

**GOVERNMENT  
EXHIBIT**

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## A Question Of Trust (Time)

By MICHAEL DUFFY AND JAMES CARNEY

Time Magazine

July 14, 2003

The State of the Union message is one of America's greatest inventions, conceived by the Founders to force a powerful Chief Executive to report to a public suspicious of kings. Delivered to a joint session of Congress in democracy's biggest cathedral, it is the most important speech a President gives each year, written and rewritten and then polished again. Yet the address George W. Bush gave on Jan. 28 was more consequential than most because he was making a revolutionary case: why a nation that traditionally didn't start fights should wage a pre-emptive war. As Bush noted that night, "Every year, by law and by custom, we meet here to consider the state of the union. This year we gather in this chamber deeply aware of decisive days that lie ahead."

Just how aware was Bush of the accuracy of what he was about to say? Deep in his 5,400-word speech was a single sentence that had already been the subject of considerable internal debate for nearly a year. It was a line that had launched a dozen memos, several diplomatic tugs of war and some mysterious, last-minute pencil editing. The line—"The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa"—wasn't the Bush team's strongest evidence for the case that Saddam wanted nuclear weapons. It was just the most controversial, since most government experts familiar with the statement believed it to be unsupportable.

Last week the White House finally admitted that Bush should have jettisoned the claim. Designed to end a long-simmering controversy, the admission instead sparked a bewildering four days of changing explanations and unusually nasty finger pointing by the normally disciplined Bush team. That performance raised its own questions, which went to the core of the Administration's credibility: Where else did the U.S. stretch evidence to generate public support for the war? If so many doubted the uranium allegations, who inside the government kept putting those allegations on the table? And did the CIA go far enough to keep the bad intelligence out?

To that last question, at least, the answer was: apparently not. In what looked like a command performance of political sacrifice, the head of the agency that expressed some of the strongest doubts about the charge took responsibility for the President's unsubstantiated claim. "The CIA approved the President's State of the Union address before it was delivered," said CIA Director George Tenet in a statement. "I am responsible for the approval process in my agency. And... the President had every reason to believe that the text presented to him was sound. These 16 words should never have been included in the text written for the President."

Yet the controversy over those 16 words would not have erupted with such force were they not emblematic of larger concerns about Bush's reasoning for going to war in the first place. Making the case against Saddam last year, Bush claimed that Iraq's links to al-Qaeda and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) made the country an imminent threat to the region and, eventually, the U.S. He wrapped the evidence in the even more controversial doctrine of pre-emption, saying America could no longer wait for proof of its enemies' intentions before defending itself

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overseas—it must sometimes strike first, even without all the evidence in hand. Much of the world was appalled by this logic, but Congress and the American public went along. Four months after the war started, at least one piece of key evidence has turned out to be false, the U.S. has yet to find weapons of mass destruction, and American soldiers keep dying in a country that has not greeted its liberators the way the Administration predicted it would. Now the false assertion and the rising casualties are combining to take a toll on Bush's standing with the public.

#### FOLLOW THE YELLOWCAKE ROAD

How did a story that much of the national-security apparatus regarded as bogus wind up in the most important speech of Bush's term? The evidence suggests that many in the Bush Administration simply wanted to believe it. The tale begins in the early 1980s, when Iraq made two purchases of uranium oxide from Niger totaling more than 300 tons. Known as "yellowcake," uranium oxide is a partially refined ore that, when combined with fluorine and then converted into a gas, can eventually be used to create weapons-grade uranium. No one disputes that Iraq had a nuclear-weapons program in the 1980s, but it was dismantled after the first Gulf War. Then, in the mid-1990s, defectors provided evidence that Saddam was trying to restart the program.

Finally, late in 2001, the Italian government came into possession of evidence suggesting that Iraq was again trying to purchase yellowcake from Niger. Rome's source provided half a dozen letters and other documents alleged to be correspondence between Niger and Iraqi officials negotiating a sale. The Italians' evidence was shared with both Britain and the U.S.

**When it got to Washington, the Iraq-Niger uranium report caught the eye of someone important: Vice President Dick Cheney. Cheney's chief of staff, Lewis Libby, told TIME that during one of his regular CIA briefings, "the Vice President asked a question about the implication of the report." Cheney's interest hardly came as a surprise: he has long been known to harbor some of the most hard-line views of Saddam's nuclear ambitions. It was not long before the agency quietly dispatched a veteran U.S. envoy named Joseph Wilson to investigate. Wilson seemed like a wise choice for the mission. He had been a U.S. ambassador to Gabon and had actually been the last American to speak with Saddam before the first Gulf War. Wilson spent eight days sleuthing in Niger, meeting with current and former government officials and businessmen; he came away convinced that the allegations were untrue. Wilson never had access to the Italian documents and never filed a written report, he told TIME. When he returned to Washington in early March, Wilson gave an oral report about his trip to both CIA and State Department officials. On March 9 of last year, the CIA circulated a memo on the yellowcake story that was sent to the White House, summarizing Wilson's assessment. Wilson was not the only official looking into the matter. Nine days earlier, the State Department's intelligence arm had sent a memo directly to Secretary of State Colin Powell that also disputed the Italian intelligence. Greg Thielmann, then a high-ranking official at State's research unit, told TIME that it was not in Niger's self-interest to sell the Iraqis the destabilizing ore. "A whole lot of things told us that the report was bogus," Thielmann said later. "This wasn't highly contested. There weren't strong advocates on the other side. It was done, shot down."**

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Except that it wasn't. By late summer, at the very moment that the Administration was gearing up to make its case for military mobilization, the yellowcake story took on new life. In September, Tony Blair's government issued a 50-page dossier detailing the case against Saddam, and while much of the evidence in the paper was old, it made the first public claim that Iraq was seeking uranium from Africa. At the White House, Ari Fleischer endorsed the British dossier, saying "We agree with their findings."

#### THE DOUBTS THAT DIDN'T GO AWAY

By now, a gap was opening behind the scenes between what U.S. officials were alleging in public about Iraq's nuclear ambitions and what they were saying in private. After Tenet left a closed hearing on Capitol Hill in September, the nuclear question arose, and a lower-ranking official admitted to the lawmakers that the agency had doubts about the veracity of the evidence. Also in September, the CIA tried to persuade the British government to drop the allegation completely. To this day, London stands by the claim. In October, Tenet personally intervened with National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice's deputy, Stephen Hadley, to remove a line about the African ore in a speech that Bush was giving in Cincinnati, Ohio. Also that month, CIA officials included the Brits' yellowcake story in their classified 90-page National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's weapons programs. The CIA said it could neither verify the Niger story nor "confirm whether Iraq succeeded in acquiring uranium ore and/or yellowcake" from two other African nations. The agency also included the State Department's concerns that the allegations of Iraq's seeking yellowcake were "highly dubious"—though that assessment was printed only as a footnote.

At a time when it was trying to build public support for the war, the Bush Administration did not share these internal doubts about the evidence with the public. In December, for example, the State Department included the Niger claim in its public eight-point rebuttal to the 12,200-page arms declaration that Iraq made to the U.N. two weeks earlier. And a month later, in an op-ed column in the New York Times titled "Why We Know Iraq Is Lying," top Bush aide Rice appeared to repeat the yellowcake claim, saying, "The declaration fails to account for or explain Iraq's efforts to get uranium from abroad." Nor did the U.S. pass on what it knew to international monitors. When the International Atomic Energy Agency, a U.N. group, asked the U.S. for data to back up its claim in December, Washington sat tight and said little for six weeks.

The battle between believers and doubters finally came to a head over the State of the Union speech. Weeks of work had gone into the address; speechwriters had produced two dozen drafts. But as the final form was taking shape, the wording of the yellowcake passage went down to the wire. When the time came to decide whether Bush was going to cite the allegation, the CIA objected—and then relented. Two senior Administration officials tell TIME that in a January conversation with a key National Security Council (nsc) official just a few days before the speech, a top cia analyst named Alan Foley objected to including the allegation in the speech. The nsc official in charge of vetting the sections on WMD, Special Assistant to the President Robert Joseph, denied through a spokesman that he said it was O.K. to use the line as long as it was sourced to British intelligence. But another official told TIME, "There was a debate about whether to cite it on our own intelligence. But once the U.K. made it public, we felt comfortable citing what they had learned." And so the line went in. While some argued last week that the

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fight should have been kicked upstairs to Rice for adjudication, White House officials claim that it never was.

#### NUCLEAR FALLOUT

But if it was good enough for bush, it wasn't good enough for others. Colin Powell omitted any reference to the uranium when he briefed the U.N. Security Council just eight days later; last week he told reporters that the allegation had not stood "the test of time." Nor did Tenet mention the allegation when he testified before the Senate panel on Feb. 11. "If we were trying to peddle that theory, it would have been in our white paper," an intelligence official told TIME. "It would have been in lots of places where it wasn't. A sentence made it into the President's speech, and it shouldn't have."

Did Bush really need to push the WMD case so hard to convince Americans that Saddam should be ousted? In a TIME poll taken four weeks before coalition forces invaded, 83% of Americans thought war was justified on the grounds that "Saddam Hussein is a dictator who has killed many citizens of his Iraq." That's one claim that has never been contested. In the same TIME poll, however, 72% of Americans thought war was also justified because it "will help eliminate weapons of mass destruction in Iraq."

The unseen threat of a Saddam with WMD was an argument that played to Bush's strengths. As a politician, Bush has always been better at asserting his case than at making it. After 9/11, his sheer certitude—and the faith Americans had in his essential trustworthiness—led Americans to overwhelmingly support him. The yellowcake affair may have already changed that relationship, for as the casualties mount in Iraq, polls suggest that some of that faith is eroding. Which means the next time Bush tells the nation where he wants to go, it may not be so quick to follow.

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**After the War Intelligence (NYT)**  
By David E. Sanger and James Risen  
The New York Times  
July 12, 2003

The director of central intelligence, George J. Tenet, accepted responsibility yesterday for letting President Bush use information that turned out to be unsubstantiated in his State of the Union address, accusing Iraq of trying to acquire uranium from Africa to make nuclear weapons.

Mr. Tenet issued a statement last night after both the president and his national security adviser placed blame on the C.I.A., which they said had reviewed the now discredited accusation and had approved its inclusion in the speech.

For days, the White House has tried to quiet a political storm over the discredited intelligence, which was among many examples cited in Mr. Bush's speech to justify the need for confronting Iraq to force the dismantlement of Saddam Hussein's arms programs.

"I gave a speech to the nation that was cleared by the intelligence services," the president said after a meeting in Uganda with President Yoweri K. Museveni, for the first time placing implicit blame for his error on those agencies.

Condoleezza Rice, the president's national security adviser, speaking to reporters on Air Force One en route to Uganda, said, "The C.I.A. cleared the speech in its entirety."

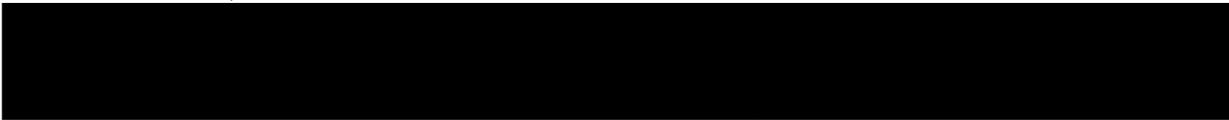
Although Mr. Tenet's statement did not say he had personally cleared the speech, he said in his statement, "I am responsible for the approval process in my agency."

In an administration that prides itself on discipline and message control, the question of how faulty intelligence got into Mr. Bush's speech has become an unusual exercise in finger-pointing, with top officials and agencies blaming one another.

In his State of the Union address, Mr. Bush cited an Iraqi attempt to purchase uranium from Africa as part of evidence of Mr. Hussein's unconventional weapons and Iraq's desire to reconstitute its nuclear program.

"The British government," the president said, "has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

Mr. Tenet said yesterday: "The president had every reason to believe that the text presented to him was sound. These 16 words should never have been included in the text written for the president."



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In the classified version of a National Intelligence Estimate prepared by intelligence agencies last fall, the allegation about Iraq's activities in the African nation of Niger was included along with a footnote that said the State Department had its doubts about whether it was justified by the evidence. Somalia and Congo were also cited in the estimate.

Ms. Rice said the administration did not learn until March that the documents that were the primary basis for the assertion about Niger had been forged. She also said she did not learn about the mission to Niger last year by a former American ambassador -- who found no evidence to back up the charge -- until a month ago, when she was asked about it during a television interview.

In recent days, the C.I.A.'s spokesman said Mr. Tenet had never personally approved Mr. Bush's use of the African uranium example in the speech. But Dan Bartlett, one of Mr. Bush's closest aides, who drafted parts of the address, said in an interview that the wording had been "cleared at the highest levels of the C.I.A." which would seem to mean Mr. Tenet or his deputy, John McLaughlin.

Inside the National Security Council, some senior staff members gave a slightly different account, saying the paper trail suggests the claim about Africa may have been approved at the agency's midlevels, by a senior expert on nuclear proliferation and arms control.

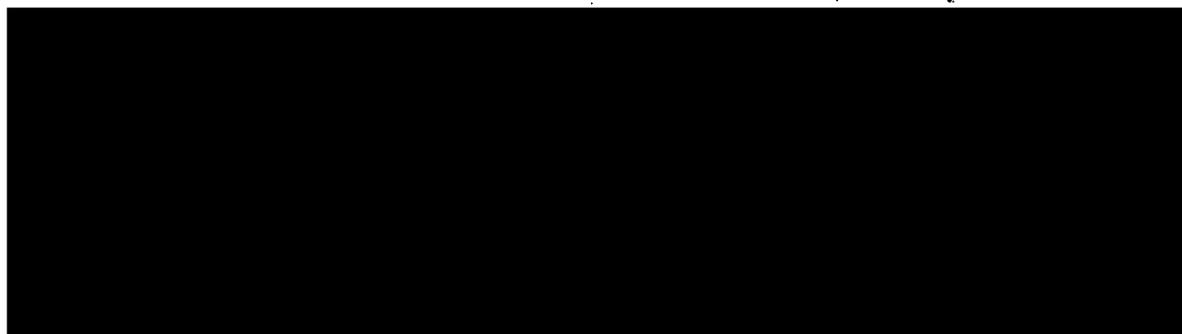
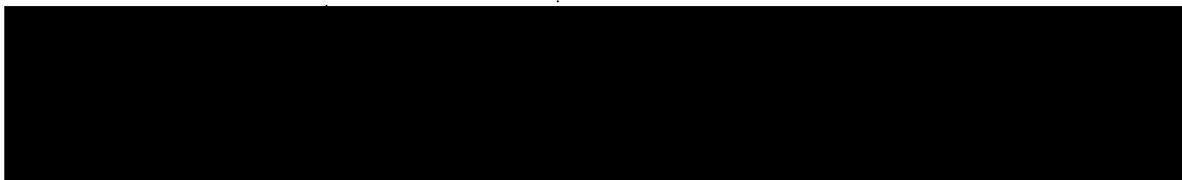
A senior administration official said Ms. Rice had telephoned Mr. Tenet before she spoke to reporters yesterday. Asked whether the White House continued to have confidence in Mr. Tenet, Ms. Rice replied, "Absolutely."

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But Mr. Tenet was clearly an official under fire yesterday. Senator Pat Roberts of Kansas, the Republican chairman of the select committee on intelligence, said he was "disturbed by what appears to be extremely sloppy handling of the issue from the outset by the C.I.A."

He added that he was most worried about "a campaign of press leaks by the C.I.A. in an effort to discredit the president." He accused Mr. Tenet of failing to warn Mr. Bush about any doubts in the agency.

The Senate, by voice vote on Thursday night, called for an investigation into what led to Mr. Bush's statement.



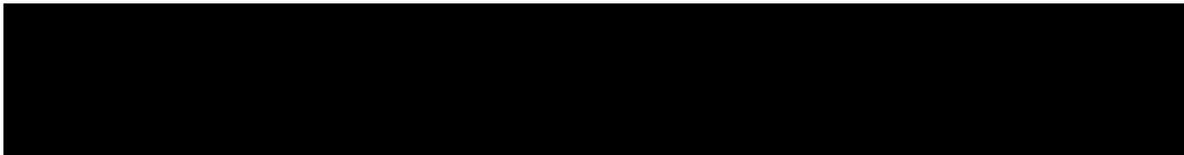
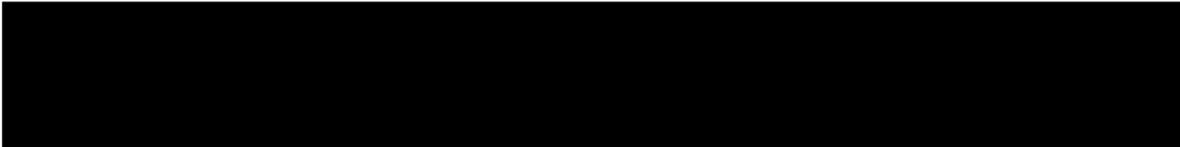
Ms. Rice said yesterday that the new wording Mr. Bush used in the address had been reviewed and changed by the C.I.A., whose officials initially expressed concern about some "specifics about amount and place." After the changes, she said, "the C.I.A. cleared the speech in its entirety."

**"If the C.I.A., the director of central intelligence, had said, 'Take this out of the speech,' it would have been gone, without question," she added. "If there were doubts about the underlying intelligence, those doubts were not communicated to the president, to the vice president or to me."**

Mr. Bush, Ms. Rice and Mr. Powell all insist that the political furor over one line in Mr. Bush's speech obscures what they say is a larger truth: that Mr. Hussein was trying to reconstitute his nuclear program, and had sought to obtain key components for it around the world.

So far, investigators on the ground in Iraq have found no evidence of that rekindled effort, though a barrel full of nuclear centrifuge plans and equipment was found buried for the last 12 years in the garden of one nuclear engineer in Baghdad. This strongly suggests that Mr. Hussein's government was holding onto key designs in case they had the opportunity to restart the program.

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In the case of the uranium, Mr. Bush actually cited British intelligence because it had published the allegation about Africa in an unclassified report in September. "It cited a public document, which probably helped," Ms. Rice explained yesterday. "It was also Britain, which probably helped."

**When the first rumors of a purchase effort in Niger surfaced, at the beginning of 2002, Vice President Dick Cheney's office asked the C.I.A. to assess the information. Apparently without the knowledge of Mr. Cheney or Mr. Tenet, the agency sent a former ambassador, Joseph C. Wilson IV, to investigate. He reported back that the government of Niger had denied the report, and that other indications were that it was bogus.**

Before the speech, the crucial conversations between the C.I.A and White House over whether to include the African reference in the State of the Union address were held between Robert G. Joseph, a nuclear proliferation expert at the National Security Council, and Alan Foley, a proliferation expert at the C.I.A., according to government officials.

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There is still a dispute over what exactly was said in their conversations. Mr. Foley was said to recall that before the speech, Mr. Joseph called him to ask about putting into the speech a reference to reports that Iraq was trying to buy hundreds of tons of yellowcake from Niger. Mr. Foley replied that the C.I.A. was not sure that the information was right.

Mr. Joseph then came back to Mr. Foley and pointed out that the British had already included the information in a report. Mr. Foley said yes, but noted that the C.I.A. had told the British that they were not sure that the information was correct. Mr. Joseph then asked whether it was accurate that the British reported the information. Mr. Foley said yes.

Other government officials said, however, that Mr. Joseph did not recall Mr. Foley's raising any concerns about the reliability of the information. If he had, they said, Mr. Joseph would have made sure that the reference was not included in the speech.

The White House would not say what the C.I.A. officers had been asked, or whether the issue had been raised with Mr. Tenet, who sees the president daily and speaks often with Ms. Rice and Stephen J. Hadley, the deputy national security adviser.

The White House said it was stunned to learn, after the speech, that the Niger evidence was based on false documents, and that the sources for evidence that Iraq sought the yellowcake elsewhere in Africa were far short of reliable. "What the president says has to be bulletproof," a senior American official said. "This clearly wasn't."

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**WMDs Inquiry Urged (AP)**

By Deb Riechmann

The Associated Press

July 9, 2003

**Democrats pressed for deeper investigation of pre-war U.S. intelligence efforts Tuesday after the White House admitted President George W. Bush had erred in his State of the Union speech when he said Saddam Hussein had tried to buy uranium in Africa.**

**As weeks have passed with the American search turning up no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, criticism has been building concerning assertions the administration made as justification for the war.**

**Michael Anton, a spokesman for the White House's National Security Council, said in a statement: "We now know that documents alleging a transaction between Iraq and Niger had been forged."**

**Several investigations are underway in Congress, but Democrats said much more was needed.**

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**White House mea culpa prompts new calls for probe of prewar intelligence (AP)**

By Tom Raum  
The Associated Press  
July 9, 2003

PRETORIA, South Africa (AP) - President Bush on Wednesday defended his use of prewar intelligence on Iraq, saying he is "absolutely confident" in his actions despite the discovery that one claim he made about Saddam Hussein's weapons pursuits was based on false information.

Democrats have argued that the White House's acknowledgment that Bush misspoke earlier this year when he said Saddam tried to buy uranium in Africa justifies a broad review of how the administration used prewar intelligence on Iraq.

Bush, at a news conference here with South African President Thabo Mbeki during a five-nation African tour, took on his critics.

"There's no doubt in my mind that when it's all said and done the facts will show the world the truth," he said. "There's going to be, you know, a lot of attempts to try to rewrite history, and I can understand that. But I'm absolutely confident in the decision I made."

Bush did not directly address the misstatement itself, made during his State of the Union address. Instead, he defended his decision to go to war based on a larger body of information.

"There is no doubt in my mind that Saddam Hussein was a threat to the world peace," the president said. "And there's no doubt in my mind that the United States ... did the right thing in removing him from power."

[REDACTED]

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The Bush administration used purported Iraqi weapons of mass destruction as a major justification for the war, and the failure to find such weapons so far has generated intense criticism from some Democrats.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer set off a furor Monday when, under questioning by reporters, he acknowledged that Bush was incorrect in his State of the Union speech when he said "the British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

Wednesday, Fleischer said that "this type of information should not have risen to the level of a presidential speech."

But, he added, "this is a classic issue of hindsight is 20-20."

"There's a bigger picture here," Fleischer told reporters traveling with Bush to South Africa. He repeated administration assertions that Saddam Hussein was trying to reconstitute a weapons of mass destruction program.

Other White House officials elaborated on Fleischer's remarks Tuesday, saying the United States had additional evidence of Iraq's nuclear intentions.

Michael Anton, a spokesman for the National Security Council, said that when Bush made the speech, there was other intelligence indicating Iraq had tried to acquire uranium from several countries in Africa. This other information, however, was not detailed or specific enough to prove such a contention, he said.

The claim rested significantly on a letter or letters between officials in Iraq and Niger that were obtained by European intelligence agencies. The communications are now accepted as forged.

Anton acknowledged such on Tuesday, but also said the documents were not the sole basis for the Iraq-Africa statement in Bush's speech.

"Because of this lack of specificity, this reporting alone did not rise to the level of inclusion in a presidential speech," Anton said. "That said, the issue of Iraq's attempts to acquire uranium from abroad was not an element underpinning the judgment reached by most intelligence agencies that Iraq was reconstituting its nuclear weapons program."

On Sunday, Joseph Wilson, an envoy sent to Africa to investigate allegations about Iraq's nuclear weapons program, said the Bush administration manipulated his findings, possibly to strengthen the rationale for war.

Wilson insisted in an NBC-TV interview that his doubts about the purported Iraq-Niger connection reached the highest levels of government, including Vice President Dick

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Cheney's office. In fact, he said, Cheney's office inquired about the purported Niger-Iraq link.

Fleischer said Monday that Cheney did not request information about Wilson's mission to Niger, was not informed of his mission and was not aware of it until press reports accounted for it.

[REDACTED]

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Ari Fleischer Gaggle  
July 7, 2003

Q Can you give us the White House account of Ambassador Wilson's account of what happened when he went to Niger and investigated the suggestions that Niger was passing yellow cake to Iraq? I'm sure you saw the piece yesterday in The New York Times.

MR. FLEISCHER: Well, there is zero, nada, nothing new here. Ambassador Wilson, other than the fact that now people know his name, has said all this before. But the fact of the matter is in his statements about the Vice President -- the Vice President's office did not request the mission to Niger. The Vice President's office was not informed of his mission and he was not aware of Mr. Wilson's mission until recent press accounts -- press reports accounted for it.

So this was something that the CIA undertook as part of their regular review of events, where they sent him. But they sent him on their own volition, and the Vice President's office did not request it. Now, we've long acknowledged -- and this is old news, we've said this repeatedly -- that the information on yellow cake did, indeed, turn out to be incorrect.

Q Which gets to the crux of what Ambassador Wilson is now alleging -- that he provided this information to the State Department and the CIA 11 months before the State of the Union and he is amazed that it, nonetheless, made it into the State of the Union address. He believes that that information was deliberately ignored by the White House. Your response to that?

MR. FLEISCHER: And that's way, again, he's making the statement that -- he is saying that surely the Vice President must have known, or the White House must have known. And that's not the case, prior to the State of the Union.

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**Retired Envoy: Nuclear Report Ignored; Bush Cited Alleged Iraqi Purchases (WPost)**

By Richard Leiby and Walter Pincus

The Washington Post

July 6, 2003

Joseph C. Wilson, the retired United States ambassador whose CIA-directed mission to Niger in early 2002 helped debunk claims that Iraq had tried to obtain uranium there for nuclear weapons, has said for the first time publicly that U.S. and British officials ignored his findings and exaggerated the public case for invading Iraq.

Wilson, whose 23-year career included senior positions in Africa and Iraq, where he was acting ambassador in 1991, said the false allegations that Iraq was trying to buy uranium oxide from Niger about three years ago were used by President Bush and senior administration officials as a central piece of evidence to support their assertions that Iraq had reconstituted its nuclear weapons program.

"It really comes down to the administration misrepresenting the facts on an issue that was a fundamental justification for going to war," Wilson said yesterday. "It begs the question, what else are they lying about?"

The Niger story -- one piece of the administration's larger argument that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction posed an imminent threat -- was not debunked until shortly before the war began, when the United Nations' chief nuclear inspector told the Security Council the documents were forgeries. The White House has acknowledged that some documents were bogus, but a spokesman has said there was "a larger body of evidence suggesting Iraq attempted to purchase uranium in Africa," indicating it may have involved a country other than Niger.

For the past year, Wilson has spoken out against the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, but until he was interviewed by The Post and wrote an op-ed article scheduled for publication in today's New York Times, he had never disclosed his key role in the Niger controversy. He said Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was not an immediate threat before the war, and predicted a long and bloody U.S. occupation. In April, before U.S. troops entered Baghdad, he predicted on [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) that Hussein "is preparing to go underground to fight a guerrilla campaign, assuming he is still alive. . . . If our presence is seen as an occupation, rather than a liberation, it is entirely possible that Saddam thinks he can rebound. . . ." Wilson was the last U.S. diplomat to meet with Hussein:

The CIA turned to Wilson in February 2002 because of his extensive experience with intelligence and his relationship with senior officials in Niger. He also earned praise from the first Bush administration as the charge d'affaires in Baghdad, when he secured the release of 150 Americans held hostage as "human shields" after Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait in 1990.

Wilson's account of his eight-day mission to Niger, including a statement he was told Vice President Cheney's staff was interested in the truth of the allegations, has not been contradicted by administration officials, but they have played down his importance and denied his accusations.

A senior administration official said yesterday that Wilson's mission originated within the CIA's clandestine service after Cheney aides raised questions during a briefing. "It was not orchestrated by the vice president" and did not need high-level approval, the official said. He added that it was reported in a routine way that he said was "not memorable," did not mention Wilson's name and did not say anything about forgeries.

Wilson has been interviewed recently by the House and Senate intelligence committees, which are expected to focus on who in the National Security Council and the vice president's office had access to a CIA cable, sent March 9, 2002, that did not name Wilson but said Niger officials had denied the allegations.

In Wilson's view, key questions in any inquiry would include who in the White House knew the details of his mission and who was told of his conclusions. "When you task a serious organization like the CIA [to answer a question], it doesn't go into a black hole," he said.

The senior administration official said the CIA officers who dealt with Wilson "may have oversold" the role of Cheney's office.

Wilson, 53, who was the Clinton administration's senior director of African affairs on the National Security Council, said he took no pay for the assignment, only expenses. He said he also told CIA officers he was no secret agent: "I don't do clandestine -- I only do discreet."

A private consultant since leaving government in 1998, Wilson had contacts in Niger dating to his first posting there as a foreign service officer in the 1970s. He also served in Togo, Burundi, South Africa and Congo. In 1992, he became ambassador to Gabon and the Republic of Sao Tome and Principe.

Wilson said he went to Niger skeptical, knowing that the structure of the uranium industry -- controlled by a consortium of French, Spanish, German and Japanese firms -- made it highly unlikely that anyone would officially deal with Iraq because of U.N. sanctions. Wilson never saw the disputed documents but talked with officials whose signatures would have been required and concluded the allegations were almost certainly false. Back in Washington, he briefed CIA officers but did not draft his own report.

In September 2002, the story of Iraq purchasing uranium in Africa made its way into a published British dossier on Hussein's weapons of mass destruction that got wide coverage. Wilson was perplexed.

"Given the fact that we were in close cooperation, we were close allies, we were going to war together over weapons of mass destruction, we were building the case for our respective populations, it was unfathomable to me that this information would not have been shared" with the British, he said.

In late September 2002, CIA Director George J. Tenet and top aides made two presentations in closed session on Capitol Hill and were asked about the published reports. They said there was

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information that Iraq had attempted to buy uranium but that there was some doubt the information was credible. But on Dec. 19, 2002, a State Department fact sheet listed attempts to purchase uranium, specifically from Niger, as an item omitted from Iraq's supposedly full disclosure of its weapons of mass destruction program.

Bush, in his State of the Union speech on Jan. 23, declared that "the British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

After Bush's speech, Wilson said he contacted an associate at the State Department, noted that the Niger story had been debunked and said, "You might want to make sure the facts are straight."

In early February, the CIA received a translation of the Niger documents and in early March, copies of the documents, which the agency turned over to the International Atomic Energy Agency accompanied with some of the CIA's doubts about their credibility.

After IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei announced they were bogus, Wilson read a March 8 front-page story in The Washington Post that quoted an unidentified U.S. official as saying, "We fell for it."

The quote provided "a wake-up call . . . that somebody was not being candid about this Niger business," he said. Interviewed that day on CNN about the Niger documents, Wilson did not mention his 2002 trip but said of the forgeries: "It taints the whole case that the government is trying to build against Iraq. . . . I think it's safe to say that the U.S. government should have or did know that this report was a fake before Dr. ElBaradei mentioned it in his report at the U.N. yesterday."

In June, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice said in an interview on NBC's "Meet the Press" that top administration officials were unaware of the faked documents at the time of the State of the Union speech. "Maybe someone knew down in the bowels of the agency, but no one in our circles knew that there were doubts and suspicions that this might be a forgery."

**But Wilson said he considers that "inconceivable." Based on his experience handling intelligence at the NSC, Wilson does not believe his report would have been buried. Having been told the vice president's office was interested, he said, "If you are senior enough to ask this question, you are well above the bowels of the bureaucracy. You are in that circle."**

Last week, Wilson said of Hussein: "I'm glad the tyrant is gone. Everybody is glad the tyrant is gone." But he does not believe the war was ever about eliminating Hussein's weapons of mass destruction. It was, he said, a political push to "redraw the map of the Middle East."

While his family prepared for a Fourth of July dinner, he proudly showed a reporter photos of himself with Bush's parents. On a den wall was a framed cable to him in Baghdad, from the first President Bush, dated Nov. 20, 1990:

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"What you are doing day in and day out under the most trying conditions is truly inspiring," the cable states. "Keep fighting the good fight. You and your stalwart colleagues are always in our thoughts and prayers."

Wilson observed: "I guess he didn't realize that one of these days I would carry that fight against his son's administration."

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**Report Cast Doubt on Iraq-Al Qaeda Connection (WPost)**

By Walter Pincus

The Washington Post

June 22, 2003

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## Sunday Show Transcripts 07/13/03

### Fox News Sunday

RICE: I saw the speech after it has been struck. But let me just say, the Cincinnati speech was constructed apparently with a reference to a specific incident, one specific incident, based on a specific source. The director told Steve Hadley in a brief conversation that he didn't want--taken out, without question, taken out.

Now, the State of the Union was then constructed with language that was broader than a single incident and a single place and a particular quantity.

SNOW: So you...

RICE: It was based instead on broader information, including the British report, which the British say is broader.

SNOW: All right, so when people are saying that the sentence in the State of the Union is simply a clever way of covering up a discredited story about yellow cakes from Niger, you say that's not true. There were more sources of what?

RICE: There were broader statements taken out of the NIE than this...

SNOW: The National Intelligence Estimate.

RICE: The National Intelligence Estimate--than that particular story which had been in the Cincinnati speech.

We then sent what was in the State of the Union out for clearance. There was some discussion about what should be said, how much could be said. The sentence that was agreed upon, which is the one that appeared, "The British intelligence services have found" so forth and so on, was then cleared as a part of the speech in its entirety by the DCI.

SNOW: As you know, I've worked on State of the Union addresses. And typically, guidance for that kind of language comes from your office, from the National Security Council. The CIA doesn't talk to speech writers, at least not very often.

RICE: No, that's right.

(LAUGHTER)

SNOW: So...

RICE: Well, in fact, what we do is that we put together a lot of documentation from all kinds of sources and give that to the speech writers as grist to write from.

SNOW: Yes, and you approve--I mean, quite often, your office drafts language. Did your talking points include mention of the possibility that Saddam was trying to obtain uranium from Africa?

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RICE: What was given to the speech writers was, in effect, data from various sources about the nuclear activities of Saddam Hussein. The National Intelligence Estimate had references to uranium acquisition, not only to the specific source, the specific case. And that was, I understand, given to the speech writers; they wrote it.

But what we do, Tony--and I want to be very clear--is that it is also the practice, once something is written, to send it out to the agencies and to say, "Will you stand by this?"

SNOW: Right. So you now say that it doesn't rise to the standard. Is the president mad? The president ought to be ticked about this.

RICE: The president understands that what he said was, first of all, accurate, but secondly, that we have higher standards for what he says. And the reason that we send this out in the clearance process is because we're trying to meet that higher standard.

SNOW: OK, the question that people have is--I mean, you keep talking about a higher standard, and yet this got through. There had been specific requests to delete something that was similar from an October speech. How did it happen?

RICE: Tony, first of all, it was not something that was similar. It was based on different sourcing, and it was broader. It was also, with the British report, in the British report in a way that it's actually sourced in the speech.

Now, what we have to depend on, and this is what the director said, we have to depend on the intelligence agencies to say, "No, we're not confident enough in that for the president of the United States to say it."

SNOW: Do you--I look at "The Washington Post" story and I think, you know what, this looks like something somebody at the CIA is leaking to fire back at the White House. How'd you read it?

RICE: I don't know. I don't know where the story comes from. I've said what the story is. The story is that, for Cincinnati, there was a reference in the speech that was specific to an amount, and therefore came from a particular source about a specific place. The director said, "Can't stand with that," took it out without question.

**In the State of the Union, we looked at the intelligence. We did say, do you have anything more? They said there was in the NIE, the National Intelligence Estimate, a broader story that had to do with other places in Africa. And so it says, "The British have said"--which is accurate--"The British have said that" so forth and so on.**

Now, as Director Tenet has said, he is responsible for his agency's process. I am a--have a very close working relationship with the director. We both agree it was a mistake for this to go in, because it didn't meet the president's standards.

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