

FIVE YEARS LATER-AND THE ATTORNEY GENERAL STILL MAINTAINS THE COVER-UP

Five years ago today, on a Monday morning just like today, this happened:

Our bedroom was just beginning to show the first hints of morning light on July 14 when Joe marched in, dropped the newspaper on the bed, and said in a tight voice, "Well, the SOB did it." He set a steaming mug of coffee on my bedside table and left the room. What? I struggled to wake up. I sat up, switched on the lamp, and opened the Washington Post to the op-ed page; I didn't know what I would find, but I knew it wouldn't be good. Rovert Novak had written in his column that "Wilson never worked for the CIA, but his wife, Valerie Plame, is an Agency operative on weapons of mass destruction."

And yet, five years later, through the President's efforts to silence Scooter Libby and through the Attorney General's determination to hide the Vice President's and President's own testimony, we still have had no full accounting of the leak of Valerie Wilson's identity. In fact, most of the press attention has been focused on the following sentence in Novak's column, the one that—Richard Armitage apparently convinced Patrick Fitzgerald—derived from a stupid and careless but ultimately ignorant leak.

Two senior administration officials told me that Wilson's wife suggested sending him to Niger to investigate the Italian report.

And so, largely because once an investigation was announced, Novak told a different story about that first line—about how he learned of Valerie's maiden name and about how he learned of her status—than he told just after the leak, when he said "They thought it was significant, they gave me the name and I used it," the press just bought that implausible, revised story. Novak's new cover story got so far-fetched that he was comparing Valerie Wilson with a person running a congressional campaign in Wyoming.

I call all kinds of politicians operatives. ... Someone's running a congressional campaign in Wyoming, I call him an operative.

And even when it was revealed that there had been a **third** conversation that went into Novak's column, a conversation between Libby and Novak, a conversation they both made efforts to hide for three years, almost no one went back to scrutinize Novak's column and sources again. Not even when it was revealed that, just two days before he spoke with Novak, Libby had told **precisely** those two details that remain unexplained in Novak's column—the name "Plame" and her status as an Agency operative on WMD—to Ari Fleischer. Libby provided those details to someone who could be expected to leak them on July 7 (and remember, Novak called Ari on July 7); is there any reason to imagine that Libby didn't provide those details on July 9, when he met with Novak?

Let me take a detour into Novak's column to demonstrate why I believe it very likely that Libby knowingly leaked classified information to Novak on July 9 (a detour I make at more length here). There is another passage in Novak's column that was—even according to Scooter Libby's operative story—still classified on July 9, when he spoke with Novak.

After eight days in the Niger capital of Niamey (where he once served), Wilson made an oral report in Langley that an

Iraqi uranium purchase was "highly unlikely," though he also mentioned in passing that a 1988 Iraqi delegation tried to establish commercial contacts.

Novak either screws up the date accidentally or intentionally, but this detail is unmistakably the Ibrahim Mayaki story from the CIA report on Wilson's trip, which was declassified (again, according to Libby's operative story) on July 10. There's a lot redacted in the affidavits which might include more detail, but we know that Novak testified that Rove said he was working on declassifying the memo—which, Rove said, was "not very definitive."

According to Novak, when he "brought up" Wilson's wife, "Mr. Rove said, oh, you know about that too" (II-154) and promised to seek declassification of portions of a CIA report regarding the Niger trip, which Rove said "wasn't an impressive piece of work or a very definitive piece of work" (II-158).

That sentence from Rove surely is the source of this sentence from Novak's column.

The agency never before has declassified that kind of information, but the White House would like it to do just that now — in its and the public's interest.

Rove also told Matt Cooper the report would be declassified, without then giving him details from the report, so even though Rove is a liar, it is quite likely that's all he told Novak—that the report was unclear and that it would be declassified.

But the classified part—the Mayaki story—either remains unexplained or, in redacted bits, Novak blamed on Armitage. Now, Armitage **could** have leaked this detail from the CIA trip report. He got a copy of the report as an attachment to the INR memo on July 7. Except that both Armitage

and Novak describe their conversation about the Wilson trip as a few off-hand comments at the end of long conversation on other topics. Furthermore, we know that Armitage didn't mention the CIA trip report when he leaked to Woodward in June. Armitage wasn't obsessed by the Mayaki story; Armitage was obsessed that a man like Joe Wilson would get shuttled around on intelligence trips by his hot blonde wife.

Scooter Libby, however, **was** obsessed by the Mayaki story. He and his boss—both of them—had underlined the passages of reports that detailed the Mayaki story on at least two separate occasions, on two separate copies of the report each (and it appears that Libby had a conversation with John Hannah about it too). According to Judy Miller, Libby had leaked her the information from the trip, just the day before Libby spoke with Novak.

He then referred to another report I thought it was a third report. He said this was involved the arrival in Niger of a delegation of Iraqi officials in 1999. And that this Iraqi delegation was seeking a broader trade relationship with Niger. Since Niger basically had only one thing to export, which was uranium, that officials in Niger had concluded that Iraq was interested in acquiring uranium. He said that the author of the report, which had gone up to the Hill, which was credited by the CIA, was Joe Wilson.

And when Cheney dictated talking points to Libby on July 12, he asked him to describe the Mayaki conversation on deep background (though, by the time Cheney dictated these talking points, the report had been declassified).

In short, given that Libby is a proven liar and Novak's story changes constantly, there's no reason to believe Novak and Libby when they claim Libby didn't give Novak stuff that made it into his column. Libby is by far the most likely

source of the Mayaki detail. And if he leaked that information—which, according to Libby's operative story, he knew to be classified on July 9—we have every reason to believe that Libby also shared the two details, the name Plame and the detail that Valerie worked as an operative in WMD—that remain unexplained in Novak's column.

Now, these weedy details from Novak's column remain unexplained. But there's a bigger question that also remains unexplained—though all the circumstantial evidence supports the case. Did Dick Cheney, just days before Libby spoke with Novak, order Libby to leak Valerie Wilson's identity to reporters? There's a great deal of evidence that suggests Cheney did. And, there are two FBI interview reports which might support the case. But for some reason, Attorney General Mukasey doesn't want to release those reports and make it clear whether his bosses orchestrated the leak of Valerie Wilson.

But then, we know the Attorney General thinks it's no big deal that the Vice President outed a CIA spy.