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MSG:	FIL		TK: 5
TO:	NATION		
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CC:	MICHAEL DUFFY		
FROM:	WASHINGTON		
SLUG:	URANIUM FROM AFRICA		
BY:	MATT COOPER	DUE:	QPS:
IN:		CLOSE: 07/11/2003	I/O: OUT
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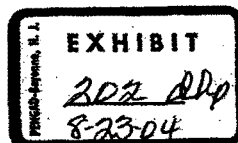
Spoke this afternoon with I. Lewis ?Scooter? Libby, the Vice President?s Chief of Staff.

He told TIME (and this is unique to TIME because he was making it up on the fly, so let's give it the full trumpet): ?The vice president heard about the possibility of Iraq trying to acquire uranium from Niger in February 2002. As part of his regular intelligence briefing, the vice president asked a question about the implication of the report. During the course of a year the vice president asked many such questions and the agency responded within a day or two. The agency said they had reporting suggesting the possibility of such a transaction. But the agency noted that the reporting lacked detail. The agency pointed out that Iraq already had 500 tons of uranium, portions of which came from Niger, according to the IAEA. The vice president was unaware of the trip by Ambassador Wilson. And didn't know about it until this year when it became public in the last month or so.?

ON DEEP BACKGROUND, MEANING, IN THE STRICT KISSINGERIAN DEFINITION , YOU CAN USE IN YOUR VOICE BUT WITHOUT QUOTATION, a few things:

--no recollection of this coming up during the visits Cheney and Libby took to Langley

--the Veep did NOT ask that this line be put into the speech. the veep was more focused on the ?project Bioshield? part of the speech. we were not involved in the part of the speech process



MC 0041

5/23/04 11:31 AM

--denies emphatically the reports that the brits handed intel directly to veep. ?we don?t get things directly? he said.

OFF THE RECORD: he reiterated the point that Ari made today that wilson, in his report, recounted speaking to an ex Niger leader who said that he?d been approached by the Iraqis about encouraging more Iraqi-Niger business. wilson, in his report, according to libby, off the record, (See ari?s statement for the full account.) interpreted this as the Iraqis seeking niger uranium, ?consistent with that the president said.? in other words, the administration is putting out the line that Wilson has omitted a key fact in his recent op-ed and public remarks and that even his own report allowed the possibility that Iraq was pursuing uranium from Niger.

--doesn?t know the chain of custody of the documents from whoever to italians to brits.

This pissing match with Wilson is where the whole story could be by Mon or TUES so suggest we play it with prominence. At home if you have questions.

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