

Rove's Problem: 'Dump Cheney, Or Get Out Of Town'

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Dick Cheney went off to Asia on a three-nation tour in mid-April, in what one Washington insider described as a desperate effort to "improve his image." The Vice President is now such a liability to the Bush re-election effort that pressure is mounting on White House campaign strategist Karl Rove, in the words of one longtime Republican Party strategist, to "either dump Cheney from the ticket or get out of town."

The newly released book by *Washington Post* assistant managing editor Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, has added to Cheney's woes. According to Woodward's account of the Bush Administration's decision to invade Iraq, Dick Cheney was the "fevered" architect of the fiasco. While President Bush agonized over the decision, and was unconvinced by CIA briefings on Saddam Hussein's so-called weapons of mass destruction stockpiles as late as January 2003, Cheney came into the Administration *already* convinced that the overthrow of the Iraqi regime was America's number-one foreign policy and national security priority.

Along the way, Cheney badly bungled the mandate he had received from President Bush in May 2001, to take charge of the Administration's counterterrorism and homeland security mission. Cheney ignored mountains of CIA and FBI evidence, during the Spring and Summer of 2001, that a major terrorist attack was being planned against targets in the continental United States. Richard Clarke, the former National Security Council chief for counterterrorism, charged, in testimony before the 9/11 Commission last month, that Cheney never so much as held a meeting of his counterterrorism task force, prior to the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. Britain's BBC tellingly observed, of Cheney's fixation on Saddam, that if the terror attack warnings had named Saddam Hussein, rather than Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, the Bush Administration would have been fully mobilized.

After three days of public hearings earlier this month, members of the 9/11 Commission delivered the ultimate damning indictment of the Bush Administration, announcing that they had concluded that the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks could have been prevented, if top Administration officials had acted differently. The accusations by Commission members appeared on the front page of the *Washington Post* on April 17—side by side with the first news coverage of Woodward's book, featuring the identification of Cheney as the hawk-in-charge of the Iraq war push.

VP Failed to Stiffarm This Summons

While much of the 9/11 Commission's criticism was directed at President Bush and Attorney General John Ashcroft, the Cheney issue has been ever-present. The *New York Times* editorialized, one day after President Bush told reporters that he had no second thoughts about what more he could have done to stop the terror attacks, that, for one thing, the President could have come back to Washington from his month-long vacation in Crawford, Texas, to mobilize the Cabinet, and put the American people on alert as to the growing threat of a terrorist attack.

In late 1999, amid reports of terrorist attacks on the United States in the run-up to the New Year's Millennium celebrations, President Bill Clinton—who has been routinely pilloried by Republican rightwingers as "soft on terrorism"—did precisely what Bush and Cheney did not do. The Clinton Cabinet and Principals Committee met on a daily basis; FBI, CIA, and other agencies were pressed to perform at top capacity; bureaucratic impediments were pushed aside; and at least four major terrorist plots were stymied.

Lyndon LaRouche expressed his agreement with the 9/11 Commissioners, noting that something "very ugly" happened in the Summer of 2001, as American security systems were

denigrated, while Bush vacationed and Cheney obsessed on overthrowing Saddam. Had the President used his bully pulpit to alert the country; had top-down pressure been placed on law enforcement and intelligence agencies; there was a good chance, LaRouche opined, that the terror attacks might have been aborted—because the climate was not ripe for a successful mission.

In fact, while Bush was riding horses and clearing brush in Texas, Democratic Party Presidential candidate LaRouche was doing precisely what the Commission said Bush should have done. On Aug. 24, 2001, LaRouche put out a campaign statement, which circulated as a million-run leaflet, warning of imminent “Jacobin” terrorist attacks on Washington, D.C.—in September!

On April 29, Bush and Cheney are scheduled to testify, together, in front of the 9/11 Commission. At his ill-conceived White House press conference in mid-April, President Bush had fallen silent, in response to repeated questions as to why he and Cheney were appearing together. Intelligence sources have told *EIR* that the Bush Administration’s stonewalling on producing witnesses and documents for the Commission has created a bipartisan view, among the members, that Bush and Cheney have something to hide.

The source added that the refusal of the White House to allow National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice to testify before the Commission had been driven by Cheney, who is in a pitched battle before the Supreme Court to prevent the release of any documentation of his energy task force. The only piece of paper released so far by the Cheney task force—a map of Iraqi oil concessions—strongly supports accusations that the Cheney group was a proto-war planning unit, more focussed on dumping Saddam Hussein and grabbing Iraq’s vast oil reserves for American oil companies, than on energy independence.

Cheney reportedly argued that, if Condi Rice testified voluntarily before the 9/11 Commission, it would discredit his invoking of executive privilege to keep the energy task force documents secret.

On April 18, Bob Woodward appeared on CBS “60 Minutes,” and delivered a damning indictment of Dick Cheney for dragging the United States into an Iraq war, on the basis of pretexts that have now been widely discredited, such as the Saddam links to 9/11, and the WMD claims. Woodward, whose book was based on interviews with at least 75 Administration officials and allies, described numerous accounts of Cheney’s war push, emphasizing that, at the end of the day, it was Dick Cheney who had an office right down the hall from President Bush, and who had the greatest access to the President. Cheney used that access to convince Bush to go to war, when there were other alternative paths to disarming Iraq and even to ending the Saddam Hussein regime.

Cheney was also the architect of what Secretary of State Colin Powell described as a parallel government, housed in the Vice President’s Office and the Pentagon, and including



Why Cheney had to be with him when he met with the 9/11 Commission, was the one question President Bush outright wouldn’t, or couldn’t answer at his April 19 press conference. Republicans, not just reporters, want the Cheney question answered.

what was referred to by the Secretary as Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Undersecretary of Defense Doug Feith’s “Gestapo.”

GOP Defections

The *Wall Street Journal*, in an April 21 editorial, pitched a fit at Secretary Powell over his purported use of the term “gestapo” in describing the Wolfowitz-Feith neo-con Pentagon cell. The *Journal* cited both Wolfowitz’ and Feith’s Jewish heritage. But such histrionics by the neo-con “amen corner” aside, mounting evidence is that the Cheney/neo-con domination of the Bush Administration, the Iraq quagmire, and the recent Bush embrace of serial war criminal Ariel Sharon’s latest land-grab schemes, are causing a tremendous backlash among traditional Republicans.

The prestigious newsletter *The Big Picture*, in its April 20, 2004 edition, reported new evidence of widespread Republican angst. Publisher Richard Whalen wrote, “Bush I lost disastrously in 1992 when the divided conservative and Republican base shrank through dropouts and stay-at-homes. Much the same fate awaits Bush II, who is losing the Reagan constituency and the moderates alike. Chief strategist Karl Rove airily talks in private of simply attracting more evangelical Christians, but he overestimates their numbers and underestimates their economic disappointment in Bush’s ‘jobless recovery.’ Our continuing sampling of Republicans and Independents across the country reveals mounting disaffection and dissatisfaction with Bush, outrage at the warhawk neo-cons’ ‘hijacking’ of the GOP, and waning commitment to vote loyally for the entire Republican ticket. As anti-war feeling grows on the center-right of U.S. politics, especially among senior retired military, Republican office-holders at every level could feel the powerful anti-Bush backlash.”

If there is a single word that encapsulates the pent-up anger over the Iraq fiasco and the other disasters that have befallen America in the past three years, that word is “Cheney.” The question being asked by growing legions of Republican stalwarts is: When will the President’s “boy genius” Karl Rove wake up and smell that bitter cup of coffee?