

Cheney and His Policies Now Under Bipartisan Attack

by Edward Spannaus

Vice President Dick Cheney has made himself such an inviting target, that he is now under attack from both Democrats and Republicans. Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) delivered an extremely thoughtful speech on Jan. 14, which avoided the usual Democratic “blame-it-all-on-Bush” rhetoric in favor of a precise analysis of *who* in the Administration actually led Bush down the path to war against Iraq. Kennedy described what he called “an extraordinary policy coup,” carried out by “Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Wolfowitz, the axis of war” (see *Documentation*).

Kennedy traced the war party’s origins back to the office Cheney held in the first Bush Administration, when he was Secretary of Defense and Paul Wolfowitz was one of his top advisors. Kennedy quoted from the 1997 book by George H.W. Bush and his national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, in which they explained why they resisted pressures to eliminate Saddam in the first Gulf War: “We would have been forced to occupy Baghdad and, in effect, rule Iraq. The coalition would instantly have collapsed. . . . The United States could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land.” Kennedy also referenced two other major developments which are feeding the clamor against Cheney: the publication of the new book based on the experiences of former Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill in the Bush-Cheney Administration, and the devastating report on Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction issued on Jan. 8 by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Kennedy noted that he knows Paul O’Neill from having worked with him on issues of job safety and health care, when O’Neill headed Alcoa in the 1990s. Describing O’Neill as “a person of great integrity, and intelligence and vision,” Kennedy said, “it’s easy to understand why he was so concerned about what he heard about Iraq in the Bush Administration”—namely, that overthrowing Saddam Hussein had been on the

agenda from the very beginning.

It is also clear that O’Neill viewed Cheney as the real power and the key policymaker in the Administration; he describes the President as shallow and superficial, disengaged and uninterested in the complexities of policy. In the book, *The Price of Loyalty*, O’Neill is cited portraying Cheney as driving the Administration’s key domestic and foreign policies—always putting his political priorities above the national interest. Author Ron Suskind describes how O’Neill implored his old friend Cheney to open up a more rigorous debate and policymaking process in the White House—and finally realized that it is Cheney himself who is the problem.

As a columnist in the *International Herald Tribune* put it: “These scenes are reminiscent of a spy thriller in which the protagonist warns the head of counterintelligence that there is an enemy mole in their midst, only to discover that his confidant is actually the mole.”

O’Neill is not an off-the-reservation renegade, as White House flacks are trying to portray him. Knowledgeable sources have advised *EIR* that O’Neill is speaking for many mainstream Republicans who are horrified at the drift of Administration policy and the role of Dick Cheney. Top White House advisor Karl Rove and other insiders are aware that polls show that many Republicans would be happy to see Cheney dumped from the ticket this year—but they still believe, mistakenly, that to let Cheney go would constitute an admission that the President had been misled, which they are not yet ready to make.

Cheney was prominently featured in the presentation of the new Carnegie report entitled “WMD in Iraq: Evidence and Implications.” The report has received extensive domestic and worldwide coverage. Throughout it, there are many quotations from statements by Cheney expressing certainty that Saddam Hussein was on the verge of developing nuclear

Cheney Promotes Use Of Illegal Leak

Vice President Dick Cheney came close to declaring himself an accessory to the illegal disclosure of a Defense Department memorandum, with statements he made to the Jan. 9 *Rocky Mountain News*. When Cheney was asked about links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda, he responded: "There are several places you can go. One place you ought to look is an article that Stephen Hayes did in the *Weekly Standard* here a few weeks ago, that goes through and lays out these links in some detail, based on an assessment that was done by the Department of Defense and forwarded to the Senate Intelligence Committee some weeks ago. That's your best source of information."

What Cheney was recommending, was a classified Defense Department memo, "Al-Qaeda and Iraq Connec-

tions"—a shoddy collection of raw "intelligence" submitted by Undersecretary of Defense Doug Feith to the Senate Intelligence Committee—which was leaked to Stephen Hayes of Rupert Murdoch's *Weekly Standard*, which published substantial excerpts on Nov. 15. On that same day, in a highly unusual action, the Department of Defense immediately posted a disavowal of the memo on its website, which warned: "Individuals who leak or purport to leak classified information are doing serious harm to national security; such activity is deplorable and may be illegal."

Senator Pat Roberts (R-Kans.), the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, described the disclosure of the Feith memo as "an egregious leak of highly classified material." Both the Senate Intelligence Committee and the CIA asked the Department of Justice to investigate the leak. A Defense Department counterintelligence unit also launched an investigation, which includes identifying everyone who handled the Feith memo at any point.

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weapons; claiming that Saddam was linked to terrorists; and falsely asserting that he had provided training to al-Qaeda.

The Carnegie report zeroes in especially on the shift in official intelligence assessments which took place during 2002, and culminated in the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE). The report says that this shift suggests "that the intelligence community began to be unduly influenced by policymakers' views sometime in 2002." It then notes, "In this case, the pressure appears to have been unusually intense," and it then gives as the example of this pressure, "the Vice President's repeated visits to CIA headquarters."

In presenting the report to a Washington press conference, the project director for the report, Joseph Cirincione, focussed almost exclusively on Cheney when demonstrating how the Bush Administration had misrepresented the findings in the October 2002 NIE on Iraq. Cirincione quoted statements by Cheney in August of 2002 ("We now know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. Many of us are convinced that Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon."), to illustrate how the Administration mischaracterized the certainty and the immediacy of the threat.

Cirincione then quoted Cheney in September 2002 ("We know with absolute certainty that he is using his procurement system to acquire the equipment he needs in order to enrich uranium to build a nuclear weapon."), and cited Cheney's attacks on the International Atomic Energy Agency in March 2002—after the IAEA had reported that its inspectors had found no indication of resumed nuclear activity in Iraq, and that the documents purporting to show Iraqi attempts to import uranium, were forgeries. "They [the IAEA] have consis-

tently underestimated or missed what Saddam Hussein was doing," Cheney asserted. "I don't have any reason to believe they're any more valid this time."

Adding fuel to the fire under Cheney's pot, the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College has released a report which is highly critical of both the Iraq War and the Administration's global war on terrorism (the "GWOT"). Called "Bounding the Global War on Terrorism," and written by Dr. Jeffrey Record, a professor at the Air Force's Air War College, the report says the global war on terrorism has been "dangerously indiscriminate and ambitious" and "strategically unfocussed"; while the Iraq War was "unnecessary and unrealistic." The result is that the Army is "near the breaking point."

The Record study is a scathing attack on the Bush Administration for bungling the war on terrorism, with grave potential strategic consequences: "The administration has postulated a multiplicity of enemies, including rogue states; weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferators; terrorist organizations of global, regional and national scope; and terrorism itself. It also seems to have conflated them into a monolithic threat, and in so doing has subordinated strategic clarity to the moral clarity it strives for in foreign policy, and may have set the United States on a course of open-ended and gratuitous conflict with states and non-state entities that pose no serious threat to the United States."

Record also zeroes in on one of Dick Cheney's obsessions, the claims that Saddam Hussein was linked to al-Qaeda: "Of particular concern has been the conflation of al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a single, undifferentiated terrorist

threat. This was a strategic error of the first order because it ignored critical differences between the two in character, threat level and susceptibility to U.S. deterrence and military action. The result has been an unnecessary preventive war of choice against a deterred Iraq, that has created a new front in the Middle East for Islamic terrorism and diverted attention and resources away from securing the American homeland against further assault by an undeterrable al-Qaeda. The war against Iraq was not integral to the GWOT, but rather a detour from it.”

Military Lawyers Dissent

A further indication of dissatisfaction within the military over the Administration’s policies steered by Cheney, is the extraordinary legal brief filed with the U.S. Supreme Court on Jan. 14, by uniformed military lawyers who have been assigned by the Pentagon to defend Guantanamo prisoners before military tribunals. In their *amicus curiae* brief, filed in the case of a number of Middle Eastern men being detained at the Guantanamo military prison, the lawyers charge that the system of military tribunals (or commissions) created by the Defense Department after Sept. 11, 2001, has created “a legal black hole” and a “monarchical regime.”

The military lawyers are not challenging the President’s right, as Commander-in-Chief, to wage war and to take enemy combatants into custody. But they strongly challenge the President’s right to try and punish such prisoners, and they call this a usurpation of the power of the judiciary. “If there is no right to civilian review, the government is free to conduct sham trials and condemn to death those who do nothing more than pray to Allah,” the brief states.

Sources have told *EIR* that the military tribunal scheme, in its original form, did not come out of the uniformed military, but was dreamed up by civilian lawyers in the Pentagon, and by the Counsel to the Vice President, David Addington, himself another veteran of the Office of Secretary of Defense during Cheney’s tenure in the early 1990s.

Documentation

‘Cheney Axis of War Had Prevailed’

Excerpts from remarks by Sen. Edward Kennedy to the Center for American Progress in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 14, 2004. Subheads have been added.

The enduring accomplishments of our nation’s leaders are those that are grounded in the fundamental values that gave birth to this great country. As our founders so eloquently

stated in the Preamble to our Constitution, this nation was founded by “We, the people—in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.” . . . In these uncertain times, it is imperative that our leaders hold true to those founding ideals and protect the fundamental trust between the government and the people. . . .

Nowhere is the danger to our country and to our founding ideals more evident than in the decision to go to war in Iraq. Former Treasury Secretary Paul O’Neill has now revealed what many of us have long suspected: that despite protestations to the contrary, the President and his senior aides began the march to war in Iraq in the earliest days of the administration, long before the terrorists struck this nation on 9/11.

The examination of the public record and of the statements of President Bush and his aides reveals that the debate about overthrowing Saddam began long before the beginning of this administration. Its roots began 13 years ago, during the first Gulf War, when the first President Bush decided not to push on to Baghdad and oust Saddam. President Bush and his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, explained the reason for that decision in their 1997 book, *A World Transformed*: “Trying to eliminate Saddam, extending the ground war into an occupation of Iraq, would have violated our guideline about not changing our objectives in midstream, and would have incurred incalculable human and political costs. We would have been forced to occupy Baghdad and, in effect, rule Iraq. The coalition would instantly have collapsed, the Arabs deserting it in anger, and other allies pulling out as well. And under those circumstances, there was no viable exit strategy we could see. . . . The United States could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land.” Those words are eerily descriptive of our current situation in Iraq.

Who Made the Decision

During the first Gulf War Paul Wolfowitz was a top adviser to then Secretary of Defense Cheney. And he disagreed strongly with the decision by the first President Bush to stop the war. . . . And after that war ended, Wolfowitz convened a Pentagon working group to make the case that regime change in Iraq could easily be achieved by military force. The Wolfowitz group concluded that the U.S. forces could win unilaterally, or with the aid of a small group of coalition forces, within 54 days of mid- to very high-intensity combat. . . .

As soon as the current President Bush took office in 2001, he brought a group of conservatives with him, including Wolfowitz, Rumsfeld and others, who had been outspoken advocates for most of the previous decade for the forcible removal of Saddam Hussein. At first, President Bush was publicly silent on the issue. But as Paul O’Neill has told us, the debate was alive and well.

I happen to know Paul O’Neill, and I have great respect

for him. I worked with him on key issues of job safety and health care when he was at Alcoa in the 1990s. He's a person of great integrity, and intelligence and vision, and he had impressive ideas for improving the quality of health care in the Pittsburgh area. And it's easy to understand why he was so concerned by what he heard about Iraq in the Bush Administration. . . .

But there was resistance to military intervention by those who felt that the existing sanctions on Iraq should be strengthened. Saddam had been contained and his military capabilities had been degraded by the Gulf War and years of UN sanctions and inspections. At a press conference a month after the inauguration, Secretary of State Colin Powell said: "We have kept him contained, kept him in his box." The next day, Secretary Powell very clearly stated that Saddam "has not developed any significant capabilities with respect to weapons of mass destruction."

Then, on Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists attacked us, and everything changed. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld immediately began to link Saddam Hussein to al-Qaeda and the attacks. . . .

The advocates of war in Iraq desperately sought to make the case that Saddam was linked to 9/11 and al-Qaeda, and that he was on the verge of acquiring a nuclear capability. They created an Office of Special Projects [Plans] in the Pentagon to analyze the intelligence for war. They bypassed the traditional screening process and put pressure on the intelligence offices to produce the desired intelligence and analysis. . . .

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, President Bush himself made clear that his highest priority was finding Osama bin Laden. . . .

Soon after the war began in Afghanistan, however, the President started laying the groundwork in public to shift attention to Iraq. . . .

In his State of the Union address, President Bush broadened his policy on Afghanistan to other terrorist regimes. He unveiled the "axis of evil"—Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Those three words forged the lockstep linkage between the Bush Administration's top political advisers and the "big three" of Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz. We lost our previous clear focus on the most imminent threat to our national security—Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda terrorist network. . . .

President Bush devoted 12 paragraphs in his State of the Union address to Afghanistan, and 29 paragraphs to the global war on terrorism. But he had nothing to say about bin Laden, and only a single fleeting mention of al-Qaeda. Why not more? Because of an extraordinary policy coup. Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, the axis of war, had prevailed. The President was changing the subject to Iraq. . . .

'Those Were Cheney's Words'

It was Vice President Cheney who outlined to the country the case against Iraq that he had undoubtedly been making to President Bush all along. On Aug. 26, 2002 in an address

to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Vice President argued against UN inspections in Iraq and announced that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction, meaning chemical and biological weapons. He also said: "We now know that Saddam has resumed his efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. . . . Many of us are convinced that Saddam will acquire nuclear weapons fairly soon." Those were Cheney's words. It is now plain what was happening. The drumbeat for war was sounding. It drowned out those who believed that Iraq posed no imminent threat. On Aug. 29, just two days after Cheney's speech, President Bush signed off on the plan. . . .

As 2003 began, many in the military and foreign policy communities urged against a rush to war. United Nations weapons inspectors were in Iraq searching for weapons of mass destruction. Saddam appeared to be contained. There was no evidence that Iraq had been involved in the attacks on Sept. 11. Many insisted that bin Laden and al-Qaeda and North Korea were greater threats. But their concerns were dismissed out of hand. Cheney, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz insisted that Iraq was the issue, and that war against Iraq was the only option, with or without international support. They convinced the President that the war would be brief; that American forces would be welcomed as liberators, not occupiers; and that ample intelligence was available to justify going to war.

The gross abuse of intelligence was on full display in the President's State of the Union address last January, when he spoke the now infamous 16 words: "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities [sic] of uranium from Africa." The President did not say that U.S. intelligence agencies agreed with this assessment; he simply and deviously said "The British government has learned. . ." And as we all know now, that allegation was false. It had already been debunked a year earlier by the U.S. intelligence community. Yet it was included in the President's State of the Union address. . . .

The administration is vindictive and mean-spirited. When Ambassador Joe Wilson publicly challenged the administration for wrongly claiming that Iraq had purchased uranium from Niger for its nuclear weapons program, the administration retaliated against his wife, potentially endangering her life and her career.

[T]he war in Iraq itself has not made America safer. . . . It has made the war on terrorism harder to win.

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