

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President
FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity
SUBJECT: Intelligence Unglued

July 14, 2003

The glue that holds the Intelligence Community together is melting under the hot lights of an awakened press. If you do not act quickly, your intelligence capability will fall apart—with grave consequences for the nation.

The Forgery Flap

By now you are all too familiar with the play-by-play. The Iraq-seeking-uranium-in-Niger forgery is a microcosm of a mischievous nexus of overarching problems. Instead of addressing these problems, your senior staff are alternately covering up for one another and gently stabbing one another in the back. CIA Director George Tenet's extracted, unapologetic apology on July 11 was classic—I confess; she did it.

It is now dawning on our until-now somnolent press that your national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, shepherds the foreign affairs sections of your state-of-the-union address and that she, not Tenet, is responsible for the forged information getting into the speech. But the disingenuousness persists. Surely Dr. Rice cannot persist in her insistence that she learned only on June 8, 2003 about former ambassador Joseph Wilson's mission to Niger in February 2002, when he determined that the Iraq-Niger report was a con-job. Wilson's findings were duly reported to all concerned in early March 2002. And, if she somehow missed that report, the *New York Times'* Nicholas Kristoff on May 6 recounted chapter and verse on Wilson's mission, and the story remained the talk of the town in the weeks that followed.

Rice's denials are reminiscent of her claim in spring 2002 that there was no reporting suggesting that terrorists were planning to hijack planes and slam them into buildings. In September, the joint congressional committee on 9/11 came up with a dozen such reports.

Secretary of State Colin Powell's credibility, too, has taken serious hits as continued non-discoveries of weapons in Iraq heap doubt on his confident assertions to the UN. Although he was undoubtedly trying to be helpful in trying to contain the Iraq-Niger forgery affair, his recent description of your state-of-the-union words as "not totally outrageous" was faint praise indeed. And his explanations as to why he made a point to avoid using the forgery in the way you did was equally unhelpful.

Whatever Rice's or Powell's credibility, it is yours that matters. And, in our view, the credibility of the intelligence community is an inseparably close second. Attempts to dismiss or cover up the cynical use to which the known forgery was put have been—well, incredible. The British have a word for it: "dodgy." You need to put a quick end to the dodginess, if the country is to have a functioning intelligence community.

The Vice President's Role

Attempts at cover up could easily be seen as comical, were the issue not so serious. Highly revealing were Ari Fleisher's remarks early last week, which set the tone for what followed. When asked about the forgery, he noted tellingly—as if drawing on well memorized talking points—that the Vice President was not guilty of anything. The disingenuousness was capped on Friday, when George Tenet did his awkward best to absolve the Vice President from responsibility.

To those of us who experienced Watergate these comments had an eerie ring. That affair and others since have proven that cover-up can assume proportions overshadowing the crime itself. All the more reason to take early action to get the truth up and out.

There is just too much evidence that Ambassador Wilson was sent to Niger at the behest of Vice President Cheney's office, and that Wilson's findings were duly reported not only to that office but to others as well.

Equally important, it was Cheney who launched (in a major speech on August 26, 2002) the concerted campaign to persuade Congress and the American people that Saddam Hussein was about to get his hands on nuclear weapons—a campaign that mushroomed, literally, in early October with you and your senior advisers raising the specter of a “mushroom cloud” being the first “smoking gun” we might observe.

That this campaign was based largely on information known to be forged and that the campaign was used successfully to frighten our elected representatives in Congress into voting for war is clear from the bitter protestations of Rep. Henry Waxman and others. The politically aware recognize that the same information was used, also successfully, in the campaign leading up to the mid-term elections—a reality that breeds a cynicism highly corrosive to our political process.

The fact that the forgery also crept into your state-of-the-union address pales in significance in comparison with how it was used to deceive Congress into voting on October 11 to authorize you to make war on Iraq.

It was a deep insult to the integrity of the intelligence process that, after the Vice President declared on August 26, 2002 that “we know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons,” the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) produced during the critical month of September featured a fraudulent conclusion that “most analysts” agreed with Cheney's assertion. This may help explain the anomaly of Cheney's unprecedented “multiple visits” to CIA headquarters at the time, as well as the many reports that CIA and other intelligence analysts were feeling extraordinarily great pressure, accompanied by all manner of intimidation tactics, to concur in that conclusion. As a coda to his nuclear argument, Cheney told NBC's Meet the Press three days before US/UK forces invaded Iraq: “we believe he (Saddam Hussein) has reconstituted nuclear weapons.”

Mr. Russert: ...the International Atomic Energy Agency said he does not have a nuclear program; we disagree?

Vice President Cheney: I disagree, yes. And you'll find the CIA, for example, and other key parts of the intelligence community disagree...we know he has been absolutely devoted to trying to acquire nuclear weapons. And we believe he has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons. I think Mr. ElBaradei (Director of the IAEA) frankly is wrong.

Contrary to what Cheney and the NIE said, the most knowledgeable analysts—those who know Iraq and nuclear weapons—judged that the evidence did not support that conclusion. They now have been proven right.

Adding insult to injury, those chairing the NIE succumbed to the pressure to adduce the known forgery as evidence to support the Cheney line, and relegated the strong dissent of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (and the nuclear engineers in the Department of Energy) to an inconspicuous footnote.

It is a curious turn of events. The drafters of the offending sentence on the forgery in president's state-of-the-union speech say they were working from the NIE. In ordinary circumstances an NIE would be the preeminently authoritative source to rely upon; but in this case the NIE itself had already been cooked to the recipe of high policy.

Joseph Wilson, the former US ambassador who visited Niger at Cheney's request, enjoys wide respect (including, like several VIPS members, warm encomia from your father). He is the consummate diplomat. So deeply disturbed is he, however, at the chicanery he has witnessed that he allowed himself a very undiplomatic comment to a reporter last week, wondering aloud “what else they are lying about.” Clearly, Wilson has concluded that the time for diplomatic language has passed. It is clear that lies were told. Sad to say, it is equally clear that your vice president led this campaign of deceit.

This was no case of petty corruption of the kind that forced Vice President Spiro Agnew's resignation. This was a matter of war and peace. Thousands have died. There is no end in sight.

Recommendation #1

We recommend that you call an abrupt halt to attempts to prove Vice President Cheney “not guilty.” His role has been so transparent that such attempts will only erode further your own credibility. Equally pernicious, from our perspective, is the likelihood that intelligence analysts will conclude that the way to success is to acquiesce in the cooking of their judgments, since those above them will not be held accountable. We strongly recommend that you ask for Cheney’s immediate resignation.

The Games Congress Plays

The unedifying dance by the various oversight committees of the Congress over recent weeks offers proof, if further proof were needed, that reliance on Congress to investigate in a non-partisan way is pie in the sky. One need only to recall that Sen. Pat Roberts, Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, has refused to agree to ask the FBI to investigate the known forgery. Despite repeated attempts by others on his committee to get him to bring in the FBI, Roberts has branded such a move “inappropriate,” without spelling out why.

Rep. Porter Goss, head of the House Intelligence Committee, is a CIA alumnus and a passionate Republican and agency partisan. Goss was largely responsible for the failure of the joint congressional committee on 9/11, which he co-chaired last year. An unusually clear indication of where Goss’ loyalties lie can be seen in his admission that after a leak to the press last spring he bowed to Cheney’s insistence that the FBI be sent to the Hill to investigate members and staff of the joint committee—an unprecedented move reflecting blithe disregard for the separation of powers and a blatant attempt at intimidation. (Congress has its own capability to investigate such leaks.)

Henry Waxman’s recent proposal to create yet another congressional investigatory committee, patterned on the latest commission looking into 9/11, likewise holds little promise. To state the obvious about Congress, politics is the nature of the beast. We have seen enough congressional inquiries into the performance of intelligence to conclude that they are usually as feckless as they are prolonged. And time cannot wait.

As you are aware, Gen. Brent Scowcroft performed yeoman’s service as National Security Adviser to your father and enjoys very wide respect. There are few, if any, with his breadth of experience with the issues and the institutions involved. In addition, he has avoided blind parroting of the positions of your administration and thus would be seen as relatively nonpartisan, even though serving at your pleasure. It seems a stroke of good luck that he now chairs your President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.

Recommendation #2

We repeat, with an additional sense of urgency, the recommendation in our last memorandum to you (May 1) that you appoint Gen. Brent Scowcroft, Chair of the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board to head up an independent investigation into the use/abuse of intelligence on Iraq.

UN Inspectors

Your refusal to allow UN inspectors back into Iraq has left the international community befuddled. Worse, it has fed suspicions that the US does not want UN inspectors in country lest they impede efforts to “plant” some “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq, should efforts to find them continue to fall short. The conventional wisdom is less conspiratorial but equally unsatisfying. The cognoscenti in Washington think tanks, for example, attribute your attitude to “pique.”

We find neither the conspiracy nor the “pique” rationale persuasive. As we have admitted before, we are at a loss to explain the barring of UN inspectors. Barring the very people with the international mandate, the unique experience, and the credibility to undertake a serious search for such weapons defies logic. UN inspectors know Iraq, know the weaponry in question, know the Iraqi scientists/engineers who have been involved, know how the necessary materials are procured and processed; in short, have precisely the expertise required. The challenge is as daunting as it is immediate; and, clearly, the US needs all the help it can get.

The lead *Wall Street Journal* article of April 8 had it right: “If the US doesn’t make any undisputed discoveries of for-

bidden weapons, the failure will feed already-widespread skepticism abroad about the motives for going to war.” As the events of last week show, that skepticism has now mushroomed here at home as well.

Recommendation #3

We recommend that you immediately invite the UN inspectors back into Iraq. This would go a long way toward refurbishing your credibility. Equally important, it would help sort out the lessons learned for the intelligence community and be an invaluable help to an investigation of the kind we have suggested you direct Gen. Scowcroft to lead.

If Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity can be of any further help to you in the days ahead, you need only ask.

/s/

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