

'Plamegate' Can Bring Down Cheney

by Michele and Jeffrey Steinberg

On July 22, in a special hearing called by a joint panel of Senate and House Democrats, on the criminal investigation of the White House role in the Valerie Plame case, a packed hearing room of press, Congressional staffers, and other government officials, heard testimony from leading retired intelligence professionals. The hearing, titled, "National Security Consequences of Disclosing the Identity of a Covert Intelligence Agent," was chaired by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.).

And while the hearing was taking place, another bombshell was dropped on the White House: *Bloomberg* news service and the *New York Times* reported that Special Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald, who has been investigating the White House leaking of Plame's identity as a covert CIA agent since December 2003, is looking into "perjury" and "obstruction of justice" charges, because of statements coming from the principal figures identified as the leakers: Karl Rove and I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, which have been contradicted by other witnesses in the investigation.

In 2004, the former counsel to President Richard Nixon, John W. Dean, wrote a book called *Worse Than Watergate*, about the lies and the liars involved in the faked intelligence used to start the Iraq War. Events in Washington over the last week, confirm that Dean is right.

Bush, Cheney To Blame

The opening statement by Representative Waxman, to the Joint Panel on July 22, gave a chilling picture of how the case of the leaks that jeopardized CIA agent Valerie Plame Wilson's safety, is the *same* as the issue of how the Administration used false information that tricked Congress into voting in favor of the war against Saddam Hussein. Waxman should know—he was one of the leading Democrats who

voted in the power for President Bush to launch that war. Only *after* the war, did the truth come out: There was no evidence of a nuclear "mushroom cloud" about to come from Baghdad.

"[T]o this day, the White House has not cited a shred of credible evidence of a uranium deal between Iraq and Niger," Waxman stated, referring to the claim that Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney both cited as their "evidence" of a nuclear threat from Iraq.

"Instead, it appears that the President's advisors launched a smear campaign. . . . We only have partial information about what happened in the hours and days that followed [the publication of an op-ed by former Ambassador Joe Wilson, who disclosed that he had investigated, and found to be false, in February 2002, a report that Iraq sought to buy uranium from Niger] . . . but we do know that a classified State Department memorandum identifying Valerie [Plame] Wilson was circulated aboard Air Force One; that Karl Rove, the President's closest advisor, talked about Ms. Wilson's identity with columnist Robert Novak and *Time* reporter Matthew Cooper; and that Scooter Libby, the Vice President's chief of staff, also spoke with at least one journalist about Ms. Wilson." Waxman said that *eleven* such leaks have been reported by the White House (see *Documentation*).

Expert Testimony Causes Breakthrough

After two hours of hearings, it was clear that the expert testimony had a profound impact on the members of the panel, who had not quite understood, yet, how much damage the White House did in leaking Plame's identity.

Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) told the witnesses that "the consequences of what has occurred are far more serious than I first imagined." Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-N.Y.) echoed Conyers, saying that, until the testimony, "I did not realize

the profound impact on the entire intelligence agency . . . that's been built up over decades." In response to Slaughter's question as to whether or not any of the witnesses, in their professional experience, had ever heard of the White House leaking the identity of a covert agent before, former CIA analyst Larry C. Johnson said: "It's never happened. I mean, this is unprecedented."

In his testimony, Johnson revealed that he was in the same 1985 CIA training class as Valerie Plame Wilson, and that because of the potential danger, the identities of the classmates are so secret, that until July 2003, when columnist Robert Novak revealed Plame's name, Johnson had known her only as "Valerie P."

The witnesses were an impressive array of senior retired intelligence officials, who have served in a broad array of roles in the intelligence community: James Marcinkowski, a former case officer for the CIA; Col. W. Patrick Lang (U.S. Army, ret.), former director, Defense Humint Services for the Defense Intelligence Agency; and David MacMichael, former senior estimates officer, National Intelligence Council for the CIA.

The witnesses, along with seven other former intelligence officials, were signators of a July 20 letter to the leaders of the Senate and House of Representatives, warning Congress that the exposure of Plame is a danger to national security, and to every U.S. intelligence officer and asset serving under a cover. Their letter blasts the Republican Party "talking points" claim that Plame's assignment at CIA headquarters to a "desk job" means that she was not in a sensitive, undercover job, and was a serious blow to the White House attempts at damage control.

The July 20 letter says the "talking points" assertion shows that those who maintain this—including Republican Majority Whip Roy Blunt (Mo.)—know nothing about human intelligence gathering, nor what a covert agent is. They wrote: "We believe it is appropriate for the President to move proactively to dismiss from office or administratively punish any official who participated in any way in revealing Valerie Plame's status. . . . [This] would send an unambiguous message that leaks of this nature will not be tolerated and would be consistent with his duties as Commander-in-Chief."

Other signators of the letter are Brent Cavan, former analyst, CIA; Vince Cannistraro, former case officer, CIA; Michael Grimaldi, former analyst, CIA; Mel Goodman, former senior analyst, CIA; Ray McGovern, former senior analyst, and White House briefer, CIA; Jim Smith, former case officer, CIA; and William C. Wagner, former case officer, CIA.

The White House damage control effort was further blown apart on July 21, when the *Washington Post*, in a front-page story, revealed that a State Department memo, now at the center of independent counsel Fitzgerald's probe, clearly identified Plame-Wilson's status as "secret," a designation that indicates undercover work. The memo was written June 10, 2003 by Carl Ford, Jr., head of the State Department

Bureau of Intelligence and Research, and resubmitted to Secretary of State Colin Powell in early July 2003, when Ambassador Joseph Wilson's op-ed appeared in the *New York Times*, detailing his trip to Niger on behalf of the CIA.

At the time the memo was sent to Powell, he was travelling to Africa with President Bush on Air Force One.

White House Iraq Group

As these developments were announced, *EIR*'s main office was receiving e-mails and calls all day from well-placed former government officials, investigative journalists, and political figures in response to the *EIR* article (July 22), "White House Iraq 'Plumbers Unit' Behind Plame Leak." (The main response was that Lyndon LaRouche was right on target with his identification of Dick Cheney and his chief of staff, Lewis Libby, as pivotal players, with Karl Rove, in the scandal.)

That *EIR* story identified the White House Iraq Group (WHIG), a senior-level task force created in August 2002 to promote the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, as the center of Administration propaganda and disinformation efforts. WHIG's efforts centered on the false claim that Saddam Hussein was on the verge of obtaining nuclear weapons, and Rove and Libby were the drivers of WHIG.

The origins of the "Get Joe Wilson and Valerie Plame" efforts have been traced to a March 2003 meeting in the Office of the Vice President, attended by Libby and John Hannah, the deputy national security advisor to the Vice President, among others. The meeting was provoked by an appearance by Joe Wilson on CNN, the day after International Atomic Energy Agency head Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei appeared at the UN Security Council, and revealed that the Niger government documents, purporting to show that Saddam was seeking to buy large quantities of yellowcake uranium, were shoddy forgeries.

It was Cheney himself who was at the center of the campaign to smear Dr. ElBaradei for debunking the Niger uranium story. In a March 16, 2003 interview on "Meet the Press," Cheney put the full force of the Administration behind the attack on ElBaradei, and three days after Cheney "gave the word" that no amount of evidence from UN weapons inspectors could stop his pre-emptive war, the war began.

Bolton Caught in Tightening Net

Sources have also suggested that former State Department arms control negotiator and leading Cheney asset John Bolton may be caught up in the net being cast by special prosecutor Fitzgerald. Bolton has long been identified as a Cheney "plant" at the State Department, who kept tabs on former Secretary of State Powell and his deputy, Richard Armitage, on behalf of the Vice President.

Now, reportedly, Fitzgerald is investigating whether Bolton and his chief of staff, CIA officer Fred Fleitz, were responsible for fingering Plame as a CIA officer who purport-

edly promoted her husband's fact-finding trip to Niger. Fleitz was specifically requested by Bolton as his liaison officer to the CIA, when Bolton first came into the State Department in 2001. Fleitz, according to several sources, was familiar with Plame's work on weapons of mass destruction at the Agency, dating back to the late 1990s.

LaRouche on Cheney

LaRouche has pointed to the perverse character of Vice President Cheney, noting that Cheney cannot resist maintaining a detailed picture of the seedy operations run against Wilson and his wife out of the White House. "It is in his nature to revel in the grimy details," he said. This, LaRouche suggests, is going to bring down the Administration—Cheney first.