

Cheney Chicanery

by Ray McGovern

Ray McGovern, a co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS), chaired National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) and prepared/briefed the President's Daily Brief during his 27-year career at the Central Intelligence Agency. On July 14, VIPS sent a "Memorandum for the President" to President Bush, urging him to ask for Vice President Cheney's immediate resignation (see EIR, July 25).

Asked by the press why VIPS is calling for Cheney's resignation, he answered, "The evidence on Cheney is just simply more comprehensive than the evidence on all the rest of the folks. . . . All the evidence points to him as the prime mover behind this magnificent deception." On Cheney being forced to resign, McGovern cited the case of Richard Nixon's Vice President Spiro Agnew. Although Agnew was only guilty of petty graft—in contrast to Cheney's offenses of using lies to take the nation into war—as Nixon himself came under increasing pressure, Agnew was jettisoned. "It is conceivable to me that Vice President Cheney could be jettisoned" in the same way.

This statement from VIPS, issued on July 27, reviewed Cheney's July 24 speech at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) in Washington.

When Vice President Dick Cheney comes out of seclusion to brand critics "irresponsible," you know the Administration is in trouble.

Cheney was enlisted to do so in the Spring of 2002, amid reports that warning given to President Bush before 9/11 should have prompted preventive action. Cheney branded such commentary "irresponsible," and critics in the press and elsewhere were duly intimidated. It will be interesting to see what happens this time.

Sifting through the congressional report on 9/11, I was reminded of the President's Daily Brief item of August 6, 2001, titled "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US." Dana Priest of the *Washington Post* has learned that this PDB article stated that "bin Laden had wanted to conduct attacks in the United States for years and that [his] group apparently maintained a support base here."

According to Priest, the PDB went on to cite "FBI judgments about patterns of activity consistent with preparations for hijackings or other types of attacks." The President has cited executive privilege in refusing to declassify the PDB item.

‘Get Out of the Hole We’re In’

With the administration under fire once again, the vice president came off the bench with a major statement on July 24 in which he tried to hit two birds with one speech: 1) to distract attention from the highly embarrassing 9/11 report released that same day; and 2) arrest the plunge in Administration credibility caused by the absence of “weapons of mass destruction” in Iraq and the use of spurious reporting alleging that Iraq had been seeking uranium in Africa. In the words of one Cheney aide, “We had to get out of the hole we were in.”

But, alas, they have dug themselves in deeper by pushing disingenuousness to new heights—or depths. Cheney made the centerpiece of his speech a series of quotes from the key National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), “Iraq’s Continuing Programs for Weapons of Mass Destruction” published on Oct. 1, 2002. The NIE judgments he selected were adduced to prove that Iraq posed such an urgent threat to the US that it would have been “irresponsible” to shy away from making war.

Inconveniently, experience on the ground in Iraq for more than four months now has cast great doubt on the validity of those judgments. Worse still, as Cheney knows better than anyone, it was largely the unrelenting pressure he put on intelligence analysts—for example, by his unprecedented “multiple visits” to CIA headquarters—that rendered those judgments so dubious.

Giving new meaning to chutzpah, Cheney quoted four statements from the NIE:

- “Baghdad has chemical and biological weapons—if left unchecked, it probably will have a nuclear weapon during this decade.” Where are the chemical and biological weapons?
- “All key aspects—the R&D, production, and weaponization—of Iraq’s offensive (biological weapons) program are active, and most elements are larger and more advanced than they were before the Gulf War.” Where are they?
- “Since inspections ended in 1998, Iraq has maintained its chemical weapons effort, energized its missile program, and invested more heavily in biological weapons; in the view of most agencies, Baghdad is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program.” Where is the evidence of this in Iraq?
- The Intelligence Community has “high confidence” in the conclusion that “Iraq is continuing, and in some areas expanding, its chemical, biological, nuclear and missile programs contrary to UN Resolutions.”

The last four months have shown that such judgments—though stated to be marked by “high confidence”—were far off the mark. I know from my own experience that this is frequently the case when analysts are put under pressure from policymakers who have already publicly asserted, *a priori*, the “correct” answers to key questions.

Intelligence Experts Debunked Cheney

Cheney did so in the administration’s rollout of its marketing strategy for war, when he charged in a major address on



Ray McGovern (center) at a July 15 press briefing with Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio, right) and Australian intelligence veteran Andrew Wilkie, at which McGovern called for Vice President Cheney’s resignation, on behalf of other veterans of the CIA and other agencies.

Aug. 26, 2002, “Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons.” The intelligence community spent the subsequent weeks in a desperate search for evidence to prove Cheney right. If he is looking for something to label “irresponsible in the extreme,” the extreme pressure he put on intelligence analysts last September certainly qualifies.

Cheney did not mention in his speech that analysts in the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) insisted on recording in the NIE, their strong dissent on the key nuclear issue. All signs point to their having chosen the wiser approach. Their diplomatically stated—but nonetheless biting—dissent is worth a careful read: “The activities we have detected do not, however, add up to a compelling case that Iraq is currently pursuing ‘an integrated and comprehensive approach to acquire nuclear weapons.’ INR considers available evidence inadequate to support such a judgment. Lacking persuasive evidence that Baghdad has launched a coherent effort to reconstitute its nuclear weapons program, INR is unwilling to project a time line for completion of activities it does not now see happening.”

It was also INR analysts who branded the infamous Iraq-seeking-uranium-from-Niger story (widely recognized as bogus but included in the estimate anyway) “highly dubious.” One of the ironies here is that the intelligence analysts at State, a department steeped in politics, felt more secure in speaking truth to power than their counterparts in the CIA. In my day, CIA analysts were generally given the necessary insulation from pressure from policymakers—and career protection when it was necessary to face them down.

Here the buck stops with CIA Director George Tenet. And fresh light was thrown on his remarkable malleability when Newt Gingrich (also a frequent visitor to CIA over recent months) made this gratuitous comment to ABC on July 27: “Tenet is so grateful and loyal that he will do anything he can to help President Bush.”