

Witness Testimony

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In order to understand the deliberate leaking of Valerie Plame's identity as a clandestine officer of the Central Intelligence Agency it is necessary to understand the environment in which senior Administration officials acted. The leaking was, in my judgment, a manifestation of the continuing battle by some policy-makers to pressure the intelligence community into providing the intelligence data that would support previously adopted objectives. Some senior officials have contempt for the professional intelligence community, including CIA and DIA. This contempt has been manifested by attempted intimidation of analysts to produce supporting data for the policy-makers' own ideological beliefs. This disdain for the intelligence community led to dependence by policy makers on dubious channels of information such as the defector sources produced by Ahmad Chalabi and the INC. This channel fostered the original belief that Saddam Hussein had renewed his nuclear program and was close to obtaining a nuclear device. The intelligence community estimate was that it would require several years to produce such a device, but a much shorter period if Saddam were able to acquire weapons-grade uranium.

The dispute about the nuclear weapons scenario bubbled up as a major issue in late 2001 when CIA and the British MI-6 were separately provided intelligence analysis from the Italian military intelligence service (SISMI) stating that the Ba'athi regime was seeking uranium in Africa. American Intelligence analysts were apparently dubious about the report given that the I.A.E.A. had in 1997 inventoried over 15 tons of uranium ore stored in Iraq. The question was asked why the Ba'athis were seeking more uranium when they already had a stockpile and still had no capability of refining and enriching the uranium. But there were no intelligence data to contradict the Italian report.

The Vice President and his chief of staff Lewis Libby visited CIA headquarters to engage the CIA analysts directly on this issue of uranium acquisition in Africa and the alleged renewal of a nuclear program. I have heard that this unprecedented act, in which a Vice President engages desk level analysts, resulted in a contentious give and take. The analysts maintained their position that there were no supporting intelligence data for the Italian report. The Vice President, who had publicly asserted the uranium story as proof Saddam was acquiring nuclear weapons, insisted that CIA analysts were not looking hard enough for the evidence. As a result of this pressure, CIA's Non-Proliferation Center sent Joe Wilson to Niger for a fact-finding trip. As we know, there was no evidence obtained by Ambassador Wilson, or any other fact-finder, to support the Italian report. In fact, further investigation resulted in the CIA acquisition of documents on which the Italian report was based. The British reporting, making the same assertions about yellowcake acquisition attempts, was apparently based on the same document foundation. These documents were crude forgeries.

Officials in the Vice President's office were obviously not pleased with the trip report of

Wilson's fact-finding mission but these officials did not alter their views about a renewed nuclear program despite CIA findings. Indeed, the Vice President reiterated the claims publicly. According to testimony provided by the head of the NPC to the Senate Intelligence Committee, his efforts with the NSC arguing against the inclusion of the uranium claim in the State of the Union Address were to no avail. Memoranda to the Deputy NSC Chief from the CIA Director saying there was no intelligence evidence for the claim were ignored. The infamous sixteen words were included in the President's speech. When Ambassador Wilson went public with his Op-Ed piece in the New York Times (after several media reports about the uranium acquisition report being unfounded) the leaks from the White House began with the evident intent of politically trashing Joe Wilson. But the leakers were unable to restrain their underlying contempt for the CIA and exposed the identity of Wilson's wife, implying that as a specialist in WMD at the Agency she was already opposed to the reporting that an Iraqi nuclear program was in process. There was also the suggestion of nepotism, as if traveling to Niger was some sort of boondoggle. Again, Valerie Plame was collateral damage to the leakers who were intent on destroying the credibility of anyone who doubted the Italian military intelligence report, a report we now know is based on a fabrication and for which there was and is no independent verification.

The revelation of Plame's professional affiliation, which is being investigated as a criminal violation of the Identities Act, was a purely vindictive act that was not germane to the apparent political purpose of attacking former Ambassador Joseph Wilson and the results of his fact-finding visit to Niger. In pursuing a political agenda, the leakers destroyed a woman's chosen career path without regard for the consequences. But the consequences are much greater than Valerie's job as a clandestine CIA employee – they include the damage to the lives and livelihoods of many foreign nationals with whom she was connected and it has destroyed a clandestine cover mechanism that may have been used to protect other CIA non-official cover officers.