

Talking PointsFALSE ALLEGATION: (Hardball 7/14)

MATTHEWS: Well, a couple of points of interest, I think, are, first of all, that the vice president's office asked the CIA to send somebody down to Niger and check on this case. They obviously reported back, so the vice president's office, which is headed by Scooter Libby, who is a foreign policy expert and an advocate of the war, I think it's fair to say -- why didn't he inform the president, inform him, go tell the president he shouldn't have said this? Forget about who put it in the speech. Why didn't he aggressively say, this shouldn't be in there.

Secondly, Steven Hadley was told by George Tenet of the CIA, that this information was bogus. Why didn't he correct it on behalf of the president?

FINEMAN: Well, I think there was definitely both political and administrative momentum inside the White House at the time from the vice president's office. Probably from parts of the Defense Department that overrode whatever cautionary signs there might have been, and said we have to make the case that not only we should go to Iraq, but that we need to go to Iraq now. I mean, these -- these things that were in the speech, Chris, are important because they went to the question of why America needed to invade now.

RESPONSE

- The Vice President's office did not request Joe Wilson's trip to Niger. As Director Tenet said in his statement on Friday, the CIA sent Wilson to Niger on its own volition. It was not in response to a specific request by the Vice President's office.

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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.

FALSE ALLEGATION (Hardball 7/14)

MATTHEWS: I want to ask you how this works, though, because the vice president in this administration has enormous influence, almost central influence. He tells the CIA to go check out this story. They come back, Joe Wilson comes back and says nothing to it. Then the vice president's office checks off or initiate this kind of language. Don't they have to explain, in the vice president's office, the chief of staff there, Scooter Libby, why they did this knowing it was false?

NOONAN: Christopher, you don't know and I don't know that they knew it was false, but let me tell you ...

(CROSSTALK)

MATTHEWS: They were told it was false by the CIA.

NOONAN: Christopher, the CIA can't say this is false. The CIA can say to the best of our understanding and interpretation of the data, we have reason to doubt this. We think it is not true. The CIA isn't a repository of unimpeachable facts. Look, when you are putting together speeches, you well remember facts are hard to come by. Data is easier to come by. Interpretation of data is easier to come by. Facts are tough.

MATTHEWS: OK. You are good, Peggy. And I just want to ask you, you think about this, how could the vice president's office or the National Security Council have gotten information on trafficking uranium in Africa except through the CIA? Do they have their own sources? We will get back to Peggy Noonan ...

NOONAN: It looks like they got it from the British. We'll be back.

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RESPONSE: (Off the Record)

- The reference to uranium and Africa was already in the draft of the State of the Union when the Vice President and I received the speech – which was relatively late in the process.
- The Vice President was unaware of the Joe Wilson trip and did not know about it until June of this year, when it was first discussed in the press.
- The Vice President did not see Wilson's trip report until recently.
- The Vice President saw the NIE last fall, which he took to be authoritative.
- The Vice President's office did not know the information was false. The Vice President heard in his regular intelligence briefing that Iraq was trying to acquire Uranium from Niger. As part of the regular briefing process, the Vice President asked a question about the implication of Iraq trying to acquire Uranium from Niger. (Note: During the course of the year, the Vice President asks the Agency many questions.) The Agency responded within a day or two. The Agency said that they had reporting suggesting the possibility of such a transaction but the reporting lacked detail. The Agency pointed out that Iraq already had 500 tons of yellowcake, portions of which came from Niger according to the IAEA.

Did anyone in the Vice President's office receive Mr. Wilson's report? And, if so, wasn't that enough to raise questions about the veracity of the Niger evidence?

- The report did not disprove allegations that Iraq had tried to purchase uranium from Niger. It reported that Nigerien official denied that sales had been made.
- Mr. Wilson never saw the documents he was allegedly trying to verify on his trip to Niger and the report did not indicate the existence of documents or say anything about forgeries.
- Mr. Wilson has said that, based on the Nigeriens' denials and the security and oversight of Niger's uranium, he was convinced Niger could not have provided

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uranium to Iraq. But, in fact, Niger did provide uranium to Iraq in the 1980's - 200 tons of which are currently under IAEA seal.

- The respect to the question of whether a sale or transfer of uranium occurred between Niger and Iraq, Mr. Wilson's report was, at best, inconclusive.
- Indeed, the report supports the intelligence community's conclusion in the NIE that Iraq was "vigorously trying to procure" more uranium from Iraq. The report stated that a Nigerien official met with an Iraqi delegation and interpreted the Iraqis' attempt to increase commercial relations to mean uranium yellowcake sales.
- With respect to whether or not Iraq had attempted to pursue such transactions, the report in fact furthered the case. He reported that the Niger officials he spoke to denied that contracts were signed to sell uranium to Iraq. He reported that based on the security and oversight of Niger's uranium he thought.

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