

Bush and Cheney Discussed Plame Prior to Leak

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The Public Record

Thursday, June 05, 2008

Favoured : 3

Published in : [Politics](#)

Editor's Note: *In a new tell-all book, former White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan details the behind-the-scenes discussions related to the leak of covert CIA operative Valerie Plame. In one passage, McClellan wrote that President Bush authorized the leak in July 2003 of a highly classified National Intelligence Estimate, undercutting claims by Bush some three months later that he was unaware of the nuances of the case. On Tuesday, Congressman Henry Waxman renewed calls for the Justice Department to release transcripts of Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney's interviews with federal investigators in 2004 related to the leak probe based on information contained in McClellan's book and new information Waxman obtained suggesting that Cheney may have ordered his deputy to leak to reporters Plame's association with the CIA. In light of these new developments, [The Public Record](#) is republishing Jason Leopold's investigative report from April 2006 that first exposed Bush and Cheney discussing Plame weeks before White House officials leaked her identity to the media.*

In early June 2003, Vice President Dick Cheney met with President Bush and told him that CIA officer Valerie Plame Wilson was the wife of Iraq war critic Joseph Wilson and that she was responsible for sending him on a fact-finding mission to Niger to check out reports about Iraq's attempt to purchase uranium from the African country, according to current and former White House officials and attorneys close to the investigation to determine who revealed Plame-Wilson's undercover status to the media.

Other White House officials who also attended the meeting with Cheney and President Bush included former White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, then-National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, her former deputy Stephen Hadley, and Deputy White House Chief of Staff Karl Rove.

This information was provided to this reporter by attorneys and US officials who have remained close to the case. Investigators working with Special Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald compiled the information after interviewing 36 Bush administration officials over the past two and a half years.

The revelation puts a new wrinkle into Special Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald's two-year-old criminal probe into the leak and suggests for the first time that President Bush knew from early on that the vice president and senior officials on his staff were involved in a coordinated effort to attack Wilson's credibility by leaking his wife's classified CIA status.

Now that President Bush's knowledge of the Plame Wilson affair has been exposed, there are thorny questions about whether the president has broken the law - specifically, whether he obstructed justice when he was interviewed about his knowledge of the Plame Wilson leak and the campaign to discredit her husband.

Details of President Bush's involvement in the Plame Wilson affair came in a 39-page court document filed by Fitzgerald late Wednesday evening in US District Court in Washington.

Fitzgerald's court filing was made in response to attorneys representing I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Vice President Dick Cheney's former chief of staff, who was indicted on five counts of perjury, obstruction of justice, and lying to investigators for not telling the grand jury he spoke to reporters about Plame Wilson.

Libby's attorneys have in the past months argued that the government has evidence that would prove Libby's innocence and that the special prosecutor refuses to turn it over to the defense. Fitzgerald said in court documents he has already turned over thousands of pages of evidence to Libby's attorneys and that further discovery requests have been overly broad.

The attorneys and officials close to the case said over the weekend that the hastily arranged meeting was called by Cheney to "brief the president" on Wilson's increasing public criticism about the White House's use of the Niger intelligence and the negative impact it would eventually have on the administration's credibility if the public and Congress found out it was true, the sources said.

Bush said publicly in October 2003 that he had no idea who was responsible for unmasking Plame Wilson to columnist Robert Novak and other reporters. The president said that he welcomed a Justice Department investigation to find out who was responsible for it.

But neither Bush nor anyone in his inner circle let on that just four months earlier, they had agreed to launch a full-scale campaign to undercut Wilson's credibility by planting negative stories about his personal life with the media.

A more aggressive effort would come a week or so later when Cheney - who, sources said, was "consumed" with retaliating against Wilson because of his attacks on the administration's rationale for war - met with President Bush a second time and told the president that there was talk of "Wilson going public" and exposing the flawed Niger intelligence.

It was then that Cheney told Bush that a section of the classified National Intelligence Estimate that purported to show Iraq did seek uranium from Niger should be leaked to reporters as a way to counter anything Wilson might seek to publish, these sources said.

Throughout the second half of June, Andrew Card, Karl Rove, and senior officials from Cheney's office kept Bush updated about the progress of the campaign to discredit Wilson via numerous emails and internal White House memos, these sources said, adding that some of these documents were only recently turned over to the special counsel.

One attorney close to the case said that Bush gave Cheney permission to declassify the NIE and that Cheney told Libby to leak it to Bob Woodward, the Washington Post's assistant managing editor, which Libby did on June 27, 2003.

But Woodward told Libby shortly after he received the information about the NIE that he would not be writing a story about it for the Post but that he would use the still classified information for the book he was writing at the time, Plan of Attack.

Woodward would not return calls for comment nor would Libby's attorneys Ted Wells and William Jeffress.

Libby told Cheney that he had a good relationship with New York Times reporter Judith Miller and that he intended to share the NIE with her. Libby met with Miller on July 8, 2003 and disclosed the portion of the NIE that dealt with Iraq and Niger to her.

According to four attorneys who last week read a transcript of President Bush's interview with investigators, Bush did not disclose to the special counsel that he was aware of any campaign to discredit Wilson. Bush also said he did not know who, if anyone, in the White House had retaliated against the former ambassador by leaking his wife's undercover identity to reporters.

Attorneys close to the case said that Fitzgerald does not appear to be overly concerned or interested in any alleged discrepancy in Bush's statements about the leak case to investigators.

But "if Mr. Libby continues to misrepresent the government's case against him ... President Bush and most certainly Vice President Cheney may be caught in an embarrassing position," one attorney close to the case said. "Mr. Fitzgerald will not hesitate to remind Mr. Libby of his testimony when he appeared before the grand jury."

Speaking to college students and faculty at California State University Northridge last week, Wilson said that after President Bush cited the uranium claims in his State of the Union address he tried unsuccessfully for five months to get the White House to correct the record.

"I had direct discussions with the State Department, Senate committees," Wilson said during a speech last Thursday. "I had numerous conversations to change what they were saying publicly. I had a civic duty to hold my government to account for what it had said and done."

Wilson said he was rebuffed at every instance and finally decided to write an op-ed in the New York Times and expose the administration for knowingly "twisting" the intelligence on the Iraqi nuclear threat to make a case for war. The op-ed appeared in the newspaper July 6, 2003. Wilson wrote that had he personally traveled to Niger to check out the Niger intelligence and had determined it was bogus.

"Nothing more, nothing less than challenging the government to come clean on this matter," Wilson said. "That's all I did."

Last update : Thursday, June 05, 2008