

July 8, 2004

**Senator Carl Levin (D-MI)**

**New CIA Response Raises Question Again:  
Where Does Vice President Cheney Get His Information?**

On July 7th, I finally received an unclassified answer to a Question for the Record that I had posed to Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet after he appeared before the Armed Services Committee on March 9, 2004. I am releasing this response today, because it is further evidence that Vice President Cheney has and continues to misstate and exaggerate intelligence information to the American public. This pattern, the record of which has continued to grow over time, suggests that Vice President Cheney is getting his intelligence from outside of the U.S. Intelligence Community. In February I asked him to clarify the basis for some of his statements, but he has not yet responded to my request (letter attached). I am therefore left to continue wondering what his sources are.

**Alleged Atta meeting in Prague**

Vice President Cheney persists in his representation that a leader of the 9/11 hijackers, Mohammed Atta, may have met with an Iraqi intelligence official in Prague in April, 2001. When asked on *Meet the Press* on December 9, 2001 about possible links between Iraq and the 9/11 attacks, he claimed that the April Atta meeting was “pretty well confirmed.” His subsequent statements on the Prague meeting have been more qualified, but he continues to present the alleged meeting as if it were something about which there wasn’t enough information to make an informed judgment, i.e., it may have happened, or we don’t know that it didn’t happen. Most recently, on June 17, he wrapped the suggestion in the following verbal package: “We have never been able to confirm that, nor have we been able to knock it down, we just don’t know. ... I can’t refute the Czech claim, I can’t prove the Czech claim, I just don’t know.... That’s never been proven; it’s never been refuted.”

This characterization does not fairly represent the views of the Intelligence Community. I have long been aware of this difference, and have pressed the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to declassify their views on whether they believe this meeting took place. Finally, a few days ago, they provided a public, unclassified response to that question.

The CIA states publicly, for the first time, that they lack “any credible information” that the alleged meeting took place. They note that the report was based on a single source whose “veracity... has been questioned,” and that the Iraqi intelligence official who was purportedly involved and who is now in our custody denies the meeting took place. Further, they assess that Atta is “unlikely” to have ever sought such a meeting because of the substantial risk that it would have involved. The full CIA response is attached.

As we learned Tuesday, the 9/11 Commission reviewed all of the intelligence, including investigations by both U.S. and Czech officials, and indeed all of the intelligence that the Vice

President received, and stands by its conclusion that the meeting did not occur.

The CIA and 9/11 Commission staff statements are not equivocal; while it is impossible to disprove a negative, after a systematic and thorough review of the evidence it is their judgment that the meeting was unlikely or did not take place. However, the Vice President continues to simply claim that the evidence is somehow ambiguous or unclear, and leaves out the conclusion of the CIA. On June 17, Vice President Cheney said that “we just don’t know” whether the meeting took place. He went further to suggest that the report has “never been refuted,” but acknowledged that the only piece of evidence he’d ever seen to support an Iraq connection to September 11 was “this one report from the Czechs.” This is the one report from the single source that the CIA now publicly acknowledges has been called into question.

Earlier this year in a January 9, 2004 interview with the *Rocky Mountain News*, Vice President Cheney said that, after the initial Czech report of a meeting, “we’ve never been able to collect any more information on that.” But again, this is simply not true: the 9/11 Commission lays out information that was gathered by the FBI that places Atta in the United States during the week of the alleged meeting in Prague, and the CIA clearly had information about the unreliability of the source as well as the refutation by the other purported party in the meeting.

In his numerous public statements Vice President Cheney has not been reflecting the view of the Intelligence Community on the issue of the Atta meeting. On what information has the Vice President been relying?

Outside of the Intelligence Community, the only other U.S. government source of information I know on the Iraq-al Qaeda connection, including the alleged Atta meeting in Prague, is the Office of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith. Under Secretary Feith has acknowledged that his office provided information to Vice President Cheney’s office on these matters.

In the summer of 2002, Under Secretary Feith prepared several versions of a classified briefing on the Iraq-al Qaeda relationship. The briefing was given first to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, then to Director Tenet and the CIA in August, and finally to the staffs of the Office of the Vice President (OVP) and the National Security Council (NSC) in September. The version of the briefing given to Vice President Cheney’s staff included three slides that were not included in the version given to the CIA.

One of those slides, which has since been declassified at my request and is attached, was critical of the way the Intelligence Community was assessing the Iraq-al Qaeda relationship. Under Secretary Feith has acknowledged to Armed Services Committee staff that he added two other two slides which concerned the Atta meeting issue, and which were not part of the briefing given to the CIA.

The two slides remain classified despite my request for declassification.

The Atta meeting is, unfortunately, not the only instance in which the Vice President appears to have relied on analysis other than that of the Intelligence Community. As the Intelligence Committee report to be released tomorrow will indicate, the CIA intelligence was way off, full of exaggerations and errors, mainly on weapons of mass destruction. But it was Vice President Cheney, along with other policymakers, who exaggerated the Iraq-al Qaeda relationship.

### ***Weekly Standard* article on Iraq-al Qaeda cooperation**

On January 9, 2004, Vice President Cheney told the *Rocky Mountain News* that, on the question of the relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda, “one place you ought to go look is an article that Stephen Hayes did in the *Weekly Standard* here a few weeks ago, that goes through and lays out in some detail, based on an assessment that was done by the Department of Defense and forwarded to the Senate Intelligence Committee some weeks ago. That’s your best source of information.”

The article to which Vice President Cheney astonishingly enough referred as the “best source of information” says it was based on a leaked Defense Department Top Secret/Codeword document. Aside from the sense of wonder that is engendered when the Vice President seems to confirm highly classified leaked information by calling it the “best source” of information, the Intelligence Community did not even agree with the Defense Department document on which the *Weekly Standard* article was purportedly based. On March 9<sup>th</sup>, when I asked Director Tenet, the Director of Central Intelligence, about Vice President Cheney’s comments, allegedly based on the classified Defense Department document, he said that the CIA “did not agree with the way the data was characterized in that document.” He also said that he would speak to Vice President Cheney, to tell him that the Intelligence Community had disagreements with the Defense Department document.

The document in question was prepared by Under Secretary Feith. It was very similar to the series of briefings that Under Secretary Feith had provided to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, then to Director Tenet and the CIA, and finally to the staffs of the Office of the Vice President and the National Security Council in the summer of 2002.

### **Other examples of exaggeration by Vice President Cheney**

Unfortunately, these are not the only cases where the Vice President, as just one key Administration spokesman, has exaggerated or misstated the intelligence on issues related to Iraq. In fact, they are just two examples of a consistent pattern of such exaggeration where the policymakers – not the CIA – were the exaggerators, before and after the start of the war, and continuing up to the present. There are others.

### **Iraq’s mobile biological weapons vans**

As late as January 22, 2004, Vice President Cheney said to National Public Radio that “we know for example that prior to our going in that he had spent time and effort acquiring mobile biological weapons labs, and we’re quite confident he did, in fact, have such a program.

We've found a couple of semi trailers at this point which we believe were, in fact, part of that program." He concluded by saying "I would deem that conclusive evidence, if you will, that he did in fact have programs for weapons of mass destruction."

That is not what the Intelligence Community believed at the time. David Kay, the CIA's chief inspector in Iraq said the previous October that the Iraq Survey Group had "not yet been able to corroborate the existence of a mobile BW [biological warfare] production effort," and that it was still trying to determine "whether there was a mobile program and whether the trailers that have been discovered so far were part of such a program."

When I asked Director Tenet about Vice President Cheney's comments, he said he had spoken to him about it, to tell him that was not the view of the Intelligence Community.

### **Aluminum tubes for nuclear weapons**

On September 8, 2002, Vice President Cheney made an unqualified statement about the aluminum tubes on *Meet the Press*:

"He [Saddam] is trying, through his illicit procurement network, to acquire the equipment he needs to be able to enrich uranium to make the bombs."

Tim Russert: "Aluminum tubes."

VP Cheney: "Specifically aluminum tubes. ... it is now public that, in fact, he has been seeking to acquire, and we have been able to intercept and prevent him from acquiring through this particular channel, the kinds of tubes that are necessary to build a centrifuge.... But we do know, with absolute certainty, that he is using his procurement system to acquire the equipment he needs in order to enrich uranium to build a nuclear weapon."

There was a fundamental debate within the Intelligence Community before the war as to the intended purpose of the aluminum tubes that Iraq was trying to import. The Department of Energy, the Nation's foremost nuclear weapons experts, and the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, did not believe the aluminum tubes were for centrifuges to make nuclear weapons. Instead, they believed they were for conventional artillery rockets. But Vice President Cheney did not acknowledge any division within the Intelligence Community. He stated that the U.S. knew "with absolute certainty" that Iraq was trying to obtain the tubes for nuclear weapons purposes.

Tomorrow the CIA will be properly called to account for their failures expressed in Phase I of the Intelligence Committee report. Phase II will follow, regarding the policymakers' use of intelligence.

The CIA's belated public acknowledgment to my earlier question that the Intelligence Community has no credible evidence of an Iraqi-al Qaeda meeting in April 2001 dramatizes the need for that Phase II review.