

Mayfield, Jennifer H.

From: Laurie Myroie [sam11@erols.com]  
 Sent: Wednesday, October 01, 2003 1:38 AM  
 To: Laurie Myroie  
 Subject: Clifford May, Was it really a secret that Wilson's wife worked for the CIA?, NRO

National Review Online  
 Clifford May

September 29, 2003, 10:22 a.m.

Spy Games

Was it really a secret that Joe Wilson's wife worked for the CIA?

It's the top story in the *Washington Post* this morning as well as in many other media outlets. Who leaked the fact that the wife of Joseph C. Wilson IV worked for the CIA?

What also might be worth asking: "Who didn't know?"

I believe I was the first to publicly question the credibility of Mr. Wilson, a retired diplomat sent to Niger to look into reports that Saddam Hussein had attempted to purchase yellowcake uranium for his nuclear-weapons program.

On July 6, Mr. Wilson wrote an op-ed for the *New York Times* in which he said: "I have little choice but to conclude that some of the intelligence related to Iraq's nuclear weapons program was twisted to exaggerate the Iraqi threat."

On July 11, I wrote a piece for NRO arguing that Mr. Wilson had no basis for that conclusion — and that his political leanings and associations (not disclosed by the *Times* and others journalists interviewing him) cast serious doubt on his objectivity.

On July 14, Robert Novak wrote a column in the *Post* and other newspapers naming Mr. Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, as a CIA operative.

That wasn't news to me. I had been told that — but not by anyone working in the White House. Rather, I learned it from someone who formerly worked in the government and he mentioned it in an offhand manner, leading me to infer it was something that insiders were well aware of.

I chose not to include it (I wrote a second NRO piece on this issue on July 18) because it didn't seem particularly relevant to the question of whether or not Mr. Wilson should be regarded as

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a disinterested professional who had done a thorough investigation into Saddam's alleged attempts to purchase uranium in Africa.

What did appear relevant could easily be found in what the CIA would call "open sources." For example, Mr. Wilson had long been a bitter critic of the current administration, writing in such left-wing publications as *The Nation* that under President Bush, "America has entered one of its periods of historical madness" and had "imperial ambitions."

What's more, he was affiliated with the pro-Saudi Middle East Institute and he had recently been the keynote speaker for the Education for Peace in Iraq Center, a far-Left group that opposed not only the U.S. military intervention in Iraq but also the sanctions and the no-fly zones that protected Iraqi Kurds and Shias from being slaughtered by Saddam.

Mr. Wilson is now saying (on C-SPAN this morning, for example) that he opposed military action in Iraq because he didn't believe Saddam had weapons of mass destruction and he foresaw the possibility of a difficult occupation. In fact, prior to the U.S. invasion, Mr. Wilson told ABC's Dave Marsh that if American troops were sent into Iraq, Saddam might "use a biological weapon in a battle that we might have. For example, if we're taking Baghdad or we're trying to take, in ground-to-ground, hand-to-hand combat."

Equally, important and also overlooked: Mr. Wilson had no apparent background or skill as an investigator. As Mr. Wilson himself acknowledged, his so-called investigation was nothing more than "eight days drinking sweet mint tea and meeting with dozens of people" at the U.S. embassy in Niger. Based on those conversations, he concluded that "it was highly doubtful that any [sale of uranium from Niger to Iraq] had ever taken place."

That's hardly the same as disproving what British intelligence believed — and continues to believe: that Saddam Hussein was actively attempting to purchase uranium from somewhere in Africa. (Whether Saddam succeeded or not isn't the point; were Saddam attempting to make such purchases it would suggest that his nuclear-weapons-development program was active and ongoing.)

For some reason, this background and these questions have been consistently omitted in the Establishment media's reporting on Mr. Wilson and his charges.

There also remains this intriguing question: Was it primarily due to the fact that Mr. Wilson's wife worked for the CIA that he

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received the Niger assignment?

Mr. Wilson has said that his mission came about following a request from Vice President Cheney. But it appears that if Mr. Cheney made the request at all, he made it of the CIA and did not know Mr. Wilson and certainly did not specify that he wanted Mr. Wilson put on the case.

It has to be seen as puzzling that the agency would deal with an inquiry from the White House on a sensitive national-security matter by sending a retired, Bush-bashing diplomat with no investigative experience. Or didn't the CIA bother to look into Mr. Wilson's background?

If that's what passes for tradecraft in Langley, we're in more trouble than any of us have realized.

— *Clifford D. May, a former New York Times foreign correspondent, is president of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a policy institute focusing on terrorism.*

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