

‘Super-Watergate’ Hits Bush and Cheney

by Edward Spannaus

“A Super-Watergate is now underway,” Lyndon LaRouche said on June 9, remarking on the intensifying pressure on the Bush-Cheney Administration, and the escalation of the obstruction and coverup by the White House. The Watergate-type pattern is striking—and the overall process is readily understood by those who are familiar with the fight that LaRouche and his associates have been waging against the neo-conservatives in the Administration, and against Vice President Dick Cheney in particular, for the past two years.

Now, the Abu Ghraib torture scandal has put the issue of *war crimes* on the table. This hits in the context of the continued exposures of the fabricated evidence on Iraqi weapons; anger over the gross bungling and mismanagement of the Iraq war; and the intensifying criminal investigation of the leak of the CIA covert-agent status of Ambassador Joseph Wilson’s wife, Valerie Plame.

Congressional Democrats Move

The revolt in Congress among leading Democrats, and some Republicans as well, is indicated by the declaration of eight senior Democrats that they will launch their own probe of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, and their demand for key documents from the Administration.

The House Armed Services Committee was to hold a vote on June 14 on a Resolution of Inquiry sponsored by 40 Democrats, requesting that Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld provide to Congress, photographs and documents connected to the Taguba Report on prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib, and also materials pertaining to civilian contractors involved in prisoner interrogations.

And in the background are the still-simmering scandals over the corrupt private contracting deals for Iraq, centering around Dick Cheney’s Halliburton/KBR. The latest revelation was the disclosure of a March 5, 2003 Pentagon e-mail saying that the awarding of a major, no-bid contract to Halliburton on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, was “coordinated” with the Vice President’s office. Private contracting for Iraq is the subject of numerous investigations, and will be the topic of another hearing by the House Government Reform Committee on June 15, being held largely as a result of the pressure coming from the senior Democratic member on the committee, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif) and others.

Tenet Jumps, Ashcroft Digs In

The unravelling of the Administration is reflected in the near-simultaneous resignations of CIA Director George Tenet, and his operations deputy, James Pavitt. Tenet, in particular, seems to be jumping from the *Titanic* before it goes down, knowing that the war between the White House and the intelligence community is only going to get worse.

The Tenet-Pavitt resignations came at the same time that any hopes that the Abu Ghraib scandal could be contained at the level of “a few bad apples” were disintegrating, as one high-level Administration memo after another was leaked, showing that disregard for the Geneva Conventions and U.S. law was a deliberate policy of this Administration, beginning in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the launching of the war in Afghanistan.

The scandal started to escalate with the disclosure of the January 2002 memorandum to the President from his chief lawyer Alberto Gonzales, warning that Administration of-

officials could be prosecuted for war crimes because of their treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan and Guantanamo.

This was followed by the June 7 leak in the *Wall Street Journal*, of a Pentagon memorandum from April 2003, which said that the President can order torture, and can ignore international treaties and U.S. laws prohibiting torture of prisoners. This memorandum was approved as policy by Rumsfeld and top Defense Department civilian officials—over the angry objections of military lawyers from the uniformed services.

The next day, Tuesday, June 8, both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* ran front-page stories disclosing leaked memos from the Department of Justice (DOJ), which showed that the DOJ had in fact provided the legal arguments used in the 2003 Pentagon memorandum, and also in the Gonzales January 2002 war crimes warning. The DOJ memorandum, coming out of the right-wing ideologue-ridden Office of Legal Counsel, contended that U.S. agents who torture prisoners at the President's direction could not be prosecuted under the U.S. anti-torture statute.

The DOJ memos were leaked just in time for the appearance of Attorney General John Ashcroft at a dramatic Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on June 8. Here, in contrast to Tenet's jumping ship, Ashcroft dug in his heels, showing that he is fully prepared to go down with the sinking vessel. In the face of demands by Senators for the DOJ torture memos, Ashcroft stonewalled, telling Committee members that he will not give the committee copies of Justice Department memoranda which were already leaked to the press.

After the Attorney General repeatedly refused to provide the documents, without citing any legal basis for withholding them, Senator Joe Biden (D-Del) pointedly told Ashcroft he might be held in contempt of Congress—a warning later repeated in stronger terms by Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.).

On June 10, the *New York Times* ran three simultaneous op-eds, which constitute an Eastern Establishment indictment of the Bush Administration around the issue of war crimes.

- Donald Gregg, a retired CIA station chief who was the national security advisor to Vice-President George H.W. Bush during the Reagan Administration, published an op-ed in the *New York Times*, ripping open the administration's coverup of the torture crimes, and laying the responsibility for the horrors in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo squarely on the shoulders of the Bush Administration itself. The memos written by administration lawyers "cleared the way" for the tortures, Gregg wrote, "and make a mockery of administration assertions that a few misguided enlisted personnel perpetrated the vile abuse of prisoners." He warned that there is "nothing that can more devastatingly undercut America's standing in the world—or more important, our view of ourselves—than these decisions" which permit abuses and torture.

- A second *New York Times* op-ed, called "An American in the Hague," by a senior editor of the journal *Foreign Affairs*, noted that Bush Administration officials could find

themselves on trial for war crimes in The Hague, under the same legal standards that the United States has promoted against Nazi leaders and in war-crimes tribunals for Rwanda and Yugoslavia. "Under the doctrine of command responsibility," the author states, "officials can be held accountable for war crimes committed by their subordinates even if they did not order them, so long as they had control over the perpetrators, had reason to know about the crimes, and did not stop them or punish the criminals."

- The same issue of the *New York Times* published another op-ed called "Physician, Turn Thyself In," exposing the fact that military doctors and nurses examined the victims of torture at Abu Ghraib, "treated swollen genitals, prescribed painkillers, stitched wounds, and recorded evidence of the abuses"—then returned the victims to their victimizers for more torture. But under international law, and standards of common decency, these medical professionals had a duty to say what they saw, and they did not.

They still should come forward with the evidence they have, said the author, M. Gregg Bloche, who teaches law and health policy at Georgetown and Johns Hopkins Universities.

Plame Probe Hits Home

Last week, it was also confirmed that Cheney had been questioned by Federal prosecutors investigating the illegal disclosure of the identity of CIA covert operative Valerie Plame. It was also reported, and confirmed, that President Bush had consulted with a private attorney, and is prepared to hire him if necessary. John Dean, the former White House Counsel, called this "a rather stunning and extraordinary development," and said that this indicates that the special prosecutor knows that Bush knows something, perhaps "not only of the leaker, but of efforts to make this issue go away."

Cheney's office is, of course, at the center of the inquiry, with his chief of staff Lewis Libby a prime suspect. *EIR* had been told that an effort to discredit Plame's husband, former Ambassador Joe Wilson, had been launched in Cheney's office in early 2003, to try and prevent Wilson from speaking out on the Niger uranium "yellowcake" hoax, which was being used as one of the justifications for the Iraq war.

At the center of the fabricated Iraq intelligence was Cheney's favorite Iraqi faker, Ahmed Chalabi, and his Iraqi National Congress. A serious FBI investigation is also now underway into evidence that Chalabi and his top intelligence aide were passing sensitive American intelligence to their friends in Iran. Long after the CIA, State Department and others had ditched Chalabi, Cheney and the hard-core neo-conservatives in the Pentagon continued to promote his fabricated "intelligence" and to feed it into the White House.

Lying to Congress and the American people, launching an illegal war, and committing war crimes in violation of U.S. laws and international conventions; and then covering it up—the accumulation of this corruption is big, much bigger than Watergate ever was.