

Cheney: He Can Run, But He Can't Hide

by Jeffrey Steinberg

"Dick Cheney is a political disaster awaiting recognition. In the book, I set forth a relatively long list of inchoate scandals, not to mention problems worse than scandals. They all involve Cheney in varying degrees. Bush can't dump Cheney, for it is Cheney, not Rove, who is Bush's backroom brain. He is actually a co-president. Bush doesn't enjoy studying and devising policy. Cheney does. While Cheney has tutored Bush for almost four years, and Bush is better prepared today than when he entered the job, Cheney is quietly guiding the administration. Cheney knows how to play Bush so that Cheney is absolutely no threat to him, makes him feel he is president, but Bush can't function without a script, or without Cheney. Bush is head of state; Cheney is head of government.

"If, say the Securities and Exchange Commission's current investigation of Halliburton's accounting also discovers that Cheney engaged in insider trading when he left Halliburton (which the facts suggest is highly likely), and this matter erupts before the Republican convention, then Cheney might be forced to step aside. Cheney always has his bad-health excuse anytime he wants to take it—because it is a fact. He has a certain immunity as vice president, but if he were to be dropped from the ticket (or he and Bush lose), I believe Cheney would have serious problems which he would no longer be able to deflect. Thus, he will stay and fight like hell to win.

"I quote Cheney from his time in the Ford White House when he said, 'Principle is okay up to a certain point, but principle doesn't do any good if you lose.' I think this statement sums up Cheney's thinking nicely. . . .

"Because of their secrecy, it takes a lot of work to connect the dots. I've not connected them all, but enough of them to know that the only agenda they had during the first term was to get a second term—which meant secretly taking care of their major contributors. Should they get a second term, we know their secret agenda, for they have quietly stated it: They intend to make sure the Republicans control the federal government (all three branches) indefinitely, if possible. In short, the Bush-Cheney agenda is about perpetuating Republican rule by taking particularly good care of major contributors who share their view of the world."

The words of a Democratic Party opposition researcher? James Carville? John Kerry? Hardly. These are the words of John Dean, the former Richard Nixon White House lawyer

and longtime Republican activist, from a March 31, 2004 interview with *Salon* magazine. Dean has just come out with a book, *Worse Than Watergate: The Secret Presidency of George W. Bush*, which highlights the role of Cheney as the co-President and driving ideological figure behind the Administration's crimes against the general welfare of the United States. As Dean reminded *Salon*, "No one died because of the abuses of power known as Watergate. Too many have died (and more in the future may) because of the abuses of power by this presidency. That's why their abuses are worse than Watergate."

Senator Warns of 'Dictatorship'

John Dean is not merely speaking for himself, when he zeroes in on the Vice President. A growing chorus of leading Republican moderates and liberals—and even a number of leading Reagan Republicans—are voicing their disgust at what Cheney and his neo-conservative minions have done to the United States, and to the Republican Party. Some are speaking behind closed doors. Others are voicing their concerns openly about a Bush-Cheney triggered Constitutional crisis.

Take Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.), a decorated Vietnam veteran and voice for the Midwest "Main Street" wing of the Republican Party. On March 14, Hagel gave an interview to *Washington Post* editor Robert Kaiser, in which he warned that the United States, under the Bush-Cheney regime, was veering toward dictatorship. "Congress is the only thing that stands in the way between essentially a modern-day democratic dictatorship and a president who is accountable to the people," Hagel bluntly observed. Congress "could become an adjunct to the executive branch."

Hagel reminded his fellow Senators that the oath of office is not a pledge of allegiance to a political ideology or to the Oval Office. "I don't owe my allegiance to my party or my president. My oath of office that I take is to the Constitution. . . . What's eroding is the strength of this institution [the U.S. Senate]. . . . The lack of oversight, the lack of being consulted, the lack of being part of the process in forming policy. . . . When you reference . . . committing the nation to war, I think we owe the people we represent far more consideration than just as a party matter, or supporting our president."

Hagel saved his most eloquent and blunt criticism for the Senate itself: "As the heavy winds and high seas blow in this political sea, you cannot afford for the future of this country to come loose on your moorings here. [The Senate] is the one institution that the framers of the Constitution created that is supposed to be that mooring for society. . . . But I think we've come loose of our moorings to some extent."

Senator Hagel has matched his words with deeds on at least two recent occasion. When Vice President Cheney, working through Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), attempted to shut down the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's probe into the alleged fabrication of intelligence to



John Dean, the former Nixon White House lawyer, is taking the gloves off against Dick Cheney, whom he calls “a political disaster” and “Bush’s backroom brain.” Shown here is one of his attacks on the Bush team in Salon magazine. He has also authored a new book, Worse Than Watergate: The Secret Presidency of George W. Bush.

force Congressional support for an Iraq invasion, Hagel, a member of the panel, threatened to cast his deciding vote with the Democrats, to open a thorough probe. Committee chairman Pat Roberts (R-Kans.) caucused with Hagel and leading panel Democrats Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) and Carl Levin (D-Mich.), and a deal was reached to vastly expand the committee’s investigation—to include the intelligence flows from the Iraqi National Congress; the workings of two Pentagon rogue intelligence units, the Office of Special Plans and the Policy Counterterrorism Evaluations Group; and the statements by Administration officials—including Cheney—leading up to, and following the Iraq War. Cheney fumed, but the Nebraska Senator stood his ground, and the Congress now has its only bipartisan “official” probe into the abuses of intelligence leading up to the Iraq War. When Cheney recently used the occasion of a speech at the Ronald Reagan Library to trash the presumptive Democratic Party Presidential nominee Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) as weak on national security, Hagel came to the defense of his Senate colleague and fellow Vietnam veteran.

Rising Anger and Frustration

Other Senate Republicans are also becoming more blunt in their criticisms of the Bush-Cheney Administration. One former Senate GOP aide told *EIR* that a large number of senior Republican staffers are in open revolt, and will throw their support behind the Democratic Presidential nominee. A top aide to a prominent East Coast Republican Senator revealed that there is widespread anger among Republican Senators, over the constant pressure from the Administration to stymie

any hearings that might reveal damaging information about the Administration’s pre-Iraq War machinations. “We’ve been told to concentrate on the budget,” and prevent any damaging information from coming out before November’s elections, the staffer revealed.

The same staffer asked, rhetorically, why Rumsfeld was still Secretary of Defense, and why Cheney is still on the 2004 re-election ticket. “The actual level of frustration and anger is much more intense than appears on the surface,” he confirmed.

In the March 15 issue of his authoritative newsletter *The Big Picture*, longtime Republican Party consultant and activist Richard Whalen identified former Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kans.), the 1996 Republican Party Presidential nominee, as one among the leading Midwest Republicans who have quietly thrown their support to Kerry. “His razor-edge wit and fiery temper sometimes flash in debate, but mostly this son of the middle border speaks his mind with direct simplicity and common sense. His endorsement of Kerry will be widely influential among dismayed moderate Republicans and Independents,” Whalen observed.

Word of the simmering revolt, particularly against Cheney, is also circulating in Europe. A senior British defense specialist told *EIR* on March 25 that there is growing momentum in Republican Party circles for Cheney to be dumped as Vice President.

“What is the reason for Cheney’s staying on?” the source asked angrily. “He’s done only damage for the past 18 months. He’s the chief architect of this mess in Iraq, he is at the center of all the Halliburton scandals. He is, demonstrably,



Many high-ranking Republicans are asking why Vice President Dick Cheney is still on the 2004 re-election ticket, and are hoping he will go back to Wyoming.

a failure, and he has become a major liability, and that appraisal is increasingly shared by Republican Party stalwarts. The hard-nosed power brokers in the Party, I'm certain, think he is a liability, and that it's time to 'move on,' with someone else as Bush's running-mate. What you might call 'selfish Republicans' are thinking this way, and think he is damaging the Party."

According to the British source, "If Cheney goes, that would be the needed signal, that the influence of Perle, Wolfowitz, and the rest of that crowd, is waning. Cheney is *the* symbol for them, and so he has to be dealt with. And Cheney has a very sensible and graceful escape route, he has just to make a serious announcement that, for health reasons, he has to leave office."

Running . . . From What?

Cheney's appeal has not been improved by his new posture as the highly visible "attack dog" of the Bush-Cheney re-election campaign.

In early March, the Vice President was hit by a new round of Justice Department and Congressional probes, all targeting his past ties to Halliburton Corporation, and his central role in the propaganda disinformation offensive, leading into the Iraq War.

On March 11, the Justice Department confirmed that it had opened a formal investigation into Halliburton overbilling on Pentagon contracts in Iraq. After a months-long Department of Defense probe, the Justice Department took over the investigation into \$61 million in overcharges on gasoline deliveries to U.S. military occupation forces in Iraq. The company faces prosecution under the Federal False Claims Act.

Two days earlier, during testimony at the Senate Armed

Services Committee by CIA Director George Tenet, panel Democrats revealed that Cheney's top national security aide, Lewis Libby, had received intelligence briefings on the alleged Saddam Hussein ties to al-Qaeda from Assistant Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith in August 2002. Not only have the contents of that briefing been widely exposed as a "cherry-picked" collection of raw, uncorroborated pieces of information, painting a false picture of Saddam's links to 9/11, but also, under oath, CIA Director Tenet acknowledged that he had first learned about the Feith end-run briefings "last week." Feith had earlier told a Pentagon press briefing that he had never given such briefings. These revelations once again spotlight the fact that Cheney created his own shadow intelligence "stove-pipe" of raw sewage, originating with Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, bypassing the normal intelligence community vetting process, to make the case for war, on the basis of, at best, uncorroborated information from dubious, biased sources.

Cheney is also already the subject of at least three Federal grand juries—one investigating the source of the leaking of the identity of CIA undercover officer Valerie Plame to syndicated columnist Robert Novak in July 2003. Plame is the wife of former Ambassador Joseph Wilson, who conducted a CIA fact-finding mission to Niger in February 2002—at the initiation of the Vice President. Wilson found no evidence that Iraq was seeking to illegally purchase large quantities of "yellow cake" uranium—charges that Cheney continued to make, even after Wilson's report-back to the CIA.

The second grand jury is looking into the origins of forged documents, on the letterhead of the Niger government, which formed the basis for the phony charges that Saddam was seeking uranium in Africa for nuclear bombs. A third Federal criminal probe centers on allegations that a Halliburton-led consortium of oil companies paid \$180 million in bribes to Nigerian government officials—while Cheney was Halliburton's CEO. The same bribery charges are being investigated by magistrates in France, Great Britain, and Nigeria.

According to a March 18, 2004 *Washington Post* story, campaign strategist Karl Rove's response to the mounting "Cheneygate" scandals was to send the Vice President out on the campaign stump, in a desperate effort to "detoxify" him. The previous day, Cheney had delivered a tirade against Kerry at the Ronald Reagan Library in Simi Valley, Calif. "Campaign officials said the speech signalled a more prominent and aggressive role," the *Post* noted, "as [Cheney's] advisers continue working to elevate him above questions about his ties to industry and other controversies that have dragged down his public image. 'This is the beginning of the process of trying to detoxify him and make him back into the political asset that he should be,' said an adviser to the Bush-Cheney campaign, who spoke on condition of anonymity."

"Detoxification" may prove tougher than svengali Rove imagines. For one thing, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), the

ranking minority member of the House Government Reform Committee, has released a data base of false statements by Cheney and other top Bush Administration officials, on the Iraq War, on his Congressional website. The Vice President continues to make public statements linking Saddam Hussein to the 9/11 attacks, and refuses to admit that the whole "Saddam WMD" threat was vastly overblown.

Cheney undoubtedly made moderate Republicans very unhappy, when, on March 22, he made an appearance on the Rush Limbaugh radio show, to launch a vitriolic attack on Richard Clarke, the former Bush-Cheney counterterror czar, claiming that Clarke was "out of the loop" when the Administration devised its war on terror plans prior to 9/11. Cheney's remarks directly contradicted statements by National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, and this promises to be a major topic when Rice appears in public, under oath, before the 9/11 Commission.

Seventy-two hours after the Cheney-Limbaugh assault, Clarke corrected the Vice President, in an interview with *Salon* magazine, in which the following exchange took place:

Q: Vice President Cheney told Rush Limbaugh that you were not "in the loop," and that you're angry because you were passed over by Condi Rice for greater authority. And in fact you were dropped from a Cabinet-level position to something less than that. How do you respond to what the Vice President said?

A: The Vice President is becoming an attack dog, on a personal level, which should be beneath him, but evidently is not. I was in the same meetings that Dick Cheney was in, during the days after 9/11. Condi Rice and Dick Cheney appointed me as co-chairman of the interagency committee called the "Campaign Committee"—the "campaign" being the war on terrorism. So I was co-chairing the interagency process to fight the war on terrorism after 9/11. I don't think I was "out of the loop."

Q: The Vice President commented that there was "no great success in dealing with terrorists" during the 1990s, when you were serving under President Clinton. He asked, "What were they doing?"

A: It's possible that the Vice President has spent so little time studying the terrorist phenomenon that he doesn't know about the successes in the 1990s. There were many. The Clinton administration stopped Iraqi terrorism against the United States, through military intervention. It stopped Iranian terrorism against the United States, through covert action. It stopped the al-Qaida attempt to have a dominant influence in Bosnia. It stopped the terrorist attacks at the millennium. It stopped many other terrorist attacks, including on the U.S. embassy in Albania. And it began a lethal covert action program against al-Qaida; it also launched military strikes against al-Qaida. Maybe the Vice President was so busy running Halliburton at the time, that he didn't notice.