

al Qaeda, and it drew no conclusions.”

Six weeks after the Hayes story hit the newsstands, and well after the Defense Department refutation, Dick Cheney gave an interview, on Jan. 9, 2004, to the *Rocky Mountain News*, in which he regurgitated the contents of the Feith memo, and commended Hayes and the *Weekly Standard* by name, for setting the record straight on the Saddam/al-Qaeda links. “One place you ought to go look is an article that Stephen Hayes did in the *Weekly Standard* a few weeks ago, that goes through and lays out in some detail, based on an assessment that was done by the Department of Defense and forwarded to the Senate Intelligence Committee. That’s your best source of information,” Cheney told the paper.

In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 9, 2004, CIA Director George Tenet, in response to questioning from Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) about the Jan. 9 Cheney interview, said, “Senator, we did not clear the [Feith] document. We did not agree with the way the data was characterized in that document.”

What’s more, on July 1, 2004, Director Tenet provided a more extensive written answer to Senator Levin’s question about the CIA’s assessment of the Atta/al-Ani meeting and the overall Iraqi role in the 9/11 attacks. On the Prague meeting, Tenet stated, “we are increasingly skeptical that such a meeting occurred. . . . In the absence of any credible information that the April 2001 meeting occurred, we assess that Atta would have been unlikely to undertake the substantial risk of contacting any Iraqi official as late as April 2001, with the plot already well along toward execution.” Several paragraphs later, Tenet also dismissed an Iraqi role in 9/11 (see box).

Cheney’s open embrace of the classified document leaked to the neo-con weekly had already triggered yet another firestorm. On Jan. 28, 2004, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a watchdog group, wrote to President Bush, demanding an investigation into the Vice President by the White House Counsel. The letter pointed out that it is a crime to publicly confirm information illegally leaked. “Further,” the letter read, “the Counsel should investigate whether any damage to national security was done by Mr. Cheney’s statement.” To this date, no action has been taken on the demand.

On Feb. 12, 2004, Senator Levin wrote to the Vice President, demanding to know whether the statements attributed to him in the *Rocky Mountain News* interview were accurate.

The Libby Draft

Another White House document demanded by the Senate intelligence panel but refused by Cheney, was the draft UN testimony for Secretary of State Colin Powell, written by Scooter Libby, Cheney’s chief of staff and chief national security aide until his indictment on Oct. 28, 2005 in the Valerie Plame Wilson case.

According to numerous news accounts, two separate

Libby drafts, totaling more than 90 pages, were tossed in the garbage by Powell, after he reviewed them with intelligence community analysts and senior officials, on the eve of his appearance at the UN Security Council on Feb. 5, 2003.

The Libby drafts contained allegations against Iraq that were not backed up by intelligence community data—including the allegations of Mohammed Atta’s Iraqi intelligence ties. Where did Libby get the bogus information? The answer to that question, sources report, has Cheney sweating bullets. It may be the “smoking gun” that proves that Cheney was running his own rogue disinformation operation, to fake the case for war.

Much of the evidence of Cheney’s conniving is fortunately available, because Secretary Powell had delegated his chief of staff, Colonel Wilkerson, to assemble and run the task force of intelligence community specialists, who would prepare the Feb. 5, 2003 UN Security Council testimony. In a series of news interviews, Wilkerson spelled out a chronology of skirmishes between his task force and the “Cabal.”

On Jan. 25, 2003, Scooter Libby and John Hannah, Libby’s deputy national security aide and a former vice president of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), the think tank of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), delivered a briefing on their proposed UN testimony at the White House situation room.

According to a Sept. 29, 2003 account of that session in the *Washington Post*, by Dana Priest and Glenn Kessler: “On Jan. 25, with a stack of notebooks at his side, color-coded with the sources for the information, Libby laid out the potential case against Iraq to a packed White House situation room. ‘We read [their proposal to include Atta] and some of us said, Wow! Here we go again,’ said one official who helped draft the speech. ‘You write it. You take it out, and then it comes back again.’ . . . Other officials present said they felt that Libby’s presentation was over the top, that the wording was too aggressive and most of the material could not be used in a public forum. Much of it, in fact, unraveled when closely examined by intelligence analysts from other agencies and, in the end, was largely discarded. ‘After one day of hearing screams about who put this together and what are the sources, we essentially threw it out,’ one official present said.”

Four days after the Jan. 25 situation room session, Libby and Hannah presented Powell with a 48-page draft text. Powell turned it over to Wilkerson and instructed him to take it to the CIA headquarters and scrub it for accuracy. Within 48 hours, the document had been shown to be based almost exclusively on sources the intelligence community had trashed as unreliable.

Libby came back with a second draft, this one 45 pages, containing much of the same material. Soon, this draft, too, was in the trash can, after careful scrutiny by Wilkerson and the team of CIA and DIA analysts assembled to vet the speech. “We fought tooth and nail with other members of the administration to scrub it and get the crap out,” Wilkerson told *Gentle-*