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Precedence: ROUTINE

Date: 03/28/2005

To: Washington Field

From: Washington Field

Contact: SA [redacted]

Approved By: [redacted] *DPm*

Drafted By: *cmp* [redacted] *cmp*

Case ID #: (S) [redacted] (Pending) [redacted] (S)

b1
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(U) Title: ~~(S)~~ UNKNOWN SUBJECT(S);
FALSE INFORMATION PROVIDED TO
U.S. GOVERNMENT RE IRAQI EFFORTS
TO OBTAIN URANIUM FROM NIGER;
FCI-PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT (X)

(U) Synopsis: ~~(S)~~ Sends newspaper/magazine/Internet articles to
file.

~~(S)~~ (U) Derived From: ~~G-3~~
Declassify On: ~~X1~~

(U) Details: ~~(S)~~ Included as attachments to this EC are the
below listed newspaper/magazine/Internet articles regarding
captioned investigation.

06/12/2003, "CIA Did Not Share Doubt on Iraq Data," The
Washington Post

07/16/2003, "Ecco il Falso Dossier sull'Uranio di Saddam,"
www.la Repubblica.it

07/16/2003, "FBI Looking into Forged Iraq-Niger Documents,"
CNN.com

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07/16/2003, "Forged Iraq Documents Were Full of Flaws,"
abcnews.go.com

07/20/2003, "Uranium Claim Was Known for Months to Be Weak,"
[The Washington Post](#)

08/2003, "Nuove Rivelazioni su 'Una Menzogna di Stato,'"
AltriLuoghi AltriCorpi, www.luoghicorporei.org

08/10/2003, "Depiction of Threat Outgrew Supporting Evidence,"
[The Washington Post](#)

06/27/2004, "European Intel Officials: Illicit Uranium Sales
Negotiated Years Before Iraq War," [The Financial Times](#)

06/28/2004, "Iraq: Evidence of Niger Uranium Trade 'Years
Before War,'" [The Financial Times](#)

08/02/2004, "French Probe Led to 'Fake Niger Uranium Papers,'"
[The Financial Times](#)

08/04/2004, "Nigergate, from the ex-007 false files even to
the French, [Corriere della Sera](#) (Note: Translation by
FBIHQ/OIO/Translation Services.)

08/04/2004, "The Nigergate Case is Re-Opened in Italy," [Il
Sole 24 Ore](#) (Note: Translation by FBIHQ/OIO/Translation
Services.)

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Revealed, [L'Unità](#) (Note: Translation by FBIHQ/OIO/
Translation Services.)

08/19/2004, "International Mysteries--The Key Man of
'Nigergate:' ROCCO," [Panorama](#) (Note: Translation by
FBIHQ/OIO/Translation Services.)

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09/05/2004, "Italy Eyes French Ruse to Dupe U.S. Over Iraq,"
washingtontimes.com

09/11/2004, "Italy Blames France for Niger Uranium Claim
(update IV)," www.freerepublic.com

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France," www.telegraph.co.uk

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the Truth About Nigergate,'" www.globalresearch.ca

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09/23/2004, "FBI Could Talk to Source of Forged Niger Papers.
I Did," The Hill

10/25/2004, "What Wilson Didn't Say About Africa,"
www.freerepublic.com

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The Washington Post

THURSDAY, JUNE 12, 2003

V1

CIA Did Not Share Doubt on Iraq Data

Bush Used Report Of Uranium Bid

By WALTER PINCUS
Washington Post Staff Writer

A key component of President Bush's claim in his State of the Union address last January that Iraq had an active nuclear weapons program—its alleged attempt to buy uranium in Niger—was disputed by a CIA-directed mission to the central African nation in early 2002, according to senior administration officials and a former government official. But the CIA did not pass on the detailed results of its investigation to the White House or other government agencies, the officials said.

The CIA's failure to share what it knew, which has not been disclosed previously, was one of a number of steps in the Bush administration that helped keep the uranium story alive until the eve of the war in Iraq, when the United Nations' chief nuclear inspector told the Security Council that the claim was based on fabricated evidence.

A senior intelligence official said the CIA's action was the result of "extremely sloppy" handling of a central piece of evidence in the administration's case against then-Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. But, the official added, "It is only one fact and not the reason we went to war. There was a lot more."

CIA Knew

INTELLIGENCE, *From A1*

However, a senior CIA analyst said the case "is indicative of larger problems" involving the handling of intelligence about Iraq's alleged chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs and its links to al Qaeda, which the administration cited as justification for war. "Information not consistent with the administration agenda was discarded and information that was [consistent] was not seriously scrutinized," the analyst said.

As the controversy over Iraq intelligence has expanded with the failure so far of U.S. teams in Iraq to uncover proscribed weapons, intelligence officials have accused senior administration policymakers of pressuring the CIA or exaggerating intelligence information to make the case for war. The story involving the CIA's uranium-purchase probe, however, suggests that the agency also was shaping intelligence on Iraq to meet the administration's policy goals.

Sen. Bob Graham (D-Fla.), former chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence and a candidate for president, yesterday described the case as "part of the agency's standard operating procedure when it wants to advance the information that supported their [the administration's] position and bury that which didn't."

Armed with information purportedly showing that Iraqi officials had been seeking to buy uranium in Niger one or two years earlier, the CIA in early February 2002 dispatched a retired U.S. ambassador to the country to investigate the claims, according to the senior U.S. officials and the former government official, who is familiar with the event. The sources spoke on condition of anonymity and on condition that the name of the former ambassador not be disclosed.

During his trip, the CIA's envoy spoke with the president of Niger and other Niger officials mentioned as being involved in the Iraqi effort, some of whose signatures purportedly appeared on the documents.

After returning to the United States, the envoy reported to the CIA that the uranium-purchase story was false, the sources said. Among the envoy's conclusions was that the documents may have been forged because the "dates were wrong and the names were wrong," the former U.S. government official said.

However, the CIA did not include details of the former ambassador's report and his identity as the source, which would have added to the credibility of his findings, in its intelligence reports that were shared with other government agencies. Instead, the CIA only said that Niger government officials had denied the attempted deal had taken place, a senior administration said.

"This gent made a visit to the region and chatted up his friends," a senior intelligence official said, describing the agency's view of the mission. "He relayed back to us that they said it was not true and that he believed them."

Thirteen months later, on March 8, Mohamed ElBaradei, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, informed the U.N. Security Council that after careful scrutiny of the Niger documents, his agency had reached the same conclusion as the CIA's envoy. ElBaradei deemed the documents "not authentic," an assessment that U.S. officials did not dispute.

Knowledgeable sources familiar with the forgery investigation have described the faked evidence as a series of letters between Iraqi agents and officials in Niger. The documents had been sought by U.N. inspectors since September 2002 and they were delivered by the United States and Britain last February.

The President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, a panel of nongovernment experts that is reviewing the handling of Iraq intelligence, is planning to study the Niger story and how it made its way into Bush's State of the Union address on Jan. 28. In making the case that Iraq had an ongoing nuclear weapons program, Bush declared that "the British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."

That same month, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and national security adviser Condoleezza Rice also mentioned Iraq's alleged attempts to buy uranium, and the story made its way into a State Department "fact sheet" as well.

Rep. Henry A. Waxman (Calif.), the ranking Democrat on the Government Reform Committee and a leading administration critic, wrote the president June 2 asking why Bush had included the Niger case as part of the evidence he cited against Iraq. "Given what the CIA knew at the time, the implication you intended—that there was credible evidence that Iraq sought uranium from Africa—was simply false," Waxman said.

The CIA's decision to send an emissary to Niger was triggered by questions raised by an aide to Vice President Cheney during an agency briefing on intelligence circulating about the purported Iraqi efforts to acquire the uranium, according to the senior officials. Cheney's staff was not told at the time that its concerns had been the impetus for a CIA mission and did not learn it occurred or its specific results.

Cheney and his staff continued to get intelligence on the matter, but the vice president, unlike other senior administration officials, never

mentioned it in a public speech. He and his staff did not learn of its role in spurring the mission until it was disclosed by New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof on May 6, according to an administration official.

When the British government published an intelligence document on Iraq in September 2002 claiming that Baghdad had "sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa," the former ambassador called the CIA officers who sent him to Niger and was told they were looking into new information

aim on Iraq Uranium Was Shaky

about the claim, sources said. The former envoy later called the CIA and State Department after Bush's State of the Union speech and was told "not to worry," according to one U.S. official.

Later it was disclosed that the United States and Britain were basing their reports on common information that originated with forged documents provided originally by Italian intelligence officials.

CIA Director George J. Tenet, on Sept. 24, 2002, cited the Niger evidence in a closed-door briefing

to the Senate intelligence committee on a national intelligence estimate of Iraq's weapons programs, sources said. Although Tenet told the panel that some questions had been raised about the evidence, he did not mention that the agency had sent an envoy to Niger and that the former ambassador had concluded that the claims were false.

The Niger evidence was not included in Secretary of State Colin L. Powell's Feb. 5 address to the Security Council in which he disclosed some intelligence on Iraq's alleged weapons programs and

links to al Qaeda because it was considered inaccurate, sources said.

Even so, the Voice of America on Feb. 20 broadcast a story that said: "U.S. officials tell VOA [that] Iraq and Niger signed an agreement in the summer of 2000 to resume shipments for an additional 500 tons of yellow cake," a reference to the uranium. The VOA, which is financed by the government but has an official policy of editorial independence, went on to say that there was no evidence such shipments had taken place.

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Speciali

Dossier

Sondaggi

Fu un diplomatico africano a consegnare ai servizi italiani e inglesi le carte citate da George W. Bush

Ecco il falso dossier sull'uranio di Saddam

07/10/2003

Tutto iniziò da un misterioso furto nell'ambasciata del Niger a Roma di CARLO BONINI e GIUSEPPE D'AVANZO

LA STORIA, come una spy-story senza soverchia fantasia, inizia con un'effrazione.

L'appartamento è al quinto piano di via Antonio Baiamonti 10. Nel quartiere Mazzini, a Roma. La porta è solida e blindata e protegge gli uffici dell'ambasciata del Niger nella Capitale. Un corridoio triste divide gli uffici del consigliere



Un deposito di barre di uranio

politico dalla stanza dell'ambasciatore. In una notte tra il 29 dicembre del 2000 e l'1 gennaio del 2001, i "soliti ignoti" cercano confusamente qualcosa, mettendo a soqquadro l'ambasciata. Fogli dappertutto, cassette rovesciate, armadi aperti. Quando il 2 gennaio, di buon mattino, il secondo segretario per gli affari amministrativi Arfou Mounkaila denuncia il furto ai carabinieri della stazione Trionfale, deve però ammettere che quei ladri sono stati alquanto bizzarri. Tanto rumore, e fatica, per nulla. Se si esclude un orologio di acciaio Breitling e tre piccole boccette di profumo, i "ladri" non hanno portato via altro. Apparentemente. Oggi, se si bussa alla porta dell'ambasciata e si fa qualche domanda su quel curioso furto si ottiene da una gentile signora un sorriso e queste parole: "Tutto comincia da lì, tutto comincia con quel furto".

Dall'effrazione in via Baiamonti nasce l'affare che porterà ventiquattro mesi dopo, il 28 gennaio 2003, George W. Bush a pronunciare le 16 parole del discorso sullo stato dell'Unione ("...Il governo inglese ha appreso che Saddam ha recentemente cercato di acquisire significative quantità di uranio dall'Africa...") che oggi lo tengono pericolosamente in bilico sul baratro dell'Iraqgate. O Nigergate, se preferite. Comunque, un affare che prende forma in Italia perché a Roma accadono quattro fatti che indirizzeranno Bush nella direzione di quelle avventate parole: 1) È il Sismi, tra l'ottobre e il novembre del 2001, a entrare in contatto con un diplomatico africano che vende i falsi documenti (i 6 fogli riprodotti in queste pagine) su un traffico di "500 tonnellate di uranio puro l'anno, da consegnare in due tranches" tra il Niger e l'Iraq.

2) È a Roma che l'MI6, il controspionaggio inglese, entra in

Invia questo a

> Ecco il falso ds sull'uranio di S

DALL'ARCHIVIO di Repubblica.it

Bagdad, attacca due convogli Us.

Palazzo Chigi "Il dossier urani non è roba nosti

Iraqgate, accusi alla Rice: "Sape e ha taciuto"

Iraq, Al Qaeda i gli attacchi ai m

Bagdad, insedia il nuovo governi

La Cia: "Sull'ura abbiamo sbaglia

Uccisi altri tre soldati Usa

Saddam parla su al Jazera e tv libanese

Blair difende la guerra: "Giusto battere Saddam

Bagdad, uccisi d soldati Usa

Giornalista ingle ucciso a Bagdad

Saddam: "Irach combattete gli i

Bagdad: "Aggua contro i soldati l

DOSSIER

La guerra in Ira

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possesso di quei documenti.

3) È il Sismi a informare della vicenda, come da prassi, la presidenza del Consiglio (attraverso il Cesis) e la Farnesina (attraverso il gabinetto del ministro).

4) È il direttore del Sismi, Niccolò Pollari, nel novembre del 2002, a confermare al Comitato parlamentare di controllo sui servizi di sicurezza che "il Servizio è in possesso di documentazione che prova il commercio di uranio puro tra un paese centroafricano e l'Iraq".

* * *

L'appartamento di via Baiamonti è da anni una delle postazioni di ascolto dell'intelligence militare italiana. Lo è dal 1983, da quando il Sismi riuscì a mettere le mani su una richiesta di uranio al Niger avanzata da Saddam. Il lavoro di ascolto mette a fuoco il filo diretto che l'ambasciatore nigerino Adamou Chekou (oggi consigliere del presidente del Niger Tandja Mamadou) ha con la diplomazia irachena a Roma. E, soprattutto, con Wissam Al Zahawie, ambasciatore di Bagdad accreditato presso la Santa Sede. È un'attività spionistica "interna" che incrocia i report della divisione "R" (Ricerche), incaricata delle operazioni all'estero. A Niamey, capitale del Niger, l'intelligence italiana, con la collaborazione degli agenti inglesi, lavora al dossier Adm (Armi di distruzione di massa) dell'Iraq.

Queste indagini fanno un salto tra gli ultimi giorni di ottobre 2001 e i primi giorni di novembre. Riferisce a Repubblica una fonte del Sismi: "In quei giorni, un diplomatico di un Paese africano, rappresentato con un'ambasciata a Roma, entra in contatto con il Sismi. E offre un carteggio che lui ritiene preziosissimo per il nostro lavoro". Nel carteggio ci sono cifrari; una corrispondenza relativa a un contratto di spedizione di uranio da trasferire in Iraq con nave via Lomè (Togo) da Cotonou in Benin (dove vengono stoccate tutte le 2.900 tonnellate di uranio puro estratte nel 2000 dalle miniere nigerine di Arlit e Akouta) e, soprattutto, documenti diplomatici:

- un telex datato 1 febbraio 1999 dell'ambasciatore nigerino di Roma Chekou al ministro degli esteri di Niamey;
- una lettera datata 30 luglio 1999 dal ministero degli affari esteri all'ambasciata di Roma;
- una lettera indirizzata al presidente della Repubblica del Niger, datata 27 luglio 2000;
- un "protocollo d'intesa" tra i governi nigerino e iracheno "relativo alla fornitura d'uranio siglata il 5 e 6 luglio 2000 a Niamey". Il protocollo ha un allegato di due pagine dal titolo "Accord".

* * *

L'intelligence italiana acquista i documenti "a scatola chiusa". O forse, se ha ragione il ministro degli Esteri Franco Frattini ("I servizi italiani non hanno mai fornito alcuna documentazione"), ne media l'acquisto a favore degli inglesi dell'MI6. A guardare con occhio sgombro i documenti, la loro infondatezza balza agli occhi. Come ha scritto Seymour Hersh il 31 marzo 2003 sul settimanale New Yorker: "La lettera datata 10 ottobre 2000 (si tratta del protocollo d'intesa tra Niger e Iraq *n.d.r.*) è firmata da Allele Habibou, ministro degli esteri e della cooperazione, cessato dall'incarico nel 1989. Un'ulteriore lettera (del 27 luglio 2000 *n.d.r.*) ha un testo così grossolano che se ne sarebbe accorto

chiunque usando Google su Internet". E si potrebbe aggiungere che 500 tonnellate di uranio puro sono una quantità così importante che avrebbe dovuto insospettire chiunque abbia una qualche confidenza con quel Paese e con quel prodotto. O ancora che la lettera del 30 luglio 1999 fa riferimento ad accordi raggiunti a Niamey il 29 giugno 2000. Che la lettera del 27 luglio 2000 al presidente del Niger ha il suo timbro e la sua firma.

A bocce ferme, si può capire però dove si nasconde il trucco che inganna. Il diplomatico che vende i documenti è perfettamente a conoscenza delle intercettazioni (telefonate, fax, telex) sull'ambasciata nigerina dell'intelligence italiana. Infila quindi, come primo documento del fascicolo che offre, il telex 003/99/ABNI/Rome, indirizzato al ministero degli Affari esteri del Niger. Si legge: "Ho l'onore di portare a vostra conoscenza che l'ambasciata irachena presso la Santa Sede, mi informa che sua Eccellenza Wissam Al Zahawie, ambasciatore iracheno presso la Santa Sede, effettuerà una missione ufficiale nel nostro Paese in qualità di rappresentante di Saddam, presidente della Repubblica irachena. Sua Eccellenza Zahawie arriverà a Niamey...".

Questo telex (intercettato) è già nel "dossier Niger" di Forte Braschi. La circostanza conferma agli agenti italiani che "quella roba è buona" o quanto meno attendibile. E, "buono" viene dunque ritenuto anche il resto della documentazione. Quindi il messaggio del 30 luglio con cui si chiede "la risposta per la fornitura d'uranio"; la nota confidenziale del 27 luglio che certifica l'avvenuto accordo (n[ro] 381-NI 2000) per la "fornitura di 500 tonnellate di uranio" e, naturalmente, il protocollo di intesa tra i due governi che sembra chiudere il cerchio su una certezza: Bagdad è riuscita a procurarsi in Niger l'uranio per la costruzione di armi di sterminio.

Convienne ora tornare in via Baiamonti, negli uffici dell'ambasciata del Niger, e chiedersi: chi ha fabbricato il falso dossier? Alcune circostanze potrebbero suggerire una prima risposta. Nell'inverno del 2002, l'ambasciatore nigerino a Roma, Chekou, è richiamato a Niamey "per consultazioni". Dovrebbe fare ritorno in Italia ma, al contrario, non vi metterà più piede. Chekou viene sollevato dall'incarico e il 2 dicembre di quell'anno, al suo posto, si insedia la signora Hadjio Abdoulmoumine, in qualità di consigliere incaricato d'affari e capo della sezione consolare. È un avvicendamento di routine? O - come lascia intendere uno 007 che ha accettato di rispondere alle domande di *Repubblica* - è la conseguenza della scoperta da parte del governo nigerino che qualcosa nell'ambasciata di Roma è andato storto? Niamey è convinta che lo strano furto del gennaio 2001 sia stato, in realtà, soltanto una copertura necessaria ad accreditare la sottrazione dagli uffici di via Baiamonti del materiale cartaceo necessario a confezionare il falso dossier.

L'intelligence americana - citata anche ieri dalla rete tv Abc - è convinta al contrario che l'ambasciata del Niger a Roma sia dietro il falso. "Un diplomatico di basso livello - riferisce la fonte interpellata dalla tv statunitense - ha fabbricato il dossier fasullo in ambasciata e lo ha poi venduto al Sismi per poche migliaia di dollari". Una convinzione, questa, già espressa il 22 marzo scorso da un funzionario delle Nazioni Unite interpellato dal Washington Post: "Le lettere sul traffico di uranio sono state consegnate agli italiani da un diplomatico nigerino". La signora Hadjio Abdoulmoumine, oggi responsabile della sede diplomatica del

Niger a Roma, dice che si tratta di fantasie: "Nessun membro del corpo diplomatico è dietro i falsi: è stato lo stesso presidente del Niger Tandja Mamadou, la scorsa settimana, a riferire di persona al George W. Bush questa netta smentita".

Due fatti, tuttavia, sono certi. Che "tutto è cominciato dal furto" in via Baiamonti. Che, il 21 dicembre 2002, dopo neppure due settimane dall'avvicendamento nell'ambasciata di Roma, il governo di Niamey dirama una durissima nota sui sospetti di essere al centro di un traffico di uranio con l'Iraq. "Le accuse americane sono diffamazione. Non abbiamo mai pensato di vendere uranio all'Iraq. Non c'è mai stato alcun contratto".

* * *

Siamo ora tra la fine del 2001 e i primi giorni del 2002. Sono due mesi decisivi. Il Sismi conosce il dossier e l'MI6 ne è in possesso: "Gli inglesi lo hanno acquisito senza alcuna valutazione - spiega l'uomo di Forte Braschi - ma la fonte è stata indicata come "attendibile". Nessuno si deve meravigliare di quel che accade con quel dossier. Rientra nella rituale collaborazione d'intelligence tra Paesi alleati. È naturale che quel materiale rende più intensi sia la collaborazione che lo scambio informativo con gli inglesi. Ci sono diversi incontri, al livello più qualificato, quasi esclusivamente a Londra. Nonostante questo clima positivo, noi non sappiamo se siano stati gli inglesi a passare quella roba alla Cia. È assai probabile. Secondo la consuetudine, gli inglesi non sono tenuti a dirci a chi danno le informazioni condivise con noi".

La conferma che gli inglesi informano Langley è in una data. A febbraio del 2002, l'ex ambasciatore americano in Gabon, Joseph Wilson, viene spedito dalla Cia in Niger per verificare la fondatezza delle informazioni sul traffico di uranio ricevute dagli inglesi. Ne torna con una risposta netta. La storia è falsa. Sono dubbi che non giungono in Italia dove la storia si muove ancora e le notizie del traffico Niamey-Bagdad lasciano le palazzine di Forte Braschi per raggiungere i Palazzi nel cuore di Roma. Gli analisti della divisione "Situazione" (tengono i contatti con l'intelligence straniera e preparano le note quotidiane per il direttore) inviano il loro rapporto sulla vicenda dell'uranio nigerino. È una nota assai sintetica. "Non più di una pagina", dice la fonte di Repubblica. La notarella, che non racconta il per chi e il per come ma l'essenziale del dossier (500 tonnellate di uranio puro sono state acquistate da Bagdad), finisce sul tavolo del Cesis a Palazzo Chigi e alla Farnesina nell'ufficio di gabinetto del ministro. È la Farnesina - spiegano oggi a Forte Braschi - a sollevare "forti obiezioni" e "contestazioni" a quella informazione del nostro servizio segreto. Le maggiori perplessità giungono dalla direzione generale dei Paesi africani, diretta da un dirigente di eccellente reputazione, Bruno Cabras.

* * *

La storia dell'uranio nigerino sembra morta. Ma, il 24 settembre 2002, il governo di Tony Blair con un dossier di 50 pagine rende noto che l'Iraq ha cercato di comprare "significative quantità di uranio da un Paese africano nonostante non abbia alcun programma di nucleare civile che lo richieda". Due giorni dopo, ricorda Seymour Hersh, il segretario di Stato Colin Powell, di fronte alla commissione del Senato degli Affari esteri, cita "il tentativo iracheno di ottenere l'uranio come la prova delle sue

persistenti ambizioni nucleari". Sono le dichiarazioni che indurranno il Congresso a dare via libera con una maggioranza schiacciante al presidente Bush per le operazioni militari in Iraq.

È ottobre ormai e il direttore del Sismi, Niccolò Pollari, è ascoltato una prima volta dal Comitato parlamentare di controllo. Se ne sta sul vago. Dice e non dice. Esplicitamente tace la circostanza del "dossier uranio" acquistato a Roma e in possesso degli inglesi. Però, spiega: "Non abbiamo prove documentali, ma informazioni che un paese centroafricano ha venduto uranio puro a Bagdad". Trenta giorni dopo, il generale ci ripensa. È più esplicito. Indica "prove documentali". Sempre dinanzi al Comitato parlamentare, aggiunge il dettaglio che mancava. Dice: "Abbiamo le prove documentali dell'acquisto di uranio naturale da parte dell'Iraq nella repubblica centroafricana. Ci risulta anche il tentativo iracheno di acquistare centrifughe per l'arricchimento dell'uranio da industrie tedesche e, forse, italiane". Pollari non drammatizza. È prudente. Non disegna un quadro a tinte forti dove Bagdad appare in grado di costruire una atomica. Il direttore del Sismi sostiene che, una volta ottenuto l'uranio, una volta ottenute le centrifughe, "gli iracheni impiegheranno nella migliore delle ipotesi tre anni, e mediamente cinque, per mettere a punto, con quell'uranio arricchito, un'arma di distruzione di massa".

* * *

Nel marzo di quest'anno, il Sismi è in allarme. L'Aiea di Vienna, agenzia internazionale per l'energia atomica, ha finalmente ricevuto dagli americani ed esaminato i documenti del "dossier Niger". Il 7 marzo, Mohamed El Baradei, direttore generale dell'Aiea, spiega al Consiglio di sicurezza dell'Onu: "La mia agenzia, anche con il concorso di esperti esterni, ha concluso che i documenti in questione non sono autentici".

A Forte Braschi il clima si fa cattivo. Chi ha guardato con diffidenza e sospetto i documenti venduti dal diplomatico africano tira su la testa, dopo averla tenuta per mesi ben chinata dinanzi al successo che quelle informazioni raccoglievano sulle due sponde dell'Atlantico. Chi, di quei documenti, ha sopravvalutato la fondatezza comincia a cercare una via d'uscita alla crisi imminente sull'esterno e al prevedibile scontro interno. Come sempre capita in questi casi, dentro il servizio nascono alcune ricostruzioni che non trovano alcuna conferma e hanno, al momento, tutta l'aria di essere state costruite ad arte per sollevare un polverone che, coinvolgendo le responsabilità politiche, allontani dagli 007 critiche e censure. La prima riguarda il ruolo del presidente Berlusconi. La seconda, l'attività del suo consigliere diplomatico, Giovanni Castellaneta. Vediamo. Secondo alcune fonti del Sismi, sarebbe stato il premier italiano, in una conversazione telefonica, a confermare a George W. Bush l'esistenza del "dossier uranio" e soprattutto la sua fondatezza. Effettivamente Berlusconi parlò al telefono con il presidente degli Stati Uniti alle 8,45 (ora di Washington) del 25 gennaio 2003, a tre giorni (dunque) del discorso di Bush sullo stato dell'Unione. A cinque giorni dall'incontro a Washington dove i due presidenti convennero "sull'importanza di disarmare Saddam", ma dove - fonti diplomatiche italiane assicurano a Repubblica - "non si fece alcun accenno né al dossier uranio né dunque alla possibile attendibilità di quelle informazioni". Più o meno della stessa (velenosa) trama, è la storiella che gira intorno al nome di Giovanni Castellaneta. Il consigliere diplomatico, con buoni

legami con la comunità dell'intelligence e in corsa per diventare direttore del Cesis, avrebbe assicurato "copertura politica" al dossier del Sismi in alcuni incontri non ufficiali con i legworkers della Cia a Roma.

Su questa ricostruzione dell'affaire, interpellata da *Repubblica*, la direzione del Sismi ha scelto di non rispondere ad alcuna domanda. Di Palazzo Chigi si conosce il comunicato di domenica scorsa (13 luglio): "Le notizie di trasmissione da parte italiana ad altri organismi d'intelligence di documenti di provenienza nigerina o irachena sono destituite di ogni fondamento: i servizi italiani non hanno mai fornito alcun documento". Sono parole che non spiegano e, oggi, richiedono una pubblica spiegazione, un'assunzione politica di responsabilità, quale che sia il grado di coinvolgimento che il nostro Paese ha avuto in questa storia.

(16 luglio 2003)

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FBI looking into forged Iraq-Niger documents

WASHINGTON (CNN) --The FBI is conducting a preliminary inquiry into forged documents alleging Iraq wanted to buy uranium from Niger in an effort to find out who forged the documents and why, and whether anyone tried to influence U.S. foreign policy on Iraq, bureau officials told CNN Wednesday.

The FBI is not looking into any possible wrongdoing by the Bush administration, the officials said.

In an interview on CNN Tuesday, Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-West Virginia, who had been pushing for an FBI inquiry, disclosed that the probe had begun. Details of the probe were first reported by Newsweek.

FBI agents in the counterintelligence unit are interviewing officials from the CIA and the State Department. There are plans to dispatch agents overseas, but none have left yet.

The documents, according to officials, were first provided to Italian intelligence in late 2001. The United States did not gain possession of them until nearly a year later, in October 2002, when a journalist turned them over to the U.S. Embassy in Rome, U.S. officials said.

Sources told CNN the embassy passed them on to the CIA station chief in Rome and to officials at the State Department. A senior State Department official and another senior administration official told CNN the department did its own reporting on the documents and offered the documents to all the relevant agencies.

Government officials say CIA headquarters received the documents in February 2003, which was after the January State of the Union address in which President Bush claimed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein sought to buy uranium from Africa.

In Rome Wednesday, the head of a parliamentary committee overseeing Italian intelligence services said Italy did not produce documents. Purported Italian intelligence documents making the connection between Iraq and Niger were printed Wednesday in the Italian newspaper La Repubblica.

Committee Chief Enzo Bianco told reporters that the Italian government regularly exchanges information with allied countries, including the United States and Britain, but that the alleged intelligence documents definitely did not come from the Italian government.

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and Foreign Minister Franco Frattini have both denied allegations that Italian intelligence services provided the United States and Britain with the documents.

--CNN correspondent Kelli Arena and producers Elise Labotte and Pam Benson contributed to this report.

Find this article at:

<http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/07/16/fbi.niger>

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Forged Iraq Documents Were Full of Flaws

Forged Documents Detailing Uranium Sale Were Full of Errors

By Brian Ross

- The forged documents detailing the supposed sale of uranium from Niger to Iraq were published today in a Rome newspaper — obvious flaws and all.

Among the many glaring errors evident in the documents, which were allegedly produced by an underpaid Nigerien diplomat and published in La Repubblica, are the use of obsolete letterheads, incompatible dates and poorly forged signatures.

In one document that supposedly formalizes the sale of uranium to Iraq, dated October 2000, bears the signature of a man who has not been Niger's foreign minister since 1989.

Another letter is both addressed to the president of Niger and signed by the president of Niger — although it uses the wrong symbol for the president's office.

The forger also had a difficult time keeping his dates straight. A third document, dated July 1999, refers in the past tense to a supposed agreement in June 2000.

- [Click here to see documents](#)

A congressman is calling for an investigation.

"The U.S. government still considers these documents to be classified and the discussion about them is taking place behind closed doors," said Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif. "I think we need public hearings now that ABC has made them available and we know they are a hoax."

The same questions are being raised in Britain. Prime Minister Tony Blair also relied on the forged documents when making the case for war in Iraq.

In a combative session in Parliament, Blair insisted it still might be true that Iraq attempted to buy uranium from Niger.

"It is not beyond the bounds of possibility, let's at least put it like this, that they went back to Niger again," he said. "And that is why I stand by entirely the statement that was made in the September dossier."

Following the Paper Trail

For more than a week, the Bush administration has been trying to explain how it came to pass that the president, in his State of the Union speech, erroneously claimed that Saddam Hussein was trying to get uranium in Africa.

The president said Monday the main thrust of his case for the Iraq war is, and was, accurate. "The speeches I have given were backed by good intelligence," he said. "And I am absolutely convinced today, like I was convinced when I gave the speeches, that Saddam Hussein developed a program of weapons of mass destruction."

Bush's claim that Saddam was seeking uranium from Africa was just one part of his case for war, albeit a very important one.

However, the intelligence debacle grew out of a scam when an underpaid African diplomat who was stationed in Rome created bogus documents, which he then sold to the Italian secret service, sources said.

The Italians officially deny the sale, but intelligence sources told ABCNEWS the fake documents were produced in late 2001 in Rome, in a building that houses the tiny embassy of Niger.

The diplomat, who now has been recalled to Niger, sold the forged documents to the military branch of the Italian secret service for what sources say was a few thousand dollars.

"There had been reports circulating about Niger's sale of uranium to Iraq in the 1980s and I think this diplomat apparently saw an opportunity to make some money by feeding into the current controversy about Iraq's program of weapons of mass destruction," said counterterrorism expert Vince Cannistraro, an ABCNEWS consultant.

Niger Denies Its Diplomat Involved

In Rome today, Niger's ambassador to Italy denied the story. She said no one from her country's diplomatic corps had created any fabrication, and that Nigerien President Mamadou Tandja met with Bush last week to tell him that.

As is now known, the documents were soon spotted as forgeries by the International Atomic Energy Agency and made public when the agency's chief, Mohamed ElBaradei, testified before the U.N. Security Council on March 8.

"It was not really very difficult for us to come to the quick conclusion that these documents were forgeries," ElBaradei told Germany's ZDF Television.

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Uranium Claim Was Known for Months to Be Weak

Intelligence Officials Say 'Everyone Knew' Then What White House Knows Now About Niger Reference

Chronology of Concerns

2002

February: The CIA dispatches former ambassador Joseph C. Wilson on an eight-day trip to Niger to check on reports that Iraq had sought uranium. He deems them almost certainly false.

Feb. 24: Deputy commander of the U.S. European Command Gen. Carlton W. Fulford Jr. and the U.S. ambassador to Niger are sent to question Niger's president and others about the uranium supply. They report back to the State Department and the Pentagon their confidence that the supply, controlled by a French consortium, is secure.

March 9: A CIA cable of Wilson's trip is sent to the National Security Council and others.

Sept. 24: A British report released

By DANA PRIEST
Washington Post Staff Writer

The White House repeated a familiar retort last week to defend itself against allegations that President Bush used discredited information in his State of the Union speech about Iraq shopping for uranium oxide in Africa: "If we knew [then] what we knew today, we wouldn't have done it," as a White House official, demanding anonymity, said to a roomful of reporters Friday.

But recent revelations by officials at the CIA, the State Department, the United Nations, in Congress and elsewhere make clear that the weakness of the claim in the State of the Union speech was known and accepted by a wide circle of intelligence and diplomatic personnel scrutinizing informa-

telligence Estimate (NIE) on Iraq. Neither allegation—that Iraq sought uranium in Africa or Niger—made it into the document's "key judgments" section, according to portions of the NIE made public Friday.

On page 25, however, the NIE stated that a foreign government had reported that Niger "planned to send several tons of pure uranium (probably yellowcake) to Iraq. . . . We do not know the status of this arrangement." On the same page, it cites reports indicating Iraq's approaches to Somalia and Congo. "We cannot confirm whether Iraq succeeded in

acquiring uranium ore and/or yellowcake from these sources," the NIE stated.

On page 84, the State Department's intelligence bureau, in a dissenting analysis, said "claims of Iraqi pursuit of natural uranium in Africa are . . . highly dubious." No references to Iraq seeking yellowcake from Niger, Congo, Somalia or anywhere else appeared in the NIE that was publicly released on Oct. 4.

One reason for the public omission was the widespread skepticism about the claims, described by the senior official as "so much for so long."

Days after the Italian journalist Burba handed the documents to the U.S. Embassy in Rome on Oct. 11, intelligence officials had nearly completely discounted their substance, which mirrored the reports Wilson and others had discounted eight months earlier. In fact, when the State Department's intelligence branch distributed the documents on Oct. 16 to the CIA and other intelligence agencies, it included a caveat that the claims were of "dubious authenticity."

Similar caveats were included by the U.S. Mission to the IAEA in Vienna when the documents were turned over there on Feb. 5, said

an official familiar with documents submitted.

Four months later, in June, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice insisted that the White House had been unaware of these previous doubts. "We wouldn't have put it in the speech if we had known what we know now," Rice said. "I can assure you that the president did not knowingly, before the American people, say something that we thought to be false. It's outrageous that anybody would claim that."

Staff writer Walter Pincus contributed to this report.

AN EASY DRIVE FROM WASHINGTON

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AltriLuoghi AltriCorpi

Nuove rivelazioni su
"una menzogna di
stato"

Rubriche



Francis Kpatindé

No, Niamey non ha mai consegnato dell'uranio a Saddam Hussein. Sì, i responsabili americani hanno mentito per giustificare la loro guerra in Iraq. Ma questa nauseabonda faccenda riserva decisamente parecchie sorprese...

Quando sbarca quel martedì 26 febbraio 2002 all'aeroporto internazionale Hamani-Diori di Niamey, Joseph C. Wilson inalbera un largo sorriso. L'agente della polizia dell'aria e delle frontiere che lo accoglie non diffida affatto di quell'Americano nato il 6 novembre 1949 a Bridgeport, nel Connecticut, almeno a credere alle note che figurano sul suo passaporto diplomatico (numero 900 178 129) rilasciato il 7 ottobre 1998 a Washington.

Una volta fuori, il visitatore si precipita in una limousine dell'ambasciata americana. Direzione: l'hotel Gaweye, centro città, dove questo perfetto francofono dall'aria di *golden boy* s'installa nella suite 424/425, che offre una vista garantita sul fiume e sul ponte... Kennedy. Diplomatico riconvertito nel consiglio in strategie, Wilson è in missione a Niamey per conto del dipartimento di Stato e della CIA, la centrale d'informazione americana. Viene a cercare delle risposte a domande «della più alta importanza per la sicurezza degli Stati Uniti», secondo la formula consacrata. E, tra le altre, a questa: il Niger ha consegnato dell'uranio a Saddam Hussein? Se sì, quando ed in quali condizioni? Quali quantità di minerale sono state consegnate? E con quali complicità?

A Niamey, il democratico Wilson è in terreno noto. Vi è stato in carica dal 1976 al 1978, al principio assoluto della sua carriera, per conto dell'Usaid, l'agenzia di cooperazione del governo americano, poi vi ha soggiornato di nuovo alla fine degli anni '90, in quanto funzionario del Consiglio nazionale di sicurezza. Nella capitale, si muove dunque come un luccio nel fiume...

All'indomani del suo arrivo, ha un lungo colloquio con l'ambasciatore americano, all'epoca Barbro Owens-Kirkpatrick, una Bianca, rimpiazzata in seguito da un'Afroamericana, Gail Dennise Mathieu. Fa peraltro qualche incontro discreto, precisamente attorno alla piscina di Gaweye, poi si reca ad Arlit, a 1200 km a nord-est di Niamey. È là che si trovano le miniere d'uranio a cielo aperto. Poi, il 4 marzo 2002, lascia Niamey per Washington via Parigi, consegnando al personale dell'hotel Gaweye, che l'ha, nel frattempo, adottato e soprannominato "Bill Clinton", il ricordo di un "tipo simpatico".

Ha incontrato, come affermerà in seguito, degli ufficiali nigerini? Questi ultimi lo negano. «Non ha chiesto di essere ricevuto», si giura nel più prossimo *entourage* del capo di Stato Mamadou Tandja. «Non l'ho visto, e per dirvi tutto ignoravo tutto della sua presenza presso di noi – aggiunge il Primo ministro Hama Amadou – Non c'era alcuna ragione di farlo sorvegliare poiché all'epoca non c'era alcun caso. Ha dunque potuto circolare a suo piacimento sul nostro territorio, tanto più che i nostri rapporti con gli Americani sono buoni».

Apparentemente, Wilson non ha neanche incontrato Al Hadj Habibou Allele, il presidente del consiglio d'amministrazione

della Compagnia mineraria d'Akouta (Cominak), una delle due società (con la Società delle miniere dell'Air, Somair) che sfruttano l'uranio nigerino. «Non è venuto a bussare alla mia porta», confida, in ogni caso, questo ex ministro degli Affari esteri. Non ha maggiormente espresso, pare, il desiderio d'incontrare l'ambasciatore francese Denis Vène, il cui paese gioca peraltro un ruolo essenziale nello sfruttamento del minerale. «Non ci si può lamentare che ci abbia dimenticato, poiché la Francia intende tenersi a distanza da questa nebulosa faccenda», spiega, sotto il sigillo dell'anonimato, un diplomatico francese a Niamey.

Con le sue grate e la sua chiusura a prova, si dice, di bomba, i suoi militari (superarmati) e agenti di sicurezza nigerini, ma anche i suoi marines impavidi dalle spalle impressionanti, l'ambasciata degli Stati Uniti somiglia a un fortino. In ogni caso, «madame l'ambasciatrice Mathieu» non riceve. Il giornalista che s'interessa da vicino al dossier dell'uranio è così, educatamente ma fermamente, rispedito presso il direttore del Centro culturale americano (che è, nei fatti, il numero tre della cancelleria), il quale cerca a sua volta di defilarsi. È occorso insistere perché Louis P.Lantner, in procinto di raggiungere un nuovo incarico nell'Asia sud-orientale dopo aver passato diversi anni in Niger, finisse per aprirmi le porte del suo ufficio. Dialogo tra sordi.

- Ho qualche domanda da porvi su questa faccenda del traffico d'uranio nigerino verso l'Iraq.
- Ho istruzione dal dipartimento di Stato di non rispondere ad alcuna domanda che si riferisca a questo tema.
- Avete incontrato Wilson in occasione del suo soggiorno a Niamey?
- Non posso rispondervi.
- Cos'ha fatto qua? Chi ha incontrato?
- Non ho niente da dire.
- Avete cenato con lui?
- Gli ho giusto stretto la mano, ma vi rimando per maggiori informazioni al dipartimento di Stato, a Washington. Mi scuso, ma queste sono le istruzioni.
- Delle istruzioni scritte?
- Evidentemente.
- Posso prenderne conoscenza?
- No!

Circolare, non c'è niente da vedere...

Rientrato a Washington, Wilson, per ciò che lo concerne, ha rimesso il suo rapporto ai suoi accomandanti che si sono affrettati a seppellirlo, senza dubbio perché le sue conclusioni non erano in sintonia con i tempi. Esse sono però senza equivoci: è falso, arcifalso, che il Niger ha consegnato dell'uranio a Saddam Hussein. «Il governo e i servizi americani avrebbero potuto fare economia risparmiandosi un viaggio in Niger – ironizza un diplomatico in carica a Niamey – Sarebbero giunti alle stesse conclusioni dopo una mezza giornata di ricerche alla Biblioteca del Congresso, a Washington, o qualche ora di navigazione sul Web».

Tuttavia, a dispetto dell'evidenza, gli Americani non rinunciano. George W.Bush stesso, nel suo discorso sullo stato dell'Unione, il 28 gennaio 2003, non esita a riprendere l'accusa per proprio conto per accreditare l'idea d'una imminente minaccia nucleare irachena. Si appoggia, per questo, su dei documenti opportunamente caduti nella scarsella del governo britannico, che, afferma il presidente americano, «ha appreso che Saddam Hussein aveva in tempi recenti cercato di procurarsi delle importanti quantità di uranio in Africa». Questi documenti, come abbiamo mostrato recentemente (vedi Jeune Afrique l'intelligent n.2219*), sono dei falsi grotteschi. Vi si apprende, per esempio, che il presidente nigerino Mamadou Tandja è a tal punto esuberante da arrivare a scrivere a... se stesso. O che il presidente del consiglio

d'amministrazione della Cominak, Al Hadj Habibou Allele, che ha cessato d'essere capo della diplomazia nigerina dal 1989, era ancora in funzione nel 2000. «Dev'essere che hanno preso una carta dell'Africa, e son cascati su di noi per caso – insorge questo diplomatico dall'espressione fiorita – Per quanto grandi siano, certi paesi sono dei nani politici».

A Niamey, le accuse contro il Niger non fanno ridere nessuno, salvo forse questo funzionario che spiega che lo scandalo ha avuto almeno il merito di far uscire il paese dal suo isolamento internazionale e dal torpore. A seconda degli interlocutori, l'argomento suscita imbarazzo, fastidio, un "no comment" di circostanza, se non la schivata, questione d'evitare le rappresaglie – soprattutto da parte della Banca mondiale e del Fondo monetario internazionale, dove «gli Americani sono re» – per un paese del Sahel considerato come uno dei più poveri del pianeta.

Dall'inizio dell'affare, gli ufficiali nigerini affermano, in ogni caso, di non aver ricevuto la minima nota di protesta dalle ambasciate degli Stati Uniti e della Gran Bretagna a Niamey. «Per dei colpevoli, veniamo piuttosto viziati – sottolinea Allele – Siamo seri! Se si prelevassero 500 tonnellate d'uranio su una produzione totale stimata a 4500 tonnellate, si saprebbe. In realtà, noi non vediamo nemmeno il colore del nostro uranio. Ci ritorna sotto forma di introiti dall'esportazione». Il Primo ministro Hama Amadou rincara la dose: «Si tratta di una questione che riguarda soprattutto considerazioni di politica interna dei paesi che ci accusano. Quest'affare riguarda i grandi. Non è di nostro interesse immischiarcene. Perché dunque avremmo venduto dell'uranio a Saddam Hussein? Tutti sembrano aver dimenticato che il Niger è uno dei rari paesi africani ad aver mandato delle truppe in Kuwait in occasione della prima guerra del Golfo, nel 1991».

Come parecchi dei suoi pari dell'Africa occidentale, il capo dello Stato nigerino s'è intrattenuto con George Bush lo scorso 8 luglio a Dakar, in margine alla visita ufficiale del capo della Casa Bianca in Senegal, senza che quest'ultimo facesse d'altronde la minima allusione a questa faccenda. Secondo le nostre informazioni, al suo arrivo, quel giorno, nella capitale senegalese, Mamadou Tandja aveva intenzione d'abbordare il tema a quattr'occhi con il presidente americano, ma Abdoulaye Wade, il suo omologo senegalese, ne lo avrebbe dissuaso: «Evitiamo di guastare l'incontro con le nostre storie personali».

Lo scandalo dei falsi documenti attira a Niamey tutta una fauna d'intermediari più o meno interessati, di "consiglieri" in comunicazione e immagine, ma anche di giuristi, che fiutano il buon affare. «Con un buon avvocato, all'occorrenza americano, il Niger può guadagnare parecchio denaro a titolo di risarcimento», spiega, sicuro del fatto suo, un avvocato conosciuto del posto. «Perché sporgere querela quando nessuna imputazione pesa contro di noi? – valuta, da parte sua, il Primo ministro Hama Amadou – Il Niger è stato lavato di ogni sospetto dalle Nazioni unite. Ricordatevi della dichiarazione del direttore dell'Agenzia internazionale dell'energia atomica (AIEA), il 7 marzo scorso, davanti al Consiglio di sicurezza. Si può avere miglior difesa di quella?»

Tra i "comunicatori" che si son precipitati al capezzale del Niger figura l'Americano Herman Cohen, che si trovava a Niamey a fine luglio. Secondo le nostre informazioni, in occasione di un colloquio col presidente Tandja, questo ex sottosegretario di Stato per gli Affari africani, lobbyista titolato a Washington dal 2000, ha consigliato alle autorità di evitare ogni reazione epidermica. E proposto, di rimando, i suoi servizi per la redazione di un "Libro bianco" destinato a spiegare al pubblico americano le sottigliezze della produzione e dello sfruttamento dell'uranio del Niger.

E sia! Ma come spiegare la provenienza dei falsi documenti utilizzati dai Britannici e dagli Americani per portare delle accuse così gravi contro un paese africano e, inoltre, per tentare di giustificare la loro avventura militare in Iraq? Questi documenti son stati confezionati, come suggerisce il settimanale americano *Newsweek* nella sua edizione datata 28 luglio scorso, con delle carte intestate e dei timbri ufficiali recuperati durante il furto avvenuto nella notte tra il 1° e il 2 gennaio 2001 nei locali dell'ambasciata del Niger a Roma? «Fino a più ampie informazioni, le autorità italiane non ci hanno segnalato alcun furto nella nostra ambasciata» ci ha confidato il Primo ministro in un colloquio a Niamey. Parole che valgono una smentita. Di fatto, se, in questo scabroso affare, il Niger è "cristallino", non si può senza dubbio dire altrettanto di certi Nigerini.

Dal principio, gli sguardi si sono puntati verso l'ambasciatore del Niger in Italia, Adamou Chékou. Un tempo concessionario del costruttore automobilistico Fiat nel suo paese, quest'uomo chiaro dal viso tondo chiuso da occhiali fini e che parla correntemente l'italiano presenterebbe, agli occhi di alcuni, il profilo del colpevole ideale, poiché le sue attività toccano ad un tempo la diplomazia, la politica, e il mondo degli affari. Nominato ambasciatore in Italia dal presidente Ibrahim Mainassara Baré, al principio del 1998, non esitò a mettersi al servizio dell'avversario di quest'ultimo, il comandante Daouda Mallam Wanké. Dal 1999, era più frequentemente a Niamey che a Roma. Oggi, Adamou Chékou (che è stato recentemente rimpiazzato nella capitale italiana da un ex ministro, Mireille Ausseil) è consigliere diplomatico del presidente della Repubblica, che ha d'altronde accompagnato l'8 luglio a Dakar. Cosa pensa dunque di tutta questa

faccenda? «Per ogni domanda concernente l'uranio, bisogna che vi rivolgiate più in alto», butta là a guisa di risposta. Non se ne saprà di più.

Durante le sue (troppo) frequenti assenze da Roma, la direzione della cancelleria era assicurata dal primo consigliere, Zakaria Yaou Maiga, un uomo sul quale gravano attualmente dei pesanti sospetti, a credere alle fonti degne di fede a Niamey. Così, sarebbe questo diplomatico in carica a Roma dal 1998 che avrebbe fabbricato e consegnato (contro retribuzione?) tutti o parte dei falsi documenti in questione al Sismi, i servizi segreti italiani, i quali li avrebbero rivenduti ai loro colleghi britannici che avrebbero a loro volta condiviso la messe con la CIA. Zakaria Yaou Maiga è stato richiamato discretamente in patria, a fine luglio, mentre la sua missione in Italia non si riteneva dovesse aver termine che nel 2004. Sempre secondo le stesse fonti, sarebbe attualmente oggetto d'una inchiesta amministrativa. Colpevole? Capro espiatorio? Abbiamo contattato l'interessato, il 30 luglio a Roma, dove si trovava ancora. «Non ho nessuna dichiarazione da farvi, ma potete indirizzarvi a voci più autorevoli, a Niamey. Molte grazie e alla prossima», ci ha risposto con una voce distorta dall'emozione.

autore: Francis Kpatindé

fonte: Jeune Afrique / l'intelligent, n.2221, 3-9 agosto 2003

* In particolare l'articolo da noi tradotto col titolo , **Inchiesta su una menzogna di Stato**, N.d.T.

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face "serious
or "acknowledged"

views. The White House seldom corrects misstatements
or acknowledges

Weather

Today: Partly sunny, warm.
High 88. Low 72.
Friday: Partly sunny,
warm. High 88. Low 72.

Details, Page C12

The Washington Post

SUNDAY, AUGUST 10, 2003

125TH YEAR No. 248 R DC MD VA

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The Post Magazine, Comics
Today's Contents on Page A2

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IRAQ'S NUCLEAR FILE | Inside the Prewar Debate

Depiction of Threat Outgrew Supporting Evidence

By BANTON CULLMAN
and WALTER PINCUS
Washington Post Staff Writers

His name was Joe, from the U.S. government. He carried 40 classified slides and a message from the Bush administration.

An engineer-turned-CIA analyst, Joe had helped build the U.S. government case that Iraq posed a nuclear threat. He landed in Vienna on Jan. 22 and drove to the collection downtown.

strength aluminum tubes. The U.S. government said those tubes were for centrifuges to enrich uranium for a nuclear bomb. But the IAEA, the world's nuclear watchdog, had uncovered strong evidence that Iraq was using them for conventional rockets.

Joe described the rocket story as a transparent Iraqi lie. According to people familiar with his presentation, which circulated before and afterward among government and outside specialists, Joe said the specialized aluminum in the tubes was "overspecified," "inappropriate" and "unnecessary." No one, he

According to knowledgeable U.S. and overseas sources, experts from U.S. national laboratories reported in December to the Energy Department and U.S. intelligence analysts that Iraq was manufacturing copies of the Italian-made Medusa 81. Not only the Medusa's alloy, but also its dimensions, to the fraction of a millimeter, matched the disputed aluminum tubes.

A CIA spokesman said that Joe's last name be withheld for his safety, and said he would not be made available for an interview. The spokesman said the tubes in question "are not the size as the Medusa tubes would not identify what dis-

different U.S. intelligence agencies believed the tubes could be used to build gas centrifuges for a uranium enrichment program.

The Vienna briefing was one among many private and public forums in which the Bush administration portrayed a menacing Iraqi nuclear threat, even as important features of its evidence were being undermined. There were other White House assertions about forbidden weapons programs, including biological and chemical arms, for which there was consensus among analysts. But the danger of a nuclear-armed Saddam Hussein, more potent as an argument for war, began with weaker evidence and more

war. This article is based on interviews with analysts and policymakers inside and outside the U.S. government, and access to internal documents and technical evidence not previously made public.

The new information indicates a pattern in which President Bush, Vice President Cheney and their subordinates—in public and behind the scenes—made allegations depicting Iraq's nuclear weapons program as more active, more certain and more imminent in its threat than the data they had would support. On occasion administration advocates

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Sub-Region: Near East, West Africa, Northeast Asia, China, Arab Africa, West Europe, South Asia

Country: Iraq[0], Niger[0], North Korea, China, Libya, Italy, Iran, United Kingdom

Topic: INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL, PROLIFERATION

International Organization: IAEA

Source-Date: 06/27/2004[0]

European Intel Officials: Illicit Uranium[0] Sales Negotiated Years Before Iraq[0] War

EUP20040708000273 London The Financial[0] Times[0] (Internet Version-WWW) in English 27 Jun 04

Reference:

1. Butler Report Expected To Back Intelligence That Iraq Sought Uranium
EUP20040708000263 London The Financial[0] Times[0] (Internet Version-WWW)
English 08 Jul 04
2. UK Paper: European Intel Agencies Had Evidence of Uranium Trade Years Before War
EUP20040708000262 London The Financial[0] Times[0] (Internet Version-WWW)
English 28 Jun 04

[Report by Mark Huband in Rome: "Intelligence backs claim Iraq[0] tried to buy uranium[0]"]

[FBIS Transcribed Text]

Illicit sales of uranium[0] from Niger[0] were being negotiated with five states including Iraq[0] at least three years before the US-led invasion, senior European intelligence officials have told the Financial[0] Times[0].

Intelligence officers learned between 1999 and 2001 that uranium[0] smugglers planned to sell illicitly mined Nigerien uranium[0] ore, or refined ore called yellow cake, to Iran, Libya, China, North Korea and Iraq[0].

These claims support the assertion made in the British government dossier on Iraq's[0] weapons of mass destruction program in September 2002 that Iraq[0] had sought to buy uranium[0] from an African country, confirmed later as Niger[0]. George W. Bush, US president, referred to the issue in his State of the Union address in January 2003.

The claim that the illicit export of uranium[0] was under discussion was widely dismissed when letters referring to the sales -- apparently sent by a Nigerien official to a senior official in Saddam Husayn's regime -- were proved by the International Atomic Energy Agency to be forgeries. This embarrassed the US and led the administration to reverse its earlier claim.

But European intelligence officials have for the first time confirmed that information provided by human intelligence sources during an operation mounted in Europe and Africa produced sufficient evidence for them to believe that Niger[0] was the centre of a clandestine international trade in uranium[0].

Officials said the fake documents, which emerged in October 2002 and have been traced to an Italian with a record for extortion and deception, added little to the picture gathered from human intelligence and were only given weight by the Bush administration.

According to a senior counter-proliferation official, meetings between Niger[0] officials and would-be buyers from the five countries were held in several European countries, including Italy. Intelligence officers were convinced that the uranium[0] would be smuggled from abandoned mines in Niger[0], thereby circumventing official export controls. "The sources were trustworthy. There were several sources, and they were reliable sources," an official involved in the European intelligence gathering operation said.

The UK government used the details in its Iraq[0] weapons dossier, which it used to justify war with Iraq[0] after concluding that it corresponded with other information it possessed, including evidence gathered by GCHQ, the UK eavesdropping centre, of a visit to Niger[0] by an Iraqi official.

However, the European investigation suggested that it was the smugglers who were actively looking for markets, though it was unclear how far the deals had progressed and whether deliveries of uranium[0] were made.

[Description of Source: London The Financial[0] Times[0] (Internet Version-WWW) in English -- international respected centrist daily]

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Sub-Region: West Europe, Near East, West Africa

Country: United Kingdom, Iraq[0], Niger[0]

Topic: INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL, PROLIFERATION

International Organization: IAEA

Source-Date: 06/28/2004[0]

UK Paper: European Intel Agencies Had Evidence of Uranium[0] Trade Years Before War

EUP20040708000262 London The Financial[0] Times[0] (Internet Version-WWW) in English 28 Jun 04

[Report by Mark Huband: "IRAQ[0]: Evidence of Niger[0] uranium[0] trade 'years before war'"]

[FBIS Transcribed Text]

When thieves stole a steel watch and two bottles of perfume from Niger's[0] embassy on Via Antonio Baiamonti in Rome at the end of December 2000, they left behind many questions about their intentions.

The identity of the thieves has not been established. But one theory is that they planned to steal headed notepaper and official stamps that would allow the forging of documents for the illicit sale of uranium[0] from Niger's[0] vast mines.

The break-in is one of the murkier elements surrounding the claim -- made by the US and UK governments in the lead-up to the Iraq[0] war -- that Iraq[0] sought to buy uranium[0] illicitly

from Niger[0].

The British government has said repeatedly it stands by intelligence it gathered and used in its controversial September 2002 dossier on Iraq's[0] weapons of mass destruction programmes. It still claims that Iraq[0] had sought uranium[0] from Niger[0].

But the US intelligence community, officials and politicians, are publicly sceptical, and the public differences between the two allies on the issue have obscured the evidence that lies behind the UK claim.

Until now, the only evidence of Iraq's[0] alleged attempts to buy uranium[0] from Niger[0] had turned out to be a forgery. In October 2002, documents were handed to the US Embassy in Rome that appeared to be correspondence between Niger[0] and Iraqi officials.

When the US State Department later passed the documents to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN nuclear watchdog, they were found to be fake. US officials have subsequently distanced themselves from the entire notion that Iraq[0] was seeking to buy uranium[0] from Niger[0].

However, European intelligence officers have now revealed that three years before the fake documents became public, human and electronic intelligence sources from a number of countries picked up repeated discussion of an illicit trade in uranium[0] from Niger[0]. One of the customers discussed by the traders was Iraq[0].

These intelligence officials now say the forged documents appear to have been part of a "scam," and the actual intelligence showing discussion of uranium[0] supply has been ignored.

The fake documents were handed to an Italian journalist working for the Italian magazine *Panorama* by a businessman in October 2002. According to a senior official with detailed knowledge of the case, this businessman had been dismissed from the Italian armed forces for dishonourable conduct 25 years earlier.

The journalist -- Elisabetta Burba -- reported in a *Panorama* article that she suspected the documents were forgeries and handed them to officials at the US Embassy in Rome.

The businessman, referred to by a pseudonym in the *Panorama* article, had previously tried to sell the documents to several intelligence services, according to a western intelligence officer.

It was later established that he had a record of extortion and deception and had been convicted by a Rome court in 1985 and later arrested at least twice. The suspected forger's real name is known to the FT, but cannot be used because of legal constraints. He did not return telephone calls yesterday, and is understood to be planning to reveal selected aspects of his story to a US television channel.

The *FT* has now learnt that three European intelligence services were aware of possible illicit trade in uranium[0] from Niger[0] between 1999 and 2001. Human intelligence gathered in Italy and Africa more than three years before the Iraq[0] war had shown Niger[0] officials referring to possible illicit uranium[0] deals with at least five countries, including Iraq[0].

This intelligence provided clues about plans by Libya and Iran to develop their undeclared

nuclear programmes. Niger[0] officials were also discussing sales to North Korea and China of uranium[0] ore or the "yellow cake" refined from it: the raw materials that can be progressively enriched to make nuclear bombs.

The raw intelligence on the negotiations included indications that Libya was investing in Niger's[0] uranium[0] industry to prop it up at a time when demand had fallen, and that sales to Iraq[0] were just a part of the clandestine export plan. These secret exports would allow countries with undeclared nuclear programmes to build up uranium[0] stockpiles.

One nuclear counter-proliferation expert told the *FT*: "If I am going to make a bomb, I am not going to use the uranium[0] that I have declared. I am going to use what I acquire clandestinely, if I am going to keep the program hidden."

This may have been the method being used by Libya before it agreed last December to abandon its secret nuclear program. According to the IAEA, there are 2,600 tonnes of refined uranium[0] ore -- "yellow cake" -- in Libya. However, less than 1,500 tonnes of it is accounted for in Niger[0] records, even though Niger[0] was Libya's main supplier.

Information gathered in 1999-2001 suggested that the uranium[0] sold illicitly would be extracted from mines in Niger[0] that had been abandoned as uneconomic by the two French-owned mining companies -- Cominak and Somair, both of which are owned by the mining giant Cogema -- operating in Niger[0].

"Mines can be abandoned by Cogema when they become unproductive. This doesn't mean that people near the mines can't keep on extracting," a senior European counter-proliferation official said.

He added that there was no evidence the companies were aware of the plans for illicit mining.

When the intelligence gathered in 1999-2001 was thrown into the diplomatic maelstrom that preceded the US-led invasion of Iraq[0], it took on new significance. Several services contributed to the picture.

The Italians, looking for corroboration but lacking the global reach of the CIA or the UK intelligence service MI6, passed information to the US in 2001 and to the UK in 2002.

The UK eavesdropping centre GCHQ had intercepted communications suggesting Iraq[0] was seeking clandestine uranium[0] supplies, as had the French intelligence service.

The Italian intelligence was not incorporated in detail into the assessments of the CIA, which seeks to use such information only when it is gathered from its own sources rather than as a result of liaison with foreign intelligence services. But five months after receiving it, the US sent former ambassador Joseph Wilson to Niger[0] to assess the credibility of separate US intelligence information that suggested Iraq[0] had approached Niger[0].

Mr Wilson was critical of the Bush administration's use of secret intelligence, and has since charged that the White House sought to intimidate him by leaking the identity of his wife, Valerie Plame, as a CIA agent.

But Mr Wilson also stated in his account of the visit that Mohamed Sayeed al-Sahaf,

Iraq's[0] former information minister, was identified to him by a Niger[0] official as having sought to discuss trade with Niger[0].

As Niger's[0] other main export is goats, some intelligence officials have surmised uranium[0] was what Mr Sahaf was referring to.

[Description of Source: London The Financial[0] Times[0] (Internet Version-WWW) in English -- international respected centrist daily]

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WORLD NEWS: French probe led to 'fake Niger uranium papers'

By Mark Huband, Security Correspondent
Financial Times; Aug 02, 2004

A French intelligence operation to safeguard Niger's uranium industry and prevent weapons proliferation, inadvertently led to the forging of documents relating to an apparent clandestine uranium trade with Iraq, western intelligence officials say.

The operation, begun in 1999, reflected concern among several intelligence services that rogue states may have been trying to procure uranium. France was also concerned about the security of its own uranium supplies from Niger, as well as the security of the two French companies that control Niger's uranium industry.

Rocco Martino, an Italian businessman who has admitted that he has made a career out of "selling information", has held regular meetings with French intelligence officials in Brussels since at least 1999.

According to senior European officials, in 1999 he provided French officials with genuine documents which revealed Iraq may have been planning to expand "trade" with Niger. This trade was assumed to be in uranium, which is Niger's main export. It was then that Mr Martino first became aware of the value of documents relating to Niger's uranium exports. He was then asked by French officials to provide more information, which led to a flourishing "market" in documents.

He subsequently provided France with more documents, which turned out to have been forged when they were handed to the International Atomic Energy Agency by US diplomats.

The exposure of the forgeries appeared to undermine British government claims that Iraq had sought to buy uranium from Niger. US officials have distanced themselves from the claim, though the UK has insisted the forged documents were not part of their evidence.

According to senior intelligence officials, the forged documents were produced with the involvement of people familiar with Niger, and were created in 2000.

French officials have not said whether they know Mr Martino, and are unlikely to either confirm or deny that he is a source. According to the Sunday Times, which interviewed him under his pseudonym of Giacomo, Mr Martino said the Italian foreign intelligence service, the SISMI, had forged the documents and had arranged for them to be passed to him by an official of Niger's embassy in Rome. Mr Martino, who has not returned telephone calls since first contacted by the Financial Times a month ago, has retained personal contacts with some serving and retired officers in the SISMI since he briefly served in the intelligence services in the 1970s.

The Italian government yesterday strongly denied it had played any role in the forging of the documents or their dissemination, saying the accusations are "completely false".

Its statement also implied Mr Martino's claim to the Sunday Times that the documents were forged to justify the decision to invade Iraq is highly dubious as the market in documents - real or forged - was established several years before the war was discussed.

Intelligence experts also say that if the documents had been forged by a national intelligence service the quality would have been better and there would not have been discrepancies in them that led to them being exposed by the IAEA as fake.

One western intelligence official said: "This issue shows how vulnerable intelligence services and the media are to tricksters like Martino. He responded to a legitimate . . demand from the French, who needed the information on Niger. And now he is responding to a new demand in the market, which is being dictated by the political importance this issue has in the US. He is shaping his story to that demand."

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Italy eyes French ruse to dupe U.S. over Iraq

By Bruce Johnston
LONDON SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

BRUSSELS — Italy is blaming France's intelligence service for circulating forged documents that showed Iraq trying to buy uranium from Niger in an elaborate ruse to embarrass Britain and the United States.

Italian diplomats say privately that France was behind the forged documents that at first appeared to prove Iraq was seeking yellowcake uranium in Niger — evidence used by Britain and the United States to press the case for war with Iraq.

They say that France's intelligence services used an Italian-born middleman to circulate a mixture of genuine and bogus documents to "trap" the two leading proponents of war with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein into making unsupportable claims.

The French intelligence service, asked to comment publicly on the charges, has yet to respond.

The Italian diplomats have given the Sunday Telegraph a photograph they claim shows the Italian go-between, sometimes known as "Giacomo" — who cannot be identified for legal reasons — meeting a senior French intelligence officer based in Brussels.

"The French hoped that the bulk of the

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documents would be exposed as false, since many of them obviously were," an Italian official said.

"Their aim was to make the allies look ridiculous in order to undermine their case for war."

According to an account given to the Sunday Telegraph, France was driven by "a cold desire to protect their privileged, dominant trading relationship with Saddam, which in the case of war would have been at risk."

French officials angrily deny the account.

Last month, reports first surfaced that Giacomo claimed to have been unwittingly used by Sismi, Italy's foreign intelligence service, to circulate the false documents.

The papers found their way to the CIA and to MI6, Britain's foreign spy agency, and in September 2002 Prime Minister Tony Blair accused Saddam of seeking "significant quantities" of uranium from an undisclosed African country — in fact, Niger.

President Bush made a similar claim in his State of the Union address to Congress four months later, using information passed to him by MI6.

The U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency expressed doubts over the documents' authenticity, however, and in March 2003 declared them false.

The suggestion that Italy, driven by its government's support for the United States, had forged the documents to help to justify the war in Iraq, caused a furor and has now led to the revelation of new information about Giacomo.

The Sunday Telegraph has been told that the man has a criminal record for extortion and fraud, but draws a monthly salary of about \$5,000 from the DGSE — the French equivalent of the CIA — for which he is said to have worked for the past five years.

Giacomo could not be reached for comment on the claims last week at either his home in Formello, a suburb on the northern edge of Rome, or at his second home in Luxembourg.

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Italy blames France for Niger uranium claim (update IV)

11 September 2004

Posted on 09/11/2004 11:55:31 AM PDT by [parnasokan](#)

Notwithstanding the tragic events of September 11 2001 and the thousands of deaths provoked by a form of terrorism clearly directed against the west, and in particular the United States, CBS and some journalists of the Washington Monthly are preparing to attack, yet again, President Bush and Italy through a television program entirely dedicated to the Nigergate affair and in particular the by now famous false documents acquired by the French Intelligence services in the autumn of 2000 and distributed by their agent, the Italian Rocco Martino, in October 2002 in order to damage America, Italy and Great Britain.

All of this with the single objective of delegitimising President Bush immediately before the elections in order to favor the candidate Kerry.

The CBS has no interest in the truth, neither has it any interest in what Islamic terrorism has done and continues to do against the American people and those of its closest allies amongst whom Italy.

Bill Gertz of the Washington Times is right in giving his latest book the title "Treachery: How America's Friends and Foes Are Secretly Arming Our Enemies". Everyone who loves America and is against terrorism has to take a stance and fight so as the truth emerges. This is our objective and what we have to say is the sheer and simple truth, facts supported by incontestable proof, evidence that is as undeniable as that contained in the "Report on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq" published on 7 July 2004 in which a section is entirely dedicated to Niger.

Sunday 1st august 2004 the Sunday Times publish a story, probably trying to anticipate the Washington Monthly and CBS which was already in possession of an interview with the protagonist of the Niger affair, the by now well known Rocco Martino, in which the Italian Intelligence Services were at the origins of the false Niger documents.

All of this based on the revelations of a certain "Giacomo" who is described by the Sunday Times a somewhat mercenary source of information. Perhaps in an attempt to cover themselves the Sunday Times publish a photograph of the mysterious "Giacomo".

The following day the Financial Times publish an article by Mark Huband entitled "French Probe Lead to 'Fake Niger Uranium Papers'". In his story Huband points out that the false documents were created and circulated in 2000, before the attack on the Twin Towers and long before the decision to attack Iraq. This proves that the attempt to pin the circulation of the forgeries to the year 2002 is no more than political media campaign. In addition to this Huband dismasks "Giacomo" as Rocco Martino (the very same person who supplied the Italian journalist of Panorama with copies of the documents in the autumn of 2002) who has been working for the French Intelligence Services since 1999.

The first signs that Huband is right on track can be seen from the "strange" facts tied to the publication of his article, in the first case on the FT Web site the article resulted impossible to find unless you know

the exact title, something that the average reader is very unlikely to know. At the time the FT web master noted nothing strange, all of the links to the web site were accessible. Could it be that someone manipulated the 'search' software (programme) in such a fashion as to render the article unreadable in such a way as to limit its diffusion? In addition to this it should be noted that Huband's article was published in the UK version of the FT but did not appear in the European or American editions.

The second and more important signal that Huband on-track was the article entitled "Cosi Chirac Voleva incastrare Berlusconi" published by the Italian newspaper Libero on 8th august in which the author defines the affair as "the most important spy story since the collapse of the Soviet empire", in addition the article gives photographic evidence of the relations between Rocco Martino and the French secret services. In fact in the photographs Martino can be seen during a private encounter with a French Secret Service Officer.

Over the next few days Libero publish a series of articles from which the roles of French and certain American circles interests in the "NigerGate" affair clearly emerge, notwithstanding the offensive is carried forward by a group of American journalists in contact with European colleagues who continue to disseminate a story which they know is both false and blown. Most probably this continues with the scope of defending political and economical interests. The same group of journalists, in contact with groups of ex american government officials, continue to work on three fronts:

1) the use of unreliable sources in order to accuse the Italian government of producing the false documents. The primary source is now known to be Rocco Martino, the second may well be a group of Italians resident in the USA amongst whom an ex manager of an important Italian public company. This even after it emerged that the French Intelligence Services were responsible.

2) The second front is represented by an accusation whereby the well know individual, Michael Ledeen, would have organised a plot to produce the false documents together with Italian Ministers and heads of Italy's Secret Services, American government officials of the highest level and the well known international arms dealer Manucher Ghorbanifar. In addition to the aforementioned a group of Iranian exiles also participated in the scheme. This attempt will be examined in detail later in this document.

3) The last front is the theory whereby the false documents were produced in 2002, following an agreement between the CIA Chief of Station in Rome and the Italian Secret Services. This accusation is probably based on sources even more unreliable than Rocco Martino. This theory is completely absurd as the documents could not have been produced in 2002 if they were already circulating and in possession of the French Intelligence Services in 2000.

So the real question is why, after the story having been revealed for what it really is, is there still so much insistence on pushing the line? Could it be that there are political interests behind the affair or are there economical reasons or, indeed why not, both? We can't give a precise answer to this or rather we don't want to formulate accusations but we can add some interesting details.

If we go back and look at the FT story it can be seen that it is consistent with the Senate Intelligence Committee report (7 July 2004) which confirms that the French Intelligence Services were the involuntary source of the forgeries. More specifically Rocco Martino after having supplied documents to the French in 1999, and understanding that France wanted more information on Niger and was prepared to pay for it, decided to supply more in 2000. Unfortunately some of the documents that he supplied resulted as being crude forgeries.

The American report reveals greater details that, rather curiously, don't receive much interest from the

media. In particular that "On March 4, 2003, the U.S. Government learned that the French had based their initial assessment that Iraq had attempted to procure uranium from Niger on the same documents that the U.S. had provided to the INVO". Basically that the assessment was based on the very same documents that Rocco Martino supplied to Elisabetta Burba from Panorama. Mark Huband, analysing the demand-supply aspect, concludes that Rocco Martino statements to the Sunday Times (that the documents were falsified to justify the invasion of Iraq) as "highly suspicious" in that the commerce of documents began in the years before the Iraq war was even considered. Huband, citing a western intelligence official, concludes that "This issue shows how vulnerable intelligence services and the media are to tricksters like Martino. He responded to a legitimate .. demand from the French, who needed the information on Niger. And now he is responding to a new demand in the market, which is being dictated by the political importance this issue has in the U.S. He is shaping his story to that demand".

In addition to this we can add that the names of the people who gave rise to the American inquiry (amongst whom Sen. Jay Rockefeller) are tied to political and economical interest groups that are no less powerful than groups tied to President Bush. These groups are tied to the aforementioned American journalists who continue to produce complot theories. As mentioned before one of these theories is an absurd accusation based upon alleged activities of Michael Ledeen and Manucher Ghorbanifar. Ledeen is a conservative, member of the American Enterprise Institute while the second is a well known arms dealer who, amongst other things, in the 80's was central to the Iran-Contra affair. The accusations concentrate on alleged encounters held in Rome in 2002 in which the decision to falsify the Niger documents was taken. A source (possibly the very same Rocco Martino, currently "unavailable" even to the Rome Prosecutors Office due to the fact that he would seem to currently be in the USA) is allegedly in possession of "shocking" documents that would prove the participation in these meetings of the Italian Minister of Defence, the Director of an Italian Intelligence Service, representatives of the American Government and the Ledeen-Ghorbanifar couple. The two Italians are not named but simply indicated by their titles. This dangerous attempt to create confusion is even less sustainable from the point of view of supply and demand of documents.

In fact according to emerging evidence it appears ever more difficult give credibility to Rocco Martino or others of a similar level. Congress made public the fact that the highest levels of American government had been alerted by the Italian Intelligence Services (acting upon orders from the Italian Government) of some strange meetings held in Rome in December 2001 and June 2002 between the aforementioned Ledeen and Ghorbanifar and American government officials. What makes the original accusation so ridiculous is that, suspicious of the fact that the local U.S. embassy knew nothing of the encounters, it was the very Italian Intelligence Services that informed the United States Government in regards to the meetings.

The accusation would seem to prove that once again there is a "supply" which is adapting itself to the "demand". So whats the "demand", has it changed or is it the same as before? Could it be that there is an attempt to disguise an internal American manouver through a vast international complot, perhaps an involuntary one, as demonstrated in a recent Panorama article entitled "Rocco lo Spione".

It's a fact that the emergence of similar flashes of truth attracted the attention of The Sunday Telegraph which, on 5 September 2004, published an article entitled "Italy blames France for Niger Uranium claim", thus contributing to introducing elements of clarity in one of the cases that, notwithstanding its dramatic consequences in the internal politics of diverse countries, seems to have reduced powerful and important mediatic circles to silence as if the truth held no interest even in the presence of incontestable evidence amongst which the conclusions in the already mentioned "Report on the US Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq" published in July.

The affirmations of the London newspaper manage to break the wall of silence suddenly erected around the Niger affair, finally managing, as opposed to the Financial Times who were penalised by telematic intrusions, to cross the ocean and find distribution through the pages of the "Washington Times" before freely circulating on the Internet.

This last means of dissemination is once again denied to The Financial Times in the case of another article written by Huband, published 8 September 2004, entitled "" which was literally removed from the newspapers web site. In fact in any attempt to access the article in question on the "ft.com" web site in place of the real <http://news.ftcom/cms/s/9fac8fb4-00fd-11d9-9d96-00000e2511c8.html> page the message "MAGIC_SERVER_DELETED" appears as testimony to the persistence of somebody who holds an almost persecutory will towards Mark Huband when the author tries to insist on revealing the truth behind the Niger affair.

Is it that the Italian newspaper Libero was right, when it referred to precedent "disturbances" on the occasion of publishing Hubands article of 2 August, when it entitled its article of the 12 August "French Spies attack the Internet"?

The difference is that in this last case whoever was behind the attack went as far as definitively removing Hubands article because it was considered even more dangerous than that published in August. This because some of the passages contained in the article revealed too much of the interests of certain groups of journalists and American media in manipulating the affair of the false documents in order to influence the forthcoming Presidential elections in the U.S.A.

TOPICS: [Foreign Affairs](#)

KEYWORDS: [FRANCE](#); [ITALY](#); [NIGER](#); [YELLOWCAKE](#)

1 posted on 09/11/2004 11:55:36 AM PDT by parnasokan
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To: parnasokan

France just can't stop making friends.

You know what "MAFIA" stands for don't you??

"Morte alla Francia e Italia Allere" (Death to France is Italy's cry!)

2 posted on 09/11/2004 12:16:17 PM PDT by Bon mots
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Agent behind fake uranium documents worked for France

By Bruce Johnston in Rome

(Filed: 19/09/2004)

The Italian businessman at the centre of a furious row between France and Italy over whose intelligence service was to blame for bogus documents suggesting Saddam Hussein was seeking to buy material for nuclear bombs has admitted that he was in the pay of France.

The man, identified by an Italian news agency as Rocco Martino, was the subject of a Telegraph article earlier this month in which he was referred to by his intelligence codename, "Giacomo".

His admission to investigating magistrates in Rome on Friday apparently confirms suggestions that - by commissioning "Giacomo" to procure and circulate documents - France was responsible for some of the information later used by Britain and the United States to promote the case for war with Iraq.

Italian diplomats have claimed that, by disseminating bogus documents stating that Iraq was trying to buy low-grade "yellowcake" uranium from Niger, France was trying to "set up" Britain and America in the hope that when the mistake was revealed it would undermine the case for war, which it wanted to prevent.

Italian judicial officials confirmed yesterday that Mr Martino had previously been sought for questioning by Rome. Investigating magistrates in the city have opened an inquiry into claims he made previously in the international press that Italy's secret services had been behind the dissemination of false documents, to bolster the US case for war.

According to Ansa, the Italian news agency, which said privately that it had obtained its information from "judicial and other sources", Mr Martino was questioned by an investigating magistrate, Franco Ionta, for two hours. Ansa said Mr Martino told the magistrate that Italy's military intelligence, Sismi, had no role in the procuring or dissemination of the Niger documents.

He was also said to have claimed that he had obtained the documents from an employee at the Niger embassy in Rome, before passing these to French intelligence, on whose payroll he had been since at least 2000.

However, he reportedly also added that he had believed that the documents in question were genuine, and to have never suspected that they had been forged. "Martino has clarified his position and offered to deliver to the

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magistrates the documents which confirm his declarations," his lawyer, Giuseppe Placidi, told Ansa.

It was not possible to contact Mr Martino through his lawyer yesterday. Contacted by The Telegraph, Mr Ionta politely declined to comment, but did not deny that the questioning had taken place. The Interior Ministry in Rome, which had also expressed keen interest in the Telegraph article, refused to comment on the matter.

Mr Martino is said by diplomats to have come forward of his own accord and contacted authorities in the Italian capital following the earlier article in the Telegraph. They said he had written a letter of resignation to the French DGSE intelligence service last week.

According to an Italian newspaper report yesterday, members of the Digos, Italy's anti-terrorist police, removed documents from Mr Martino's home in a northern suburb of Rome on Friday afternoon.

"After being exposed in the international press, French intelligence can hardly be amused or happy with him," one western diplomat said. "Martino may have thought the safest thing was to hand himself over to the Italians." Investigators in Rome suspect that Mr Martino was first engaged by the French secret services five years ago, when he was asked to investigate rumours of illicit trafficking in uranium from Niger. He is thought to have then been retained the following year to collect more information. It was then that he is suspected of having assembled a dossier containing both real and bogus documents from Niger, the latter apparently forged by a diplomat.

In September 2002 Tony Blair accused Saddam of seeking "significant quantities" of uranium from an undisclosed African country - in fact, Niger. US President George W Bush made a similar claim in his State of the Union address to Congress four months later, using information supplied by MI6.

The International Atomic Energy Agency expressed doubts over some of the documents' authenticity, however, and declared them false in March 2003.

In July, the White House withdrew the president's claim, admitting that it was based on inaccurate information. British officials still say that their intelligence about Iraqi uranium purchases was supported by a second, independent source.

End of article

- 3 August 2003: America silences Niger leaders in Iraq nuclear row
- 27 July 2003: 'Saddam never shopped for uranium in my country'

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Italian Spy Discusses Own Role in Iraq-Niger Traffic Hoax

Milan Il Giornale in Italian 21 Sep 04, <http://cryptome.org/rocco-martino.htm>
29 September 2004

www.globalresearch.ca October 2004

The URL of this article is: <http://globalresearch.ca/articles/MAR410A.html>

Interview with Italian former SID Defense Intelligence Service agent Rocco Martino by Gian Marco Chiocci; place and date not given:

"Former 007 Rocco Martino Speaks Out: 'Here Is the Truth About Nigergate'" -- first two paragraphs are Il Giornale introduction

(FBIS Translated Text) [FBIS is the CIA's Foreign Broadcast Information Service.]

Rome -- After growing a mustache, he has now also grown a beard, and a thick one at that, but it is not phony like the ones that stereotype secret agents are alleged to sport. "Giacomo o' spione" ("James the spy" in southern Italian dialect) is the name favored by newspapers engaged in telling the spy story (previous two words in English in original) in which he is the leading player in connection with a hoax dossier on alleged uranium trafficking between Niger and Iraq. After being questioned by Assistant Public Prosecutor Franco Ionta, he agreed to make a confession to Il Giornale in a downtown bar. Almost as though he were organizing an (illegal) rave party (previous two words in English in original), 66-year-old Rocco Martino from Tropea, a "free-lance intelligence" (previous three words in English in original) agent as he likes to style himself, constantly shifted the venue of our rendez-vous, in keeping with his need to put people off the scent after a month of dangerous living around the world, in his capacity as a much-wanted key player in a mystery story involving the 007's of Italy, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and which is partly responsible for the US military operation in Iraq.

There was to be no beating about the bush. Former SID (Italian Defense

Intelligence Service, now defunct) agent Martino went straight to the point: "I do not have much time, and even though I have quite a few things to say about this damned Nigergate business, I would like to start by pointing something out."

(Chiocci) Go ahead.

(Martino) I have not been on the run from the Italian law; I simply moved away for reasons that are easy to comprehend -- let us say, for personal security reasons and also so as not to become cannon fodder for the national media. I traveled abroad and that is where I stayed pending a summons from Prosecutor Ionta who had been contacted and urged to issue a summons by my lawyer, Giuseppe Placidi. When the magistrate asked to meet with me, I landed in Rome in the space of a few hours in order to provide my version of events, borne out by various documents and recordings that confirm my total good faith in this murky story -- a story which is much bigger than me, and in which I turned out to be the weak link.

(Chiocci) You speak of total good faith, but the file which you slipped to Panorama and which the weekly failed to publish after checking the affair out, was a spectacular hoax.

(Martino) I did not know that it was a hoax, and there is proof of what I say. I have been engaged in intelligence (previous word in English in original) for many years, offering my cooperation to various intelligence services including the French, about whom a great deal has been said and about whom we will be talking later on. The hoax began one day when a Nigerian (as published) Embassy source who had proven to be reliable on previous occasions and who had contacts also with the collaborator of a SISMI (Intelligence and Military Security Service) aide, passed on to me a whole lot of information. It is true that that information included some references to a uranium traffic between Niger and Iraq. What did I do at that juncture? I passed it on to the French secret service, with which I am in touch and by which I was remunerated. I passed it on also to Panorama, which assessed it in order to study it, dispatching a reporter to Niger and turning the file over to the US Embassy in Rome for cross-checking.

when?
What
year?

(Chiocci) What happened then?

(Martino) The female journalist told me that the trip to Niger had not produced any real confirmation, and also the French confirmed to me that the reports I had passed on to them were groundless. But at that juncture the beans had been spilled. The file was circulating, the reports

contained in it were going around the world, and Bush and Blair were talking about those documents, albeit without actually mentioning them. I turned the television on and I did not believe my ears...

(Chiocci) The suspicion is that you may have played France's game, opposed as it was to intervention in Iraq and planning to cook up a "poisoned meat ball" to give the lie to the United States and to the United Kingdom, which were hunting around for any kind of excuse to justify the invasion of Iraq: Nigergate.

(Martino) I do not know what you are talking about. These are lunatic ravings, among other reasons because the documents in question originated back in 2000, a year before the attack on the Twin Towers in New York and three years before Bush's decision to proceed with the war against Saddam.

(Chiocci) Someone may have remembered those documents, picked them up out of the waste basket, and released them back into circulation at the right moment.

(Martino) Anything is possible. And in any case, I am the victim, the tool used by someone for games much bigger than me.

(Chiocci) When did you realize that you were in trouble?

(Martino) When I read an article in a British newspaper that more or less called me a hardened criminal, pointing the finger of accusation at me as a double-crosser working for the French, who were clearly interested in what we were talking about just now.

(Chiocci) But you were followed, photographed, and recorded while speaking with French agents.

(Martino) So? I told you, I cooperate with them. And not only with them. But I did not plot against Italy or against the United States.

(Chiocci) The British 007's think otherwise.

(Martino) That is their business.

(Chiocci) You told the Sunday Times in an interview that also the Italian Government and the SISMI were involved in the Nigergate affair. Then you backtracked when talking with Prosecutor Ionta the other day. Where does the truth lie?

(Martino) I reached a preliminary agreement with the Sunday Times for interview that was never conducted. We talked about this and that,

including the SISMI, but only to say that my source on the uranium traffic was the same as the source of an Italian intelligence service aide. As far as I know, the SISMI has nothing to do with it. I never, and I repeat never, said that Forte Braschi (SISMI's Rome headquarters) was involved, and certainly not that the Italian Government was involved.

The truth is that I have been duped, manipulated, used. I would like to figure out why they chose me; I do have some idea, but without any evidence one gets nowhere.

(Chiocci) Whom were you duped, manipulated, used by?

(Martino) If I knew that, I would dash off to report it to the magistracy, to whom indeed I have already handed over important documents and revealed the names of all the players in this murky business.

(Chiocci) People have written things about your previous misadventures...

(Martino) I have read them. What lies! To mention but two of them, I was never thrown out either of the Carabinieri Corps or of the SID.

(Chiocci) I do not wish to harp on about it, but if you had nothing to hide, why have you yourself been in hiding for all this time?

(Martino) Because the game, for those who are familiar with certain mechanisms, had become too dangerous. I do not know whether, as some people have written, there were any secret agents of various nationalities hunting me down in order to eliminate me. I do not even know in whose interest it would really have been for me not to open my mouth. The fact remains that, thanks to my lawyer, Giuseppe Placidi, and to my contacts with the public prosecutor over my giving a statement, also that veiled propensity for suicide that had begun to oppress me has disappeared.

(Description of Source: Milan Il Giornale in Italian -- right-of-center daily owned by the Berlusconi family.)

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September 21, 2004

A few people have sent me the recent *Sunday Telegraph* story about the Italian Niger docs middle man, Rocco Martino, asking for comment. First off, let me make clear that I am analyzing only already published articles here. Secondly, let me focus for the moment instead on a synopsis of a related story, from the Italian paper, *Messaggero*, that came out September 18, 2004 "La spia ritratta: innocenti i servizi italiani":

Rocco Martino has been interrogated by the magistrate Franco Ionta, assisted by his attorney Giuseppe Placidi. He says that the interview of the Sunday Times was a misunderstanding. *He said that he received the material from the Nigerian diplomatic officials and passed it to the French.* He said that he did not realize that the dossier was a recycled one, prepared during the first months of year 2000. Police officials of the DIGOS went to his home in Formello to acquire further documents.

[emphasis added]

There's a lot here, but for the moment, the key line here is that Martino is allegedly telling the Italian magistrate that he received the documents from someone at the Niger embassy in Rome, and then sold them to the French. In fact, the spate of recent articles has all been consistent about the source of where Martino himself got the documents: the Niger embassy in Rome, which is located in an apartment at 10 Via Antonio Baiamonti, near Rome's Piazza Mazzini.

The recent articles, including this *Messaggero* one, the *Sunday Telegraph* one, and recent ones in the *FT*, have been interpreted by some to suggest that somehow the French were responsible for Martino's *acquisition* of the documents. But if you read carefully, the articles allege that French intelligence was instead Martino's *customer* -- not the cook. According to these articles, Martino was on their payroll to bring them information. Why would the French buy from Martino what they had produced? They wouldn't. And we already knew that Martino was trying to sell the Niger docs: after all, it's been clear from the very first reports since July 2003 that Martino had also tried to sell the package of forged Niger documents to Italian journalist Elisabetta Burba as well, back in October 2002.

So what's the point? All of these articles focus on who was the customer, but fail to get at, who was the cook? And what was the identity and motivation of the Niger embassy official who allegedly handed off the documents to Martino?

Here's where an article by *La Repubblica*'s Carlo Bonini and Giuseppe D'Avanzo, from July 16, 2003, becomes worth revisiting. The *Repubblica* article asserts, among other things, that the director of Sismi, Niccolo Pollari, actually told an Italian parliamentary committee back in November 2002 that Sismi was in possession of the Niger documents themselves:

It was SISMI Director Niccolo Pollari who, in November 2002, gave the Parliamentary Supervisory Committee on the Intelligence Services confirmation of the fact that "the service is in possession of documentary evidence of the trade in pure uranium between a central African country and Iraq."

The not so final analysis? It's a bit hard to believe that Sismi suddenly hasn't the faintest clue about the origins of the Niger documents. Among other sources, Pollari is on record in front of the Italian parliament intelligence oversight committee in November 2002 saying that the Italian services were in possession of such documents. Secondly, all of these articles that suggest the French intelligence service were Martino's customer for the Niger documents are interesting for reasons other than their champions may realize: for it just bolsters the evidence that the "other sources" the British and others have cited for claims about Iraq seeking uranium in Niger were in fact based on what we know to be the forged Niger documents.

Posted by Laura at September 21, 2004 10:53 PM

THE HILL THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2004

FBI could talk to source of forged Niger papers. I did



JOSH MARSHALL

Why haven't we found out yet who was behind the forged Niger-uranium documents caper?

One big reason is that the FBI — which is supposed to be investigating the case — has really never tried.

Back in March 2003, Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.), vice-chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, asked the FBI to investigate the matter. It was on the basis of that supposed investigation that the committee later decided not to look into anything about the forged documents before they showed up at the U.S. Embassy in Rome in October 2002. (See Page 57 of the committee report.)

But, despite claims to the contrary, the FBI hasn't made any serious efforts to find out who was behind the scam.

There are many reasons to believe that the FBI's investigation has been at best perfunctory. But let me describe one of the clearest.

One of the obvious places to start such an investigation would be with Elisabetta Burba, the Italian journalist who got copies of the documents and later turned them over to the American Embassy in Rome.

The obvious question would be: Who gave you the documents?

FBI agents did do a cursory interview with Burba not long after Rockefeller asked for an investigation. And they made a pro-forma request for her to contact her

TWICE... WE BROUGHT HIM TO NEW YORK FOR INTERVIEW. BOTH TIMES HE TRAVELED UNDER HIS OWN NAME.

source to see if some arrangement could be devised under which they could speak with him.

But after that, they didn't follow up with her for months to find out what the answer was. And when they did finally do it, it was

three European intelligence agencies knew who he was well before we found out. In fact, twice this summer we brought him to New York for interviews.

Both times he traveled under his own name, Rocco Martino.

The first time was in June; the second time was in August. And it's the second time that's more telling.

By the time we brought Martino to New York in early August, he had already been identified by name in the Italian and the British press as the man who tried to sell Burba the forged documents.

In fact, when we whisked him out of the country, he was already under very active and conspicuous surveillance by Italian authorities in Rome. He flew to New York under his own name and stayed for several days.

One of my colleagues and I actually had a friendly bet about whether FBI agents would be waiting for Martino when he came through Customs in New York, since his role at the center of the case and his name had just been published in the *Financial Times* — a paper you can find on many street corners in Washington, D.C.

I told my friend I didn't think they were even looking for him. And if they were keeping tabs on him, I really doubted they wanted to make contact. He was a hot potato. Everything we'd learned reporting on the Niger uranium case told us that this was a story the U.S. government did not want to get to the bottom of.

Needless to say, nothing happened.

Perhaps in Italy there might have been some jurisdictional issues that could have made the bureau leery of questioning Martino. But if the case were really a serious priority, you'd think they might have tried to make contact with him when he showed up in New York right after his name had been plastered across a bunch of European newspapers.

(The Italians were keeping a close eye on him as he departed. And through

leaks to the press in Italy, they let it be known that Martino had again gone to the United States.)

But Martino came, spent several days in New York, and then left. And no one from

them over to the American Embassy in Rome.

The obvious question would be: Who gave you the documents?

FBI agents did do a cursory interview with Burba not long after Rockefeller asked for an investigation. And they made a pro-forma request for her to contact her

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source to see if some arrangement could be devised under which they could speak with him.

But after that, they didn't follow up with her for months to find out what the answer was. And when they did finally do so, it was mainly because one agent was passing the matter on to someone else.

To this day, they've never made contact with the guy who tried to sell Burba the documents.

One might speculate that Burba's just kept mum. And there's no way to unravel the mystery of the guy's identity. But that's not even close to true.

Here's why.

My colleagues and I have known the guy's name since late spring. And at least

Needless to say, nothing happened.

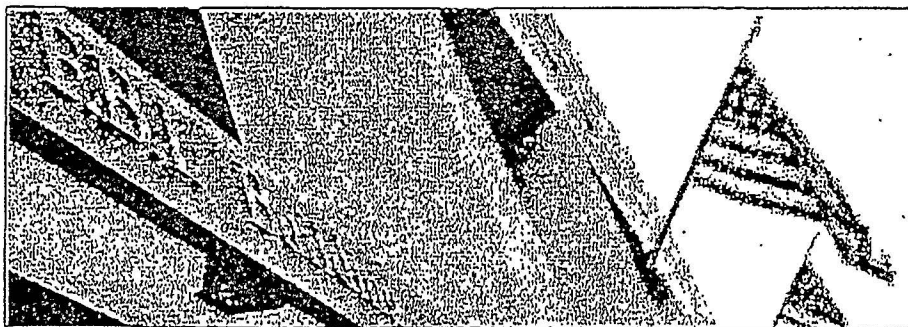
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(The Italians were keeping a close eye on him as he departed. And through leaks to the press in Italy, they let it be known that Martino had again gone to the United States.)

But Martino came, spent several days in New York, and then left. And no one from the FBI or any other American law-enforcement or intelligence agency made any attempt to contact him in any way.

Nor have they done so since. If the FBI is serious about getting to the bottom of this mystery, why haven't they made more effort to talk to the guy at the center of it?

Marshall is editor of talkingpointsmemo.com. His column appears in The Hill each week. E-mail: jmarshall@thehill.com



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Sen. Jay Rockefeller asked the FBI to investigate the Niger documents in March 2003.

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Sent: Thursday, September 23, 2004 9:14 AM

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Subject: FYI-re: Senator Rockefeller

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FBI Progress In Niger Document Probe Questioned. John Marshall writes in his column in The Hill (9/23), "Why haven't we found out yet who was behind the forged Niger-uranium documents caper? One big reason is that the FBI -- which is supposed to be investigating the case -- has really never tried." In March 2003, Sen. Jay Rockefeller "asked the FBI to investigate the matter. It was on the basis of that supposed investigation that the committee later decided not to look into anything about the forged documents before they showed up at the U.S. Embassy in Rome in October 2002. (See Page 57 of the committee report.)." Yet, "despite claims to the contrary, the FBI hasn't made any serious efforts to find out who was behind the scam." Marshall continues, "There are many reasons to believe that the FBI's investigation has been at best perfunctory. But let me describe one of the clearest." Marshall notes, "One of the obvious places to start such an investigation would be with Elisabetta Burba, the Italian journalist who got copies of the documents and later turned them over to the American Embassy in Rome." The FBI "did do a cursory interview with Burba not long after Rockefeller asked for an investigation. And they made a pro-forma request for her to contact her source to see if some arrangement could be devised under which they could speak with him." Yet, "after that, they didn't follow up with her for months to find out what the answer was. And when they did finally do so, it was mainly because one agent was passing the matter on to someone else." And "they've never made contact with the guy who tried to sell Burba the documents." But, "at least three European intelligence agencies knew who he was well before we found out. In fact, twice this summer we brought him to New York for interviews." Marshall adds, "Both times he traveled under his own name, Rocco Martino."

Newsweek (9/23, Isikoff, Hosenball) in a Web exclusive reports, "In its rush to air its now discredited story about President George W. Bush's National Guard service, CBS bumped another sensitive piece...a half-hour segment about how the U.S. government was snookered by forged documents purporting to show Iraqi efforts to purchase uranium from Niger." Newsweek continues, "The delay of the CBS report comes at a time when there have been significant new developments in the case. ... According to Italian and British press reports, Martino...was questioned last week by an Italian investigating magistrate for two hours about the circumstances surrounding his acquisition of the documents. Martino could not be reached for comment, but his lawyer is reportedly planning a press conference in the next few days." Newsweek notes, "the FBI launched an investigation into the Niger documents." But, "the bureau appears to have made little progress in unraveling the case. 'The senator is frustrated by the slow pace of the investigation,' said Wendy Morigi, the press secretary for Senator Rockefeller, who was recently briefed on the status of the FBI probe." A "striking aspect of the FBI's investigation is that, at least as of this week, Martino has told associates he has never even been interviewed by the bureau -- despite the fact that he was publicly identified by the Financial Times of London as the source of the documents more than six weeks ago and was subsequently flown to New York City by CBS to be interviewed for the '60 Minutes' report." One "U.S. law-enforcement official said the FBI is seeking to interview Martino, but has not yet received permission to do so from the Italian government."

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What Wilson Didn't Say About Africa: Joseph Wilson's Silent Partners

Original FReeper research | 10/25/2004 | Fedora

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What Wilson Didn't Say About Africa

Joseph Wilson's Silent Partners

By [Fedora](#)

with help from a few FReeper friends

Former ambassador Joseph Wilson has been a leading spokesman for critics who accuse President Bush of basing his case for war against Iraq on forged documents purporting that Iraq attempted to buy uranium from Niger. Wilson's charge has been discredited by a Senate investigation,¹ but what remains unanswered are questions arising from what is now known about French intelligence's role in pushing the forged documents on British and US intelligence.

The role of France and Wilson in undermining Bush's case for war looks particularly curious in light of disclosures about Saddam Hussein's bribery of foreign political and business figures during the course of the Oil-for-Food program from 1996 to 2003. Saddam's web of graft spun in many directions: among others, to UN officials, Russian and Chinese oil companies, British critics of Tony Blair's Iraq policies, and US critics of President Bush's Iraq policies, as well as France. Near the center of the web was the Banque Nationale de Paris, where Iraq's Oil-for-Food revenues were initially kept until 2001, when they were redistributed among several undisclosed banks approved by Iraq. Meanwhile French oil company TotalFinaElf received Oil-for-Food vouchers and held a contract to develop oil fields in southern Iraq.²

When the US and UK first began considering military action against Iraq, Bush faced the same resistance Clinton had encountered in 1998 from France and Russia. Already in December 2001, Russia had announced it would not support a US attack on Iraq.³ Then shortly after President Bush's January 29, 2002 State of the Union Address named Iraq as a member of a terrorist-sponsoring "Axis of Evil", France announced on February 22, 2002 that Europe would not support a US attack on Iraq.⁴

French intelligence soon began a campaign to discredit the US case for war against Iraq. In 1999, French intelligence had begun investigating the security of uranium supplies in Niger, where uranium production was controlled by a consortium led by the French mining company COGEMA, a division of the French state-owned nuclear energy firm AREVA. At that time, Italian businessman Rocco Martino provided French intelligence with genuine documents revealing that Iraq was planning to expand trade

with Niger. French intelligence took an interest in the documents and asked Martino to provide more information. In 2000 he used a contact in the Nigerian embassy in Rome to provide French intelligence with documents purporting that Iraq had purchased uranium from Niger. These documents were later exposed as forgeries; Martino claims that at the time he was unaware they were forged. In October 2002, as the case for war against Iraq was being debated in the UN, Martino attempted to sell the same documents to Italian journalist Elisabetta Burba, who was skeptical of their authenticity and insisted on verifying them before purchasing them. Burba's editors had the US embassy check the documents and sent Burba on a fact-finding mission to Niger, and Burba concluded that the documents were not authentic and abandoned her story on them. However French intelligence continued trying to convince British and US intelligence that the documents were authentic.⁵

Prior to receiving Martino's documents, US intelligence had already begun investigating similar reports of Iraqi attempts to buy uranium from Niger. On October 15, 2001, a report of a uranium deal between Niger and Iraq had come to the attention of the US intelligence community through an undisclosed "foreign government service". US intelligence analysts were initially skeptical of the report, partly because France controlled Niger's uranium supply through COGEMA and presumably would not allow such a transaction to occur. Then on February 5, 2002, US intelligence received a second, similar but more detailed report from a foreign government service. The second report seemed more credible to some analysts, but others continued to raise doubts, prompting Vice President Cheney to request a CIA analysis of the report. As the CIA was investigating the issue, a CIA agent in the Agency's Directorate of Operations Counterproliferation Division, Valerie Plame Wilson, suggested that the investigation be assigned to her husband Joseph Wilson, a former ambassador to Niger.⁶

Wilson, a lifetime Francophile, had spent the bulk of his diplomatic career in former French African colonies like Niger.⁷ His second wife from 1986 to 1998, Jacqueline, had served the French embassy in Burundi as a "cultural counselor" (a function often used as a cover by French intelligence).⁸ From Wilson's experience in Niger he was familiar with the Niger uranium industry. Additionally, he had worked in Iraq during the days leading up to the Gulf War. (Intriguingly, on the eve of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait Wilson had dined at the home of an arms dealer who bought weapons for Iraq from France; a *Vanity Fair* profile on Wilson mentions his wife's presence at this event, but Wilson's book states "I was the only guest.")⁹ After the Gulf War he had helped provide support to US/UK/Turkish operations in northern Iraq, while stationed as political advisor to the United States European Command in Germany during the Kosovo War. In 1998 he left the State Department and began putting his diplomatic contacts to business use. He formed J.C. Wilson International Ventures Corporation, a business development and management company which ventured in gold, oil, and telecommunications and served clients in Africa, Western Europe, and Turkey. At this time new African markets were emerging due to the recent passage of an African trade bill Wilson had helped President Clinton promote. Wilson's African investment interests included oil markets in several parts of Africa and the gold market in Niger. Wilson also kept abreast of the gold market in Iraq, where the price of gold was exceptionally cheap, as Wilson observed in one of his lectures.¹⁰ Meanwhile his then-wife Jacqueline, whom he would soon leave for Valerie Plame, became a registered lobbyist for the Presidency of Gabon, where Wilson had a good relationship with President Omar Bongo.¹¹

Wilson ran his company out of the offices of an investment company called Rock Creek Corporation. Rock Creek was controlled by Mohammed Alamoudi, whom Wilson had met in 1997 at a reception organized for the World Bank by Westar Group. Alamoudi was a member of the Saudi-Ethiopian Alamoudi dynasty, which was heavily invested in the segments of the African economy Wilson was seeking to penetrate. The Alamoudi-affiliated company Delta Services--a Swiss subsidiary of the Saudi company Delta Oil--handled Iraqi oil export contracts in 2000 and 2001 and was revealed in 2003 as a

recipient of Iraqi Oil-for-Food vouchers channeled through Abu Abbas, a Palestinian terrorist with Iraqi connections. Delta Services also cooperated with Afghanistan's Taliban regime in a project to build an oil pipeline from Afghanistan to Pakistan, prior to this project's suspension in 1998. In 1999, Alamoudi was accused by *USA Today* reporter Jack Kelley of heading a bank which was being investigated for financing Al Qaeda. *USA Today* printed retractions of several details in Kelley's article in 2004, after another member of the Alamoudi family--Abdurahman Alamoudi, a prominent American Muslim lobbyist--was indicted on terror-related charges involving a Libyan-backed conspiracy to assassinate Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah. Abdurahman was ultimately convicted in October 2004 and sentenced to 23 years in prison.¹² Under Mohammed Alamoudi's direction, Rock Creek was chaired by Elias Aburdene, an Arab-American international banking advisor and lobbyist who had previously advised banks linked to organized crime and intelligence community figures involved in the S&L Scam. In 2003 and 2004 Aburdene donated to the Sandhills Political Action Committee, which was affiliated with Senator Chuck Hagel,¹³ a leading Republican critic of the Bush administration's Iraq policy.¹⁴

While working out of Rock Creek's offices, Wilson also advised American-Turkish investment groups who shared Hagel's negative views of Bush's Iraq policy. Wilson had developed Turkish contacts during his diplomatic career. While stationed in Iraq, he had shared intelligence with members of the Turkish embassy there, including ambassador Ahmet Okcun, who would later become Turkey's Foreign Ministry Coordinator for Reconstruction of Iraq.¹⁵ Also, while in Germany, Wilson had worked on Iraqi-related issues with Turkish General Cevik Bir, a critic of US policy towards Iraq.¹⁶ Wilson and Bir expressed similar views on Iraq when they spoke together at events held by the American-Turkish Council (ATC), a Turkish-American business association headed by Brent Scowcroft,¹⁷ another prominent Republican critic of the Bush administration's Iraq policy.¹⁸ Scowcroft and Wilson shared the view that President Bush's policy towards the Middle East and Iraq was dominated by a cabal of pro-Israeli "neo-cons" represented by Richard Perle--as Wilson expressed his views in a June 2003 lecture, Bush's invasion of Iraq "was all done to make Sharon's life easier. . . American soldiers are dying in order to enable Sharon to impose his terms upon the Palestinians. . . American boys and girls are dying for Israel".¹⁹ Wilson's contact with the ATC also brought him into contact with his future wife, Valerie Plame, whom he met while receiving an ATC award during a reception at the Turkish embassy in Washington.²⁰ In addition to advising the ATC, Wilson also headed the Washington branch of a Turkish business group founded in 2000 by Turkish-American businesswoman Tumu Gumustekin, the Corporate & Public Strategy Advisory Group (CPS), which sought to capitalize on business opportunities opened up by Turkey's 1999 acceptance as a candidate for EU membership.²¹ Meanwhile, as Turkey competed for EU membership, Saddam Hussein's regime had been bribing Turkish oil companies through the Oil-for-Food Program, and in December 2001 had awarded a drilling contract to one of these companies, the Turkish state oil company Turkish Petroleum International Company (TPIC), a subsidiary of the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO).²² Also at this time the Alamoudi-affiliated company Delta Oil was involved in several oil development projects in Turkey and the surrounding region, including a joint project with TotalFinaElf and Turkish Petroleum and other companies to build a major oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline, from Turkey through Georgia to Azerbaijan.²³

While Wilson was pursuing his foreign investment ventures, he also served as a foreign policy advisor to the 2000 Presidential campaign of Al Gore. A company the Gore family had a long-term relationship with, Occidental Petroleum, shared business interests with Alamoudi-affiliated companies in Africa and the Middle East, and employed as Vice President for Middle East business Odeh Aburdene,²⁴ who shared a complex network of relationships with Rock Creek's Elias Aburdene and Joseph Wilson--notably, all three contributed to Arab-American Congressional Caucus leader Nick Rahall,²⁵ who

supported Muslim lobbying groups linked to terrorists and opposed military action in Iraq.²⁶ Abdurahman Alamoudi also contributed to Rahall, and sat on the steering committee of Arab Americans for Clinton/Gore '96 along with his associate James Zogby, who later advised Gore's 2000 Presidential campaign.²⁷ Wilson had worked as an aide to Gore from 1985 to 1986 and had developed a friendly relationship with him. Wilson says Gore was the first person outside the State Department to contact him expressing support when he was caught in Iraq in the middle of the diplomatic crisis leading up to the Gulf War. In 1997 Gore recommended Wilson to President Clinton to help him plan a trip to Africa. When Wilson began publicly opposing Bush's Iraq policy in 2002, Gore was still considered a potential candidate in the 2004 election. Gore's speeches were then being sponsored by the antiwar group Moveon.org, which Wilson would support in September 2003 in an attempt to petition Congress against appropriating funds for Iraq operations.²⁸ Moveon.org was financed by billionaire George Soros,²⁹ who had business interests encompassing, among other things, the BTC Pipeline that Mohammed Alamoudi's Delta Oil was helping build.³⁰ Later, after Gore announced in December 2002 that he would not be running in the 2004 campaign,³¹ Moveon.org began supporting John Kerry's campaign.³² Wilson began advising Kerry's campaign on foreign policy matters around May 2003, several months prior to his public entry into the Niger uranium controversy.³³ By this time, from at least fall 2002, the French intelligence operation to push the Niger forgeries on British and US intelligence was already underway. Meanwhile, from as early as at least January 6 2003--prior to President Bush's 2003 State of the Union address where the President made the African reference which Wilson criticizes--the Democratic National Committee was already circulating a memo planning a public relations strategy which would include "[c]laiming the Bush administration has 'manufactured' evidence against Saddam Hussein and used that evidence to encourage Britain and other allies to join the American fight against Iraq."³⁴

Wilson's business and political background raise questions about the motive behind his wife's recruitment of him to assist the CIA's Niger investigation, and about his subsequent politicization of the investigation to undermine the Bush administration's Iraq policy. While the media has focused attention on the question of who leaked the fact that his wife worked for the CIA, Wilson has attempted to evade the natural question of what role his wife's CIA connection played in the CIA's decision to send him to investigate the Niger uranium report. In his book, published in April 2004, Wilson wrote, "Apart from being the conduit of a message from a colleague in her office asking if I would be willing to have a conversation about Niger's uranium industry, Valerie had had nothing to do with the matter. She definitely had not proposed that I make the trip. The suggestion that Valerie might have improperly influenced the decision to send me to Niger was easy to disprove."³⁵ But contrary to Wilson's confident-sounding denial, in July 2004 a bipartisan Senate intelligence committee report found that, as *The Washington Post* reported, "Wilson. . . was specifically recommended for the mission by his wife, a CIA employee, contrary to what he has stated publicly. . . [A] CIA official told the Senate committee that Plame 'offered up' Wilson's name for the Niger trip, then on Feb. 12, 2002, sent a memo to a deputy chief in the CIA's Directorate of Operations saying her husband 'has good relations with both the PM [prime minister] and the former Minister of Mines (not to mention lots of French contacts), both of whom could possibly shed light on this sort of activity.'"³⁶ So it turns out that Wilson lied to conceal his wife's role in procuring his CIA assignment. This raises the question: why?

Another question that might be raised is why Wilson and the CIA's investigation did not explore at least the possibility of the French-led company COGEMA covertly allowing Niger to sell uranium to Iraq. In Wilson's book, while explaining the method that led him to conclude the report of Niger selling uranium to Iraq was false, Wilson explains that he ruled out the possibility of an off-the-books transaction partly because "COGEMA, as the managing partner, would have had to know and be complicit."³⁷ This seems to rule out *a priori* the very thing Wilson was sent to investigate, and in the process, to rule out the possibility of French complicity in arming Saddam Hussein's regime, which seems a hasty exoneration

in light of the fact that France had a long history of selling Iraq military equipment and resisting UN sanctions against Iraq.³⁸ It is now known that in fact French companies were helping Iraq skirt UN sanctions.³⁹

Since it is now also known that French intelligence was trying to push Martino's forgeries on US and British intelligence, as simultaneously the Democratic National Committee was planning to discredit President Bush's Iraq policy by accusing his administration of manufacturing evidence against Hussein's regime, heightened suspicion is cast on Wilson's use of the Niger investigation to discredit the Bush administration's case for war. Prior to Wilson publicly joining the debate over Iraq in May 2002, since September 11, 2001 he and Brent Scowcroft had shared a growing concern over their perception of the alleged influence of pro-Israeli "neo-cons" on Bush's Iraq policy. Wilson's first public contributions to the Iraq debate were made to Scowcroft's American-Turkish Council in May 2002, in conjunction with a presentation by Cevik Bir. Scowcroft himself entered the public debate with a *Wall Street Journal* article opposing military action on August 15, 2002. He also helped Wilson communicate his own antiwar views to the White House. Meanwhile, in June 2002 Wilson joined forces with the Alliance for American Leadership, an antiwar-oriented, Democrat-dominated foreign policy group headed by Clinton's former ambassador to Morocco Marc Ginsberg. While serving as ambassador, Ginsberg had coordinated new US trade and investment initiatives in the Middle East--including the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) Investment Fund, which had a Turkey-Azerbaijan project under the funding control of the Soros Private Fund Management--and now as a private citizen he consulted for companies doing business in the Middle East. Ginsberg arranged for Wilson to begin appearing on the news-show circuit, and Wilson began to emerge as an antiwar spokesman. Wilson wrote his first article on the debate for the *San Jose Mercury* on October 13, 2002. During this same time period Al Gore was making antiwar speeches sponsored by Moveon.org; Joseph Biden, Robert Byrd, Ted Kennedy, and Carl Levin were leading opposition to a Senate resolution on Iraq; and the UN, Russia, China, and France were helping Saddam Hussein stall US/UK military action by prolonging the weapons inspection process.⁴⁰

During the course of this debate, in September 2002 British intelligence produced a white paper which alleged that Iraq had sought uranium from Africa, an allegation subsequently repeated by President Bush in late January 2003 and Secretary of State Powell in early February 2003. A month after Powell's speech, UN International Atomic Energy Agency head Mohamed El Baradei told the UN Security Council that the Niger documents were not authentic, and Wilson and the antiwar media began attacking the British and US references to Africa, conveniently ignoring the fact that the references had been to "Africa" rather than "Niger" and there was other data on Africa being referenced. At first Wilson worked behind the scenes, trading information with political insiders like African State Department specialist Walter Kansteiner and speaking anonymously to antiwar media allies like Walter Pincus and Richard Leiby of *The Washington Post* and David Shipley of *The New York Times*. Finally on July 6, 2003 he wrote an article under his own name in *The New York Times* called "What I Didn't Find in Africa", published simultaneously with a *Washington Post* profile of his diplomatic career by Leiby. A couple days later Wilson learned from a friend that Robert Novak had said privately, "Wilson's an [expletive deleted]. The CIA sent him. His wife, Valerie, works for the CIA. She's a weapons of mass destruction specialist. She sent him." A week later Novak published this information, provoking controversy and an investigation which remains ongoing. Meanwhile Wilson promoted the antiwar efforts of Moveon.org and other antiwar groups, and he became a foreign policy advisor to John Kerry's campaign in spring 2003, after Al Gore had been effectively eliminated from serious consideration as a candidate and Kerry had emerged as the frontrunner.⁴¹

Wilson's various allegations against the Bush administration would eventually be discredited, as summarized in a July 2004 bipartisan Senate intelligence committee report which contradicted Wilson's

key claims.⁴² However, Wilson's antiwar and anti-Bush allies in the media have not bothered reporting this with the same fervor they have devoted to undermining American policy in Iraq. It is high time that the media broadened its focus beyond what Wilson didn't find in Africa, and started looking into what Wilson didn't say about Africa.

Notes

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