

Tuesday we mentioned briefly the alleged Iraq-Niger deal concerning shipping Iraq 500 tons of yellowcake {lightly enriched uranium oxide ore}, referenced to British sources in George Bush's State of the Union Speech, January, 2003. The story is murky and convoluted. Here are highlights:

*The Intelligence Community failed to authenticate in a timely fashion transparently forged documents purporting to show that Iraq had attempted to procure uranium from Niger.* Finding 4: Robb-Silberman Report, 2004, "The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction."

- A small Iraqi delegation visits Niger in 1999, reportedly for "expanding commercial relations" and other matters.
- In late 2001, early 2002, three reports from a foreign liaison service state that an agreement was signed between Iraq and Niger to deliver 500 tons of yellowcake to Iraq. Intelligence analysts in the Dept. of State and some in CIA question the reliability of the source. The original documents, including a copy of the presumed agreement, is not received at this time.
- Niger is an important producer of yellowcake; the mining operation is a consortium of nations, controlled by France.
- The reporting of this proposed deal is included in a CIA briefing of Vice President Cheney in early 2002; he expresses interest in the report which originated with the DIA. CIA officials are skeptical, but decide to send Ambassador Joseph Wilson, whose wife works undercover for CIA, to Niger to investigate the report. Wilson previously served in Niger and other African countries and has good contacts there. The CIA does not have a station in Niger. Our ambassador to Niger believes the reporting is bogus.
- Wilson visits and reports back orally and in a memo that he can find no evidence to back-up the report.
- Wilson, after administration continues to mention the Niger-Iraq connection, writes op-ed for NYTimes in June 2003 stating "what he didn't find in Niger." This begins the Valerie Plame affair, who is Wilson's wife.
- There is no reporting from those who work in the mine of such a transfer, nor evidence that trucks to transport such an amount have been seen. Furthermore, Iraq has a stock of yellowcake purchased years before and which was known to and "sealed" by earlier inspections of the IAEA.
- CIA receives the documents, as do others including the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA]; they are convinced after examination that the documents are forgeries, particularly the presumed copy of a document authenticating the agreement. It is

believed they were sold to the Italian intelligence service, and hence "infected" the system. The IAEA assessment that the documents were forged were made just prior to the invasion of Iraq. The originator of the documents is still unclear, ranging from an Italian seller of "information," to dissident former CIA officers.

- In June 2003 CIA withdraws the documents from circulation, claiming them to be false.

If you wish to revel in such details, the Wikipedia entry for Niger Yellowcake seems comprehensive.