

Cheney's Iraq Obsession: A National Security Menace

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Dick Cheney's name is now synonymous with the deepening quagmire in Iraq, which one military analyst has just described as "America's Algeria"—a reference to the brutal 1954-62 independence war in the French colony in the Maghreb, which ultimately led French President Charles de Gaulle to withdraw all his forces and grant full independence.

More than the quagmire, Cheney is now also firmly linked to the Bush Administration's abysmal counterterrorism record, prior to the attacks on New York and Washington on Sept. 11, 2001. During much of that period, Cheney was the Administration's pointman on counterterrorism, yet he took no action, even when pressed to act urgently by National Security Council official Richard Clarke and members of a bipartisan blue ribbon commission on America's national security needs and vulnerabilities.

Add these two new indictments to the prior list of Cheney crimes, and it is no wonder that growing numbers of leading Republicans are demanding his removal from the GOP ticket, as a precondition for continued support for the Bush Presidency (see "Cheney: He Can Run, But He Can't Hide," *EIR* April 9, 2004).

Cheney's standing was further damaged by the announcement, early in April, that when President Bush appears before the 9/11 Commission co-chaired by former Gov. Thomas Kean (R-N.J.) and former Congressman Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), he will be accompanied by Cheney.

As a result of this stunt, Dick Cheney's role as the usurper-President of the United States has now penetrated even the Establishment media. On April 2, *Newsweek's* Eleanor Clift wrote of the planned Bush-Cheney appearance:

"This was the week the curtain got pulled back on the Bush Presidency. In exchange for allowing Condoleezza Rice to testify under oath, President Bush gets to bring along his Vice President when he appears privately before the Commis-

sion. A top Republican strategist dubbed the legal document striking the unusual deal the Wizard of Oz letter because it strips away the myth that Bush is in charge. Until now, it's been all speculation about Vice President Cheney's influence. With the revelation of the tandem testimony, nobody with a straight face can deny Cheney is a co-President or worse, the puppeteer who pulls Bush's strings. . . . This is a defining moment in the Bush Presidency because it reveals weakness at the top."

It's far worse than weakness at the top. The week of April 2-9 was also the week the lid blew off Cheney's dirty little war in Iraq, as the situation degenerated into a nationwide insurrection against the American occupation involving both Sunnis and Shi'ites—all happening at the same moment that the world was learning that, if there's one Administration official who bears personal responsibility for sabotaging any effective counterterror or homeland security effort before 9/11, it's Dick Cheney.

The confirmation that Vice President Cheney cast the deciding vote to launch the war against Iraq in March 2003 came from former Bush Administration counterterror czar Richard Clarke, during an appearance on Chris Matthews' "Hardball" show on MSNBC-TV March 31. According to Clarke, President Bush was not 100% convinced that war with Iraq was the right thing to do. Then, Clarke revealed, "The Vice President started getting involved at the Cabinet level. The Vice President started attending the meetings." He tipped the scales, Clarke confirmed. "Look, the Vice President was in meetings that Vice Presidents have never been in before, helping shape the policy before it got to the President."

Matthews asked, "Had he been against the war with Iraq, would we have gone?"

Clarke answered, "I doubt it. He was critical."

Now that war has blown up in the face of the Cheney-Bush



In what one analyst called “the Wizard of Oz letter,” the White House made a deal in which National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice had to face the 9/11 Commission’s heat, so that Bush could “meet with them” privately and with Cheney alongside him. All in all, it highlighted the fact that Bush is not in charge.

Cheney is the one, above all others, who has created “America’s Algeria.”

Administration—exactly as Mideast military and diplomatic experts, such as Gen. Anthony Zinni (ret.) and former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Chas Freeman warned, months before the first GIs touched ground in Iraq. Zinni and Freeman told a Washington conference in September 2002 that an American invasion of Iraq would trigger an asymmetric-warfare response worse than Vietnam. Zinni called it a “Bay of Goats.” Freeman called it “America’s West Bank.”

In a *Los Angeles Times* column April 8, retired Army Col. Andrew J. Bacevich drew the comparison between Iraq and Algeria. He warned that the kind of urban guerrilla warfare that has erupted in Iraq is what defeated the French in Algeria in the 1950s and ’60s. “In their frustration,” Bacevich wrote, “the French opted to fight a ‘dirty war,’ employing systematic torture, extrajudicial killings and their own brand of terror. The effect was dramatic: French forces made impressive gains, temporarily dismantled much of the resistance network, and regained control of Algiers—at the cost of mobilizing the Algerian people against any possibility of continued French rule. The army destroyed the last shreds of French legitimacy in Algeria and thereby laid the foundation for eventual French defeat.” Bacevich concluded, “Indiscipline, lawlessness, and the excessive use of force will not guarantee victory in Iraq; indeed, the reverse is true. The French experience in Algeria stands as a warning: Down that road lies not only defeat but also dishonor.”

French President de Gaulle drew the right conclusion, and pulled France out of Algeria.

Cheney, on the other hand, shows no sign that he is capable of admitting defeat and taking the steps needed to extricate

American forces. To do that would require him to admit that he was speaking like a fool, when he told the American people that the Iraqis would greet GIs as “liberators” and that the costs of the war would be more than covered by the oil revenues of a “democratic, free-market” Iraq. So far, the Iraq war has cost American taxpayers \$250 billion, according to one U.S. official. Six hundred American soldiers are dead, and, at last report, 18,000 wounded. Cheney’s lies kill—lies about Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction, lies about Saddam’s ties to 9/11, which provided the pretext for the invasion.

Now, even Secretary of State Colin Powell is raising his voice against the Cheney bodyguard of lies that drew the United States into the quagmire. In discussion with reporters as he flew back to Washington from Brussels on April 2, Powell for the first time admitted that his United Nations Security Council presentation of Feb. 5, 2003, which spelled out the “best” evidence the U.S. had on Saddam Hussein’s weapons-of-mass-destruction programs, was based on faulty sources. The primary source of the “cooked” intelligence was Ahmed Chalabi’s Iraqi National Congress (INC), which fed a stream of disinformation directly to Cheney. A June 2002 INC letter to the Senate Appropriations Committee confirmed that INC “defector” information went directly to John Hannah, the deputy national security advisor to the Vice President, and to William Luti, the former Cheney aide who heads the Near East South Asia/Office of Special Plans at the Pentagon.

Cheney Spiked War on Terrorism

As mentioned above, Cheney has also now been identified for the first time, as *the* Administration official who flubbed the counterterrorism and homeland security efforts prior to 9/11.

On April 2, former Sen. Gary Hart (D-Colo.) gave an



Richard Clarke told one television interviewer, “The Vice President started coming to Cabinet meetings. He was involved making policy at the Cabinet level.”



After a three-year silence, former Sen. Gary Hart reminded the nation that President Bush had submerged the Hart-Rudman Commission’s recommendation for a Homeland Security Department—by telling Congress, “Leave it to Vice President Cheney.”

interview to *Salon* magazine. With another former Senator, Warren Rudman (R-N.H.), Hart co-chaired the U.S. Commission on National Security, a bipartisan body that conducted the most comprehensive review of U.S. security vulnerabilities since the end of World War II.

One of that Commission’s most dramatic findings was that this country was vulnerable to terrorist attack. The Commission urged immediate creation of a Cabinet-level agency to deal with homeland security and the terrorist threat. The report was delivered to President Bush on Jan. 31, 2001, days after he took office.

Hart told *Salon* that the report was also delivered to every member of Congress, and by April 2001, a bill had been introduced in Congress to create a Homeland Security Department.

Hart explained what happened next: “And then as Congress started to move on this, and the heat was turned up, George Bush—and this is often overlooked—held a press conference or made a public statement on May 5, 2001, calling on Congress *not* to act and saying he was turning over the whole matter to Dick Cheney.

“So this wasn’t just neglect,” Hart continued. “It was an active position by the Administration. He said, ‘I don’t want Congress to do anything until the Vice President advises me.’ We now know from Dick Clarke that Cheney never held a meeting on terrorism, there was never any kind of discussion on the department of homeland security that we had proposed. There was no Vice Presidential action on this matter.

“In other words, a bipartisan commission of seven Democrats and seven Republicans who had spent two and a half

years studying the problem, a group of Americans with a cumulative 300 years in national security affairs, recommended to the President of the United States on a reasonably urgent basis the creation of a Cabinet-level agency to protect our country—and the President did nothing!”

Hart should have qualified his final comment: The Vice President told the President to do nothing.

Rice Adds to Cheney’s Dilemma

National Security Advisor Condi Rice’s appearance April 8 before the 9/11 Commission did little to repair Cheney’s reputation. While Cheney had lied about Richard Clarke being “out of the loop” on counterterror policy, Rice confirmed that Clarke headed up the Bush White House’s pre-9/11 crisis management team on terrorism.

Rice did stubbornly maintain that there were no warnings prior to 9/11 about any “specific” terrorist attacks inside the United States. However, the smug expression was wiped off her face when Commissioner Richard Ben-Veniste disclosed that the title of the Aug. 6, 2001 Presidential Daily Briefing, provided by the CIA, was “Osama bin Laden Determined To Attack Within the United States.” Commission members are pressing the White House to declassify the Aug. 6 memo.

Rice also admitted, in her opening statement to the Commission, that the daily intelligence briefings to President Bush by Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet, were often attended by Cheney.