

LaRouche Demands Iraq Answers From Vice President Cheney

by Jeffrey Steinberg

A political firestorm is building in Washington, over the mounting evidence that some officials of the Bush Administration and the intelligence community may have lied about Iraq's purported nuclear weapons program, to secure Congressional, public, and United Nations support for the war on Iraq. One focal point of the controversy is the use of forged documents by Administration officials, in promoting the idea that Iraq was on the verge of possessing nuclear weapons.

As late as March 16, Vice President Dick Cheney appeared on national television to make the incredible claim that Iraq already possessed a nuclear weapons capability. Such arguments, based on alleged "hard" secret intelligence, played a major role in compelling skeptical members of Congress to back President Bush's war on Iraq, several Congressmen have stated.

In this context, on June 7, Debra Hanania-Freeman, spokesman for Democratic Party Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., issued a statement, quoting LaRouche, demanding specific answers from Vice President Cheney: "Let there be no mistake about it," LaRouche said. "The nature of these charges constitute hard grounds for impeachment. . . . I want to know exactly what Dick Cheney knew and when he knew it. The charges are grave and specific and leave no wiggle room. Determining who knew what and when is, at this time, an urgent matter of national security." The LaRouche campaign statement (see below) is now circulating nationally as a 1 million-run LaRouche in 2004 leaflet. Officials of the Bush Administration, starting with the Vice President, are going to have to disclose what they knew, and when.

The Niger Forgeries

As reported in *EIR* last issue ("The Henry Waxman Letter: Who Knew What, And When?"), sometime in late 2001, the Central Intelligence Agency received copies of a series of

documents, on a supposed letterhead of the Government of Niger, purporting to show Iraq attempting to purchase large quantities of uranium oxide ("yellow cake"), for possible use in building nuclear weapons. According to news accounts, in February 2002, Vice President Cheney asked a former U.S. Ambassador to Africa to travel to Niger to determine the authenticity of the documents. The Ambassador, whose identity is not yet publicly known, did make the trip, and reported back that the documents were fake, and there was no evidence of any Iraqi attempt to obtain the uranium precursor from Niger.

Despite the fact that the documents were shown to have been forgeries, allegations about the Iraq-Niger transactions continued to surface, throughout the Autumn of 2002, and reference to the Iraqi attempts to obtain the nuclear materials even appeared in a State Department "fact sheet" dated Dec. 19, 2002, and in President George Bush's Jan. 28, 2003 State of the Union address.

Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) followed up his letter to President Bush, with a new letter to National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice on June 10. This letter challenged statements made by Rice on the June 8 Sunday talk shows, which "contradicted other known facts and raised a host of new questions." Waxman pointed to Rice's statement on NBC's "Meet the Press," that "maybe someone knew down in the bowels of the agency" that the evidence cited by the President about Iraq's attempts to obtain uranium from Africa was suspect; he asked her to identify any such individual or individuals.

Waxman then added following questions: "When you were asked about reports that Vice President Cheney sent a former ambassador to Niger to investigate the evidence, you stated, 'the Vice President's office may have asked for that report.' In light of this comment, please address: (a) Whether Vice President Cheney or his office requested an investigation



The national drive kicked off by Presidential candidate LaRouche's call for impeachment proceedings against Dick Cheney, is causing a noose of questions on "Iraq WMD" lying to tighten on the Vice President. Comments by Ari Fleischer reflected it, as did a new, June 10 letter of inquiry by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) focussing on what Cheney knew and when.

into claims that Iraq may have attempted to obtain nuclear material from Africa, and when any such request was made; (b) Whether a current or former U.S. ambassador to Africa, or any other current or former government official or agent, travelled to Niger or otherwise investigated claims that Iraq may have attempted to obtain nuclear material from Niger; and (c) What conclusions or findings, if any, were reported to the Vice President, his office, or other U.S. officials as a result of the investigation, and when any such conclusions or findings were reported."

Waxman's letter concluded: "What I want to know is the answer to a simple question: Why did the President use forged evidence in the State of the Union address? This is a question that bears directly on the credibility of the United States, and it should be answered in a prompt and forthright manner, with full disclosure of all the relevant facts."

'Watergate' Parallels

That the United State government could take a decision to go to war, based, even partially, on fake intelligence, is a grave scandal, one that some qualified observers say is worse than Watergate. Indeed, former leading Watergate figure, ex-White House Counsel John Dean, wrote a June 6 article published by FindLaw, in which he stated, "Presidential statements, particularly on matters of national security, are held to an expectation of the highest standard of truthfulness. A President cannot stretch, twist, or distort facts and get away with it. President Lyndon Johnson's distortions of the truth about Vietnam forced him to stand down from re-election. President Richard Nixon's false statements about Watergate forced his resignation. . . . In the three decades since Watergate, this is the first potential scandal I have seen that could make Watergate pale by comparison. If the Bush Administra-

tion intentionally manipulated or misrepresented intelligence to get Congress to authorize, and the public to support, military action to take control of Iraq, then that would be a monstrous misdeed."

In a Feb. 1 FindLaw commentary, Dean had already singled out Cheney, for his efforts to impede Congressional probes into the activities of the Energy Task Force that he chaired in the first year of the Bush Administration. "Not since Richard Nixon stiffed Congress during Watergate," Dean charged, "has a White House so openly, and arrogantly, defied Congress's investigative authority. . . . As someone who knows a White House coverup from first-hand experience, I must say that if the Vice President forces the Comptroller to file his lawsuit, it will certainly appear that a coverup is in the works. Whether the coverup relates to Enron, or to his Energy Group's relationship with Halliburton (the energy company he ran before running for his present office), or to a dubious relationship with some other contributor that has received some benefit, or all of the above, I cannot say. But something is amiss. . . . [Cheney] is stonewalling. This is how a coverup begins."

Cheney Is the Prime Target

While an appropriate level of concern has been focused on President Bush's Jan. 28, 2003 State of the Union address, the key figure who must be forced to say what he knew, and when, is the Vice President.

It may yet prove to be the case that the Vice President has a legitimate explanation for his persistent pushing of the Iraq nuclear bomb hoax, after officials of the U.S. government confirmed, in February 2002, that the documents, underlying the charges, were fakes, based on an investigation that Cheney had personally requested.

Indeed, the *Washington Post*, on June 12, published a front-page story, already attempting to provide the Vice President with an escape hatch. According to the *Post*'s Walter Pincus, "the CIA did not pass on the detailed results of its investigation" of the Niger documents "to the White House or other government agencies." The Pincus story spun a "Keystone Cops" tale of failed communications, which several CIA analysts, interviewed for the article, disputed as nonsense.

A retired senior U.S. intelligence official told *EIR* that he had been informed that it was the Vice President's office, that pressed the CIA to provide the Niger documents to chief UN inspectors Mohammed ElBaradei and Hans Blix.

The *Post* story reflected, more than anything else, growing political pressure on the Administration to make a public accounting of the intelligence process leading up to the Iraq war. On June 9, *EIR* White House correspondent Bill Jones asked a pointed question of spokesman Ari Fleischer, who acknowledged the pivotal role of the Vice President in the Administration's intelligence assessments. Their exchange follows:

EIR: "Ari, one of the most vocal of the Administration officials in emphasizing unambiguously that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction was the Vice President. And, particularly, he was putting forward this—what was later known to be forged evidence about the letter that indicated the purchase of yellow cake from Niger. Can you tell me, at what point did the Vice President know that this evidence, or suspect that this evidence was forged in the process?"

Fleischer: "I haven't talked specifically to the Vice President about it, so I can't answer specifically, from his point of view. What I can tell you is, is the American intelligence community, as the information was received about the forgeries behind this, very frankly, spoke up and said that this information was incorrect."

EIR: "Can you tell me also, Ari, what role the Office of the Vice President or people from the Vice President's office—like [Cheney's Chief of Staff] Mr. Libby or others—played in putting together the package which was presented to the United Nations, to justify the attack on Iraq?"

Fleischer: "Again, you need to talk to them specifically about what role they played. But as has been discussed on numerous occasions, the Vice President, whether it be the Secretary of Defense [in 1991] or as Vice President, it is in his capacity—and we are a better administration for it—works carefully with the intelligence community, works carefully with all the agencies involved in the defense of our country to work with them to make certain that we are all working together, we're doing our best to implement the policies of this President. And the President values him highly in that capacity, in that role. He is very effective and he delves deep into what the agencies are working on, no matter where they are, to make certain that we are working from the best policies possible. And that's a very strong role he plays, and the President is appreciative for it."

A Series of Cheney Statements

A careful review of the statements issued by the Vice President, in the run up to the Iraq war, confirms that he was a pivotal player in the "war party," and was the "chicken-hawk" faction's point man, in charging that Saddam Hussein was in the advanced stages of building a nuclear bomb.

- On Aug. 26, 2002, Cheney delivered a bellicose speech before the 103rd National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Nashville, Tennessee, in which he directly raised the specter of a Saddam nuclear bomb. "The Iraqis continue to pursue the nuclear program they began so many years ago," Cheney bluntly told the audience. "On the nuclear question, many of you will recall that Saddam's nuclear ambitions suffered a serious setback in 1981, when the Israelis bombed the *Osirak* reactor. They suffered another major blow in Desert Storm and its aftermath. But we now know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. . . . Many of us are convinced that Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon."

- On Sept. 8, 2002, the Vice President appeared on "Meet the Press," and delivered even more specific allegations of Saddam Hussein's pursuit of the materiel required to build nuclear weapons: "We do know with absolute certainty that he is using his procurement system to acquire the equipment he needs in order to enrich uranium to build a nuclear weapon."

- On March 16, 2003, a week after Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, testified to the United Nations Security Council, debunking the Niger-Iraq nuclear weapons documents as "shoddy forgeries," the Vice President appeared on "Meet the Press," and again repeated the charges of Iraq's nuclear weapons program, going so far as to charge that "he has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons."

Cheney directly challenged the ElBaradei testimony, telling host Tim Russert, "I disagree" with the ElBaradei findings that Iraq has no nuclear weapons program. "And you'll find the CIA, for example, and other key parts of our intelligence community disagree. . . . We know that—based on intelligence—that he has been very, very good at hiding these kinds of efforts. He's had years to get good at it, and 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 is frankly wrong. And I think if you look at the track record of the International Atomic Energy Agency on this kind of issue, especially where Iraq's concerned, they have consistently underestimated or missed what it was Saddam Hussein was doing. I don't have any reason to believe they're any more valid this time than they've been in the past."

With such statements on the record, there is no doubt that the Vice President has a lot of explaining to do, and that the American people, and the world community, have every right to expect full, public disclosure.