratic primary and other events in the nation’s capital—and of his drive to force Cheney out of office. LaRouche told National Public Radio in St. Louis in a Nov. 18 interview, “Cheney is the guy we’ve got to be rid of, because we can not be going into this policy of nuclear preventive war, which is the policy the United States will be dragged into, if we don’t get him out before the next election.”

On Nov. 17, the Central Intelligence Agency formally requested a Department of Justice (DOJ) probe into the leak to the neo-con press of the classified memo from Feith; it was expected that both the National Security Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency would file similar requests within days. The Feith document, dated Oct. 27, had been passed on to the neo-con *Weekly Standard*, and widely pub-

lished and reported on Nov. 14, with great fanfare from Rupert Murdoch’s Fox TV and *New York Post*. The *Weekly Standard*, too, is a Murdoch-owned propaganda sheet, edited by one of Washington’s leading Leo Strauss cultists, William Kristol.

At the same time that the CIA was demanding a full probe of the leak, the leaders of the Senate Intelligence Committee, chairman Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) and vice-chairman John D. Rockefeller IV (D-W.Va.), were also calling on the DOJ to probe the Feith leak—and to investigate, as well, the theft of a Democratic staff memo from the panel’s highly secure offices. The theft and leaking of that staff memo had been used by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) as the pretext for his Nov. 7 order to shut down the panel’s probe of intelligence abuses by senior Bush Administration policymakers in the run-up to the Iraq war. It had been surfaced by radio host Sean Hannity and promoted by Fox TV as “proof” that the Democrats were playing “partisan politics” with a probe that has increasingly centered on Vice President Cheney, the leading war-hawk in the Bush White House.

Cheney Has Most To Lose

Behind the Frist shutdown of the Senate intelligence panel stood Vice President Cheney, the man who stands to lose the most if the probe goes forward; and the man designated by President George W. Bush as the White House point-man for relations with the Congress. In an unprecedented show of legislative clout, Cheney maintains offices at both the House of Representatives and the Senate, and is a regular participant in the weekly Senate Republican policy caucus sessions.

Congressional sources say that Frist would never have moved to shut down the intelligence panel unless he had been given explicit orders from Cheney.

In a *Washington Post* op-ed on Nov. 18, Senator Rockefeller



Where are all the leaks coming from? Vice President Cheney (right) and Defense Undersecretary Douglas Feith (left), central figures in yet another criminal leak of sensitive material to the press. The pattern of previous leaks continued: Feith's leaked memo, which was highly classified, purported to salvage one of Cheney's pre-Iraq war "intelligence" frauds.

ler sharply rebutted the charges of partisan politics, and accused the Republicans of attempting to shut down a legitimate and vital probe into how the Executive Branch abused the intelligence system, by “pilfering” a confidential staff memo meant for his eyes only. Rockefeller wrote, “There is disconcerting evidence that in this administration, the policymaking is driving the intelligence, rather than the other way around. This has added to a growing doubt among the American people about why we went to war, and it is our job to conduct for them a thorough review of the underlying facts.”

Rockefeller next tackled the issue of the staff memo and the leak: “Faced with Republicans’ continuing refusal to conduct a complete investigation into these matters, my staff recently drafted an options memo on the use or potential misuse of intelligence. The memo, intended only for me, was pilfered from the usually secure Senate Intelligence Committee and distributed to the media. It has become a convenient excuse for Republicans to shut down the committee and curtail the investigation.”

Looks Like Watergate

At the same time, Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), another member of the Senate intelligence panel, was ordering yet another DOJ probe—this time, focussed on the theft of a series of Democratic Party staff memos from the Senate Judiciary Committee. Those documents concerned the confirmation of several Bush judicial nominees, and they surfaced in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* the week of Nov. 17.

In short, “plumbers” are out in force—on behalf of Dick Cheney—to stymie a series of Senate investigations that

would prove, beyond a doubt, that the Vice President deceived President Bush, the Congress, the American people, and the world community, in order to get the neo-cons the Iraq war they, and Cheney, had desired for a decade.

Many other neo-cons, radio talk-jockeys, Congressional war-hawks, and Southern fundies all played their part in drawing the United States into a no-exit war, which has now claimed more than 400 American lives. But the quarterback of the disinformation drive, the illegal covert operations, and, now, a string of White House plumber-style break-ins and thefts, is, without a doubt, Vice President Cheney.

Just as Watergate started with a bungled break-in to the Democratic National Committee headquarters in 1972, it now appears that Cheney-gate has begun with break-ins to two highly-secured Senate offices, and leaks of classified documents and the identity of at least one covert CIA operative.

Washington intelligence community sources continue to insist that the leak of the identity of Valerie Plame, the wife of Ambassador Joe Wilson and a career “non-official cover” CIA officer, came out of Cheney’s office, and was part of an effort to silence Wilson, the intelligence community, and military and diplomatic critics of the Iraq war intelligence hoaxes.

In his *Washington Post* op-ed, Senator Rockefeller made it clear that one priority focus of the panel probe was the “highly unusual role of Defense Department officials in preparing and collecting information outside the normal intelligence channels.” This was a direct reference to the Pentagon’s super-secret Office of Special Plans (OSP) and “Team B” spook units, initially established under Feith after the

attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 (OSP was formally created in August 2002).

“Team B” was a two-man analysis cell, which “cherry-picked” raw data from the entire data base of the CIA, NSA, and DIA, seeking “proof” of Saddam Hussein links to Al-Qaeda, and evidence of Saddam’s secret weapons programs. The first members of “Team B” were David Wurmser—now a top aide to Vice President Cheney—and Michael Maloof, who was later in the OSP, but is now on administrative leave with pay from the Pentagon. Intelligence community sources have reported to this news service that Maloof is being probed for his possible role in the leaking of U.S. Iraq war plans to Israel. Maloof has also been linked to Lebanese “businessman” Emad El Hage, who is being promoted by Washington neo-cons as a future “Ahmed Chalabi of Lebanon”—i.e., an American-Israeli frontman for a future “Iraq treatment” for Syria and Lebanon.

Cheney in the Spotlight

The revived combativity by some leading Senate Democrats, in the face of the Cheney plumbers operations, intersected fresh media exposés of Cheney as “the Prime Minister of the United States,” a term used by Nightline TV host Ted Koppel in the Nov. 13 segment profiling Cheney’s actual control over the Bush Administration.

The Nightline trashing of Cheney came at the end of a solid week of exposés of the Veep—in *Newsweek*, *Time*, and the *New York Times*—revealing a new level of vulnerability that has been driven by the year-long campaign for Cheney’s ouster by Lyndon LaRouche.

Texas sources close to the Bush family have a similar view of Cheney’s growing liability to the Bush re-election. “The policy fiascos all trace to the nexus of Lewis Libby and Doug Feith,” one source commented. White House political advisor “Karl Rove knows this problem very well.”

Libby is Cheney’s chief of staff and top national security aide, who runs a shadow national security council of more than 60 people. Libby is the leading protégé of Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and GOP lawyer-fixer Leonard Garment. As Garment’s law partner, Libby was the attorney for Russian/Israeli Mafiya swindler Marc Rich.

Richard Whalen, a well-known GOP strategist, warned in his Nov. 17 newsletter, *The Big Picture*, that some of President Bush’s most intimate Texas allies are fed up with Cheney and want him out.

Under the headline “Bush’s Re-Election Politics: Cheney’s Texas Opponents,” Whalen described a recent Austin, Texas encounter between “Bush 43” pal, Texas Gov. Rick Perry, and Col. J. Patrick Lang (USA-ret.), one of the most respected military intelligence Mideast specialists and a sharp critic of the neo-con-led Iraq war. Perry heaped praise on Lang.

Whalen wrote, “Now the second-term Governor, a boyish 43 and extremely popular, exemplifies the young, powerful,

and well-connected core of Texas-based allies who are leading Bush’s 2004 re-election drive. Just as important, these are the Bush intimates whose loyal personal support for him carries special weight at the White House when expressed as opposition to the war in Iraq and to Vice President Dick Cheney, the Administration’s most influential war-hawk. As the divided Bush war cabinet struggles to devise a hurry-up exit strategy, abruptly reversing its own earlier deliberate plans, a stark political choice is taking shape in the background: would Bush rather lose the election or the war—and is he taking the chance of losing both?” He concluded, “The Iraq war that is destroying Vice President Cheney’s political acceptability within the GOP, cannot rationally be escalated and made more destructive in order to ‘save’ his candidacy and the prospects for ‘democracy’ in Iraq. Bush’s Texans see the contradiction. Any Vice President, even the formidable Cheney, ultimately has a constituency of only one—or, in his case, perhaps two, Bush I and Bush II.”

Two-Edged Sword

“Bush I,” the elder President George H.W. Bush, had on Nov. 7 demonstratively presented his namesake Public Service Award to Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), only weeks after Kennedy had savaged Cheney’s Iraq war as “a fraud.” The upset with Cheney on the part of some key “Bush 41” people was demonstrated most graphically, by an interview in the German-language edition of the *Financial Times* on Nov. 17 with Brent Scowcroft, the former President Bush’s National Security Advisor and alter ego, and still today the head of “Bush 43’s” President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB). Scowcroft minced no words in criticizing the present Bush Administration’s Iraq strategy, denouncing the “missionary zeal” with which some Administration ideologues promote “democracy in Iraq” as the cure-all for the region. He suggested, alternatively, that democracy would stand a better chance of taking root in Palestine, or even in Iran, which has held free elections, than in Baghdad.

This was a direct slap at Cheney and the neo-conservatives. They have blocked every effort to move the Middle East Road Map forward; they promote a military attack on the Iranian nuclear reactor; and they have been running unauthorized covert operations in league with the likes of the Mujahideen e-Khalq—a group on the State Department’s Foreign Terrorist Organizations list—and Iran-Contra swindler M. Ghorbanifar.

The “second Watergate” character of the Cheney-gate scandals was identified by LaRouche on Nov. 7, hours after Senator Frist’s shocking shut-down of the Intelligence Committee. A number of the “leak” actions involve Federal felony crimes, so the investigations are serious criminal matters. And the scandal is a two-edged sword: If it is not pursued ruthlessly to bring down Cheney, it will bring down Bush instead; just as Watergate bypassed the instigator of the Plumbers Unit, Henry Kissinger, and so destroyed President Richard Nixon.