

## ‘Cheney-Gate’ Escalates as Probe Becomes Official

by Jeffrey Steinberg

With the announcement by Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.V.) that he had obtained a pledge from Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) to open a formal probe of the pre-Iraq-War intelligence process, “Cheney-gate” has moved into an intensive new phase. Based on interviews with a dozen leading U.S. military, intelligence, and Congressional sources, it can be fairly stated that the fate of Vice President Dick Cheney—and the direction of the Bush Presidency—will be determined by how this battle plays out over the weeks ahead. There are signs of fissures in the Cheney and neo-conservative camp inside the Bush Administration, and also of intense pressure by Cheney loyalists on key Republican members of Congress to stymie the Senate probe.

Under the current rules of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, an inquiry can be launched whenever five members of the panel formally request it. And, as Vice Chairman of the panel, Senator Rockefeller can chair meetings in Roberts’ absence.

This situation has the Cheney crew panicked, and during the week of Nov. 3, they launched a number of dirty tricks aimed at subverting the committee’s work. Their efforts have the potential to backfire, and even trigger a “Watergate cover-up”-style scandal that could hasten Cheney’s resignation or impeachment.

### Formal Probe Launched—At Last

In early November, Senator Rockefeller, after months of staff investigation and behind-the-scenes wrangling, announced that he had won agreement from Chairman Roberts to launch a formal investigation of several facets of the pre-Iraq-War intelligence process. Since that agreement was struck, letters have gone out to the Pentagon, State Department, CIA, and White House, requesting specific documents and interviews with key personnel. Some of the letters were co-signed by Roberts and Rockefeller, and others went out

under Rockefeller’s signature alone. As of Oct. 31, the State Department and CIA had largely complied with a deadline for initial document submissions to the panel, but both the White House and the Pentagon were stalling.

On “Meet the Press” on Nov. 2, Senator Roberts told co-guest Rockefeller and host Tim Russert that he had received promises from the White House and the Pentagon on Oct. 31, that they would comply with the voluntary document requests. Rockefeller responded skeptically to the Roberts announcement.

An Oct. 31 Knight-Ridder wire service charged that top officials in Cheney’s office were putting tremendous pressure on Roberts to block any probe of White House abuse of the intelligence process, and focus all blame for the Iraq failures, instead, on the CIA. With Roberts being pulled in two directions, Rockefeller produced the five committee votes required to launch a further inquiry, and Roberts, at that point, signed on. The areas now known to be under investigation by the Senate panel include:

- The role of the Office of Special Plans (OSP), the Pentagon unit under Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith that was tasked with Iraq war planning and pre-war intelligence assessments. The OSP was headed by William J. Luti, who came to the Pentagon from the Office of Vice President Dick Cheney in mid-2001, where he was a Special Advisor for National Security Affairs and Mideast Policy.

The chief intelligence analyst in the unit, Abram Shulsky, assembled a team of full-time and “personal service contract” employees, drawn from the neo-conservative scene in Washington. There are widespread allegations that the OSP conducted “out of channel” intelligence gathering, drawing upon Ahmed Chalabi’s Iraqi National Congress, a group widely discredited in the eyes of the CIA, the State Department, and even the Defense Intelligence Agency; and on intelligence

flows from a parallel rogue intelligence unit created in the Office of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, at Feith's initiative.

One key question posed by Senator Rockefeller and others on the intelligence panel is whether the raw intelligence generated by the OSP went through normal intelligence community vetting, before being passed along to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Cheney. According to Lt. Col. Karen Kwiatkowski (USAF, ret.), who served in the Near East and South Asia policy shop at the Pentagon that housed OSP, at staff meetings Luti had boasted that the unit was being tasked by Lewis Libby, Cheney's national security advisor and chief of staff.

According to one senior U.S. intelligence source, OSP, as well as an earlier secret intelligence unit, was established at the Pentagon so that it would function in a low profile, at arm's length from Cheney's office. The aim was to avoid a repeat of the disastrous "Iran-Contra" scandals that rocked the Reagan Administration in the 1980s, when the National Security Council was caught running unauthorized covert operations.

- The role of John Bolton, the State Department's chief arms control officer, in hyping reports of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction programs in the run-up to the war. Although an October 2002 hastily prepared National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program included an extensive dissent, from the State Department's Intelligence and Research (INR) unit, expressing serious doubts about the existence of any Iraqi current nuclear weapons program, a Dec. 19, 2002 State Department fact sheet explicitly charged that Iraq was covering up its quest for large volumes of "yellowcake" uranium from Niger. This, despite the fact that the "yellowcake" allegations had been investigated by former Ambassador Joe Wilson and two others. State Department sources have told *EIR* that Bolton and his deputy at the time, David Wurmser, were responsible for that insertion in the official State Department document.

Rockefeller has stated that he wants the committee to get to the bottom of the now infamous "16 words" inserted into President Bush's January 2003 State of the Union address, alluding to British evidence of Iraq's quest for African uranium—when the same false allegations had been purged from Bush's October 2002 Cincinnati speech, at the insistence of CIA Director George Tenet.

- The role of at least one National Security Council official in the same State of the Union lie: Dr. Robert Joseph, the proliferation desk officer at the NSC and a longtime protégé of neo-conservative Richard Perle, a member of the Defense Policy Board who was a key player in the "yellowcake" caper. Sources familiar with the current functioning of the NSC say that Joseph takes his orders from Lewis Libby in Cheney's office—not National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice. Joseph got his job at the NSC at the insistence of Perle.

- The Valerie Plame leak. FBI investigators, according to intelligence community sources, have expanded their in-

vestigation into the source of the leak of the identity of the wife of Ambassador Wilson, a CIA "non-official cover" officer. The sources say that the Bureau is now looking back as early as March 2003, and is also interested in the possible role of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), a member of the Defense Policy Board. Gingrich, along with Cheney and Libby, made several unprecedented visits to CIA headquarters in the run-up to the Iraq War, to pressure analysts to come up with "proof" that Saddam was amassing weapons of mass destruction and colluding with al-Qaeda.

## Friends of Cheney Strike Back

As momentum was building for a serious probe of the "Cheney-gate" intelligence fakery, a dirty tricks campaign was launched, aimed at shutting down the Senate investigation. On Nov. 4, syndicated right-wing radio show host Sean Hannity surfaced a memorandum, purportedly written by a Democratic staffer on the Senate intelligence panel, spelling out a "partisan strategy" for using the Iraq intelligence probe in the context of the 2004 Congressional and Presidential elections.

Immediately, GOP Senate hard-liners, led by Rick Santorum (Pa.) and John Kyl (Ariz.), and including panel chairman Roberts, launched into attacks on Rockefeller, accusing all the Democrats on the intelligence panel of "politicizing" the committee's work. Rupert Murdoch's *New York Post* editorialized for Rockefeller's removal from the panel, and the Moonie *Washington Times* editorialized for the rewriting of the panel rules, to give absolute partisan control to the chairman.

Rockefeller downplayed the significance of the memo, which was only in draft form, telling CNN, "It clearly reflects staff frustration that the Senate Intelligence Committee's investigation has not tackled all of the tough issues." However, Rockefeller, and other Democrats are raising the roof over how the document got into the hands of Hannity. The offices of the Senate intelligence panel are under 24-hour security, suggesting that Republicans on staff may have stolen the document, or cyber-swiped it from staff computers.

There is good reason for panic at the Vice President's office and in other neo-con crevices in Washington. A serious probe by the Senate into any of the above-listed areas will produce evidence of serious corruption by policymakers—starting with Cheney and Libby.

The Valerie Plame leak remains a particular matter of concern for Cheney and Libby, given that the leaker and his or her accomplices face felony prosecutions and possible long prison terms. Some intelligence community officials are urging that the Senate Intelligence Committee launch its own damage assessment of the leak. As Ambassador Wilson told an audience at the Miller Center at the University of Virginia on Oct. 31, high-ranking officials of the Bush Administration, for ideological reasons, "outed" a CIA spy and gravely harmed U.S. national security. And they are still in place, and will do it again, if they are not caught.