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In testimony to the Senate Democratic Policy Committee hearing on the distortion of intelligence prior to the Iraq War, Col. Lawrence Wilkerson (ret.) said, "The Vice President was using portions of the intelligence documents in ways that the documents themselves did not seem to support."

Wilkerson Testimony

Cheney Insisted: Iraq Has WMD

Here are excerpts of the testimony of Col. Lawrence Wilkerson (ret.) to the Senate Democratic Policy Committee on June 26:

But toward the end of 2002, as we moved inexorably toward a second war with Iraq, this glue had begun to produce less of a bond. In fact, at the State Department we began to realize that America might be in this particular war alone, or virtually alone, were it to occur. On Nov. 8, the 15-0 vote in the UN Security Council for Resolution 1441 was a heady moment of international accord, but that accord was to dissipate swiftly just a few months later.

It was at this time that I personally became very interested in the intelligence picture we were being given by DCI [Director of Central Intelligence] Tenet and the documents his groups were producing (i.e., his DCI assets and his CIA assets), as well as the use of that intelligence by Administration personnel. I was made doubly aware of what sort of effects these efforts were having by the fact that even as Secretary Powell was trying to create a diplomatic pathway forward, Vice President Cheney was undermining him by giving speeches—such as the one at the 103rd National Convention

of the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars]—that virtually denied the possibilities for such a pathway. In doing so, the Vice President was using portions of the intelligence documents in ways that the documents themselves did not seem to support, or at least not strongly. Others in the Administration were participating in this distortion. The most startling example was the President's State of the Union Address on Jan. 28, 2003, which included the now-infamous statement about uranium and Niger. The Secretary of State and I, and a host of others in the Administration, knew that Iraq's alleged attempt to acquire uranium from Niger, as that attempt was then reported, was highly improbable. Moreover, when statements such as "we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud" were made, for example by the National Security Advisor, Dr. Rice, we grew concerned at the State Department because our own intelligence people told us they doubted Iraq's nuclear program was even active.

I became concerned enough that I had a group of scientists visit me in my office at State, scientists who were former members of UNSCOM inspection teams or otherwise very experienced in the history and specifics of Iraq's weapons programs. They told me that it was their belief Saddam Hussein was waiting for the international focus on his regime to relax, for sanctions to be lifted, and for key countries to resume normal trade relations with Iraq. At that time, Saddam intended to resume his pursuit of weapons of mass destruc-

tion, including a nuclear capability, but that at present he had virtually nothing in the way of WMD except perhaps outsourced research programs in the Sudan and in Syria, such programs chiefly aimed at keeping warm his chemical and biological weapons research capability. This group of scientists marshalled arguments that were quite convincing. I began to have serious doubts about what we would find were we to invade Iraq and search for weapons of mass destruction.

Then, on Jan. 29, 2003, the Secretary of State came through the door that adjoined our two offices and handed me a 48-page script describing Iraq's WMD programs. He had received the script from the Vice President's office earlier that day. As he handed the script to me, he instructed me to form a task force and be prepared to relocate to CIA headquarters at Langley the next day. He wanted me to prepare him to present the case against Iraq at the UNSC just seven days later. He informed me that the next day I would be receiving two similar scripts in addition to the one on WMD, a script on Iraq's involvement in terrorist activities and another on Iraq's human rights violations.

The Presentation at the UNSC

I immediately went to work drafting a work schedule, and determining the composition of my task force. I was aided in this effort by the NSC staff who provided me Will Toby from Bob Joseph's non-proliferation office and John Hannah from the Vice President's office. The remainder of my task force I selected from State Department assets, and the next day the entire task force relocated to Langley where DCI Tenet and DDCI [Deputy DCI] McLaughlin put themselves and their people and facilities at our disposal. The task force located in the National Intelligence Council's spaces, and used DCI Tenet's Conference Room for rehearsals and discussions. DDCI McLaughlin stayed with us almost on a round-the-clock basis, as did several NIO's and CIA analysts. Through the DCI, we also had access to the DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency], the NSA [National Security Agency], the NRO [National Reconnaissance Office], the NGA [National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency], and all other elements of the intelligence community, including State Department's INR [Intelligence and Research] (Here our contact was direct, without going through the DCI).

The task force got directly to work. The first thing we did was begin to move through the 48-page script on WMD, attempting to verify what we were reading, by going to the sources Hannah gave us as we read through the paragraphs. After a few hours of growing frustration, we realized that the 48-page document provided by the Vice President's office was not going to work. It was not sourced like a normal intelligence community document, and therefore every line had to be run down and checked against the source citations provided by Hannah. These ranged from newspaper articles to intelligence reports. Checking each source, line by line, was simply impossible in the short time we had to prepare the presenta-

tion. I turned to DCI Tenet in some frustration, and said that what we were attempting was simply not going to work. Without hesitation, DCI Tenet agreed and said we should use the October 2002 NIE [National Intelligence Estimate] on Iraq's WMD. I agreed and we began work again, after losing more than a precious half-day, this time using the NIE.

As we worked on the WMD portion of the Secretary's presentation over the next two days, we received a 25-page document on Iraq's ties to terrorism, as well as a shorter document on Iraq's human rights violations. We would eventually work to incorporate these documents in the presentation, leaving the latter almost intact as received and cutting the former to slightly over seven pages. What we eliminated from the document on Iraq's ties to terrorism was almost a genealogy of terrorism that made little sense and provided no substantive evidence of Iraqi terrorist contacts, other than Saddam Hussein's payments to the families of deceased Palestinian terrorists. The heart of what we kept in that portion of the presentation was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's presence in Iraq and what that purported, and the alleged contacts between Iraq and al-Qaeda with regard to chemical and biological weapons training (this latter having been gleaned from the interrogation of captured terrorist Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi).

Over the next few days, principally at Langley and for two days and nights in New York, we built the UNSC presentation, and Secretary Powell rehearsed its delivery. These rehearsals were initially in the DCI Conference Room at Langley. Always present were the Secretary, the DCI, the DDCI, key intelligence analysts hand-picked by the DCI and DDCI, myself and members of my task force, and, on several occasions, deputy national security advisor Steve Hadley, national security advisor Dr. Rice, OVP [Office of Vice President] chief of staff I. Lewis Libby, and others from the White House, as well as deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. In New York, we conducted two major rehearsals at the USUN Mission, the last one a full dress rehearsal. At these two, the DCI and the DDCI were present, along with the Secretary and myself, and a few others.

In the rehearsal and discussion sessions at Langley, the give-and-take was mostly the Secretary of State trying to eliminate unsubstantiated and/or unhelpful material, and others from the White House trying to keep that material in, or add more. One such incident occurred several times, and the final time it occurred provided an example of the Secretary's growing frustration. Repeatedly, the OVP or NCS [National Clandestine Service] staff personnel tried to insert into the presentation the alleged meeting in Prague between al-Qaeda operative and 9/11 hijacker Mohamed Atta and Iraqi intelligence personnel. Repeatedly, Secretary Powell eliminated it, based on the DCI's refusal to corroborate it. Finally, at one of the last Langley rehearsals, Secretary Powell was stopped in mid-presentation by deputy national security advisor Steve Hadley and asked what had happened to the paragraph describing the meeting in Prague. Secretary Powell fixed Hadley

with a firm stare and said with some pique, “We took it out, Steve—and it’s staying out.”

But the most dramatic moment for me during this intense preparation period—and there were quite a few dramatic moments—came during the dress rehearsal in New York. The Secretary had just finished running rapidly through what was a full hour-plus presentation, and he turned to DCI Tenet and asked him if he stood by everything the Secretary had just said. The DCI responded in the affirmative and remarked that, if anything in the presentation were inaccurate, he would have to take it before his own oversight committees in the Congress—and that would be a daunting task. The Secretary commented that Mr. Tenet would indeed have to stand by his words because he would be “in camera” with the Secretary in the morning at the UNSC.

My own reaction after seeing the full, formal presentation at the UNSC the next morning was that the presentation was not very convincing. It was the man who was giving it—Colin Powell—that gave it its credibility. So much of what was presented could have been interpreted in different ways. In short, it was a compilation of circumstantial evidence, and not a very convincing compilation at that. My feeling at that moment was that I had failed the Secretary because I had not put together a very powerful presentation.

Moreover, as time passed and I departed the State Department in January 2005, I discovered two very disturbing developments. First, I began hearing from reputable sources that the DIA had dissented on the results of Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi’s interrogation, the first dissent occurring around the time of the interrogation (which occurred outside the U.S. and under conditions of torture or near-torture), and the second dissent occurring about the time of the UNSC presentation, in early February 2003. This was disturbing because no such dissent was ever made known to me during the preparations for the February 5, 2003, UNSC presentation, nor to the best of my knowledge to Secretary Powell. Al-Libi’s forced testimony was of course crucial to the Secretary’s assertions in the presentation that al-Qaeda had substantive links with Baghdad.

The second development was even more disturbing and involved Iraq’s alleged mobile biological laboratories. Word reached me that the multiple, independent sources we had been given for the existence of these labs were in fact only one source, that that one source was an informant called “Curveball,” and that there were very serious doubts as to this source’s reliability; furthermore, that these doubts had been made known to DCI Tenet and to DDCI McLaughlin prior to Secretary Powell’s presentation at the UNSC. It is now public knowledge that the chief of the CIA’s European Division, Tyler Drumheller, has expressed as much. Since I never heard the name “Curveball” during the preparations for the Secretary’s UNSC presentation, let alone the doubt as to his reliability, I was quite disturbed by these revelations. Secretary Powell was not told of Curveball, nor the unreliability of any sources, during our preparations either.