



The Truth About the Valerie Plame Case Finally Emerges

Vice President Cheney had hoped that George Bush would issue a pardon of Libby, since he considered Libby to have been unjustly punished for something he did not do. But Bush decided not to pardon Libby, and this has left a deep sense of disappointment in Cheney's otherwise good relations with the former President.



How did this whole controversy start? Bush writes in his memoir: "In my 2003 State of the Union address, I had cited a British intelligence report that Iraq sought to buy uranium [yellowcake] from Niger. That single sentence in my five-thousand-word speech was not a major point in the case against Saddam. The British stood by that intelligence.... In July 2003, former Ambassador Joseph Wilson wrote a *New York Times* column alleging that the administration had ignored his skeptical findings when he traveled to Africa to investigate the Iraq-Niger connection."

Wilson's column in the *Times* resulted in the President being called a liar, which caused people in the administration to wonder why Joseph Wilson, a Democrat critic of Bush, was sent to Niger by the CIA for this mission. Washington journalist Bob Novak wanted to write a column on the affair and managed to get an interview on July 8, 2003, with Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage.. He writes in his memoir, *The Prince of Darkness*:

Armitage was giving me high-level insider gossip, unusual in a first meeting. About halfway through our session, I brought up Bush's sixteen words.... I then asked Armitage a question that had been puzzling me but, for the sake of my future peace of mind, would better have been left unasked. Why would the CIA send Joseph Wilson, not an expert in nuclear proliferation and with no intelligence experience, on the mission to Niger? "Well," Armitage replied, "you know his wife works at the CIA, and she suggested that he be sent to Niger." "His wife works at the CIA?" I asked. "Yeah, in counterproliferation."

He mentioned her first name, Valerie.... The exchange about Wilson's wife lasted no more than sixty seconds. Armitage offered no interpretation of Wilson's conduct and said nothing negative about him or his wife. I am sure it was not a planned leak but came out as an offhand observation.... Shortly thereafter, he secretly revealed his role to federal authorities investigating the leak of Mrs. Wilson's name but did not inform White House officials, apparently including the President.

Novak got Valerie's last name from Wilson's bio in *Who's Who*. But after he used it in his column, the



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name Valerie Plame became big news in the media and caused quite a storm. On October 1, 2003, after reading a second column by Novak on the case, Armitage, alarmed by the clamor in the press for the name of the leaker who had outed a covert CIA agent, revealed his role to his boss Secretary of State Colin Powell. They took up the matter with State Department lawyer William H. Taft IV, who then spoke with White House counsel Alberto Gonzales, who allegedly told Taft that he did not want to know. But why didn't Taft or Powell go directly to the President with this important information?

In January 2004, the Justice Department chose prosecutor Patrick J. Fitzgerald to investigate the leak of Valerie Plame's identity. From the outset, he was made fully aware that the leaker was Armitage, who resigned from the State Department in November 2004 but remained a subject of the inquiry until February 2006 when Fitzgerald told him in a letter that he would not be charged. The *New York Times* reported on Sept. 2, 2006:

Mr. Armitage cooperated voluntarily in the case, never hired a lawyer and testified several times to the grand jury, according to people who are familiar with his role and actions in the case. He turned over his calendars, datebooks and even his wife's computer in the course of the inquiry, those associates said. But Mr. Armitage kept his actions secret, not even telling President Bush because the prosecutor asked him not to divulge it, the people said.

Why would the prosecutor keep this vital information from the President who had expressed concern over the outing of a CIA operative? Meanwhile, the liberal press hysterically speculated that it was Karl Rove and/or Vice President Cheney who most likely leaked Plame's identity to Novak. Dick Cheney writes in his memoir, *In My Time*:

Among the many things that should give a thinking person pause about this whole sad story is that Patrick Fitzgerald knew from the outset who had leaked the information about Wilson's wife to Bob Novak. It had been Deputy Secretary of State Rich Armitage, who told the Justice Department that he had leaked the information to Novak, but kept what he had done from the White House. Armitage would later admit that he had even earlier told journalist Bob Woodward about Wilson's wife's employment. Indeed, on Bob Woodward's tape of the June 13, 2003, conversation, Armitage can be heard leaking the fact that Wilson's wife worked at the CIA four separate times.

So why did Patrick Fitzgerald spend more than two years conducting "a lengthy and wasteful investigation," as the *Washington Post* called it? Members of the White House staff were interviewed by the FBI and dragged before a grand jury at great cost to them in attorney's fees. Bob Novak wrote:

After Patrick Fitzgerald ... indicated to me he knew Armitage was my source, I cooperated fully with him. At the special prosecutor's request and on my lawyers' advice, I kept silent about this — a silence that subjected me to much abuse. I was urged by several friends, including some journalists, to give up my source's name. But I felt bound by the journalist's code to protect his identity.

Despite the fact that Fitzgerald knew the source of the leak, he decided to go after reporters who refused to name their sources. Thus, *Times* reporter Judith Miller spent 85 days in jail for refusing to reveal her sources to the prosecutor. She was finally released when she agreed to testify before a grand jury.

So, why did Fitzgerald go after Scooter Libby, Vice President Cheney's top aide? Apparently, Armitage had read a memorandum Libby had commissioned as part of an effort to rebut criticism of the White House by Joe Wilson. Who wrote the memorandum, and did it mention Valerie Plame? That information



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may have been revealed during Libby's trial but has not been made public. Was it the source of any leaks to the press? Apparently not, for it was Armitage who supposedly read the report and made the leak, not Libby.

Nevertheless, it was Libby whom Fitzgerald decided to indict. The jury found Libby guilty, not of revealing Valerie Plame's name to the press, but of perjury, obstruction of justice, and making false statements. What did he lie about? Libby said that he thought he had gotten the information about Valerie Plame from a conversation with Tim Russert, the news analyst. But Russert denied that he had given such information to Libby. As for obstruction of justice, what was Libby refusing to tell the prosecutor? Could it be that Libby was trying to protect his boss, the Vice President, who may have retrieved the information from his contacts at the CIA? And is that the reason why Cheney tried so hard to get Bush to pardon Libby?

Otherwise, there seems to be no reason why Libby would have lied about where he got the information about Plame, and no reason why he would have refused to answer questions that the prosecutor posed. Apparently, neither Cheney nor Libby knew that it was Armitage who had leaked Valerie Plame's identity to Novak. Cheney himself had been interviewed twice by the Special Prosecutor in May and August 2004. Even the President himself was questioned by Fitzgerald.

In any case, since Libby was not the person who made Valerie Plame's name public, he should not have been the subject of a prosecutor, whose aim seems have been to justify his more than two years of investigation in the nation's capital, with all of its perks, good restaurants, and plush accommodations. Even a prosecutor from Illinois needed a respite from the local grind. So he got a conviction of sorts and was thus able to return to Chicago fully vindicated.

The Vice President knew that all of this could have been avoided had Secretary Colin Powell done his duty and told the President that he knew who had leaked Plame's identity to Novak. But he preferred to remain silent, and thus opened the door to two years of a needless and wasteful investigation which distracted the administration, forced innocent staff members to undergo a costly inquisition, and led to the conviction of a loyal and highly competent public servant.

Cheney made sure that the public would know the truth and took a parting shot at Colin Powell. He wrote:

For the latter part of 2003, all of 2004, and a good part of 2005, members of the White House staff produced box after box of documents, were interviewed by the FBI, hauled before a grand jury, and repeatedly questioned about these events.

Meanwhile, over at the State Department, Armitage sat silent. And, it pains me to note, so did his boss, Colin Powell, whom Armitage told he was Novak's source on October 1, 2003. Less than a week later, on October 7, 2003, there was a cabinet meeting. At the end of it, the press came in for a photo opportunity, and there were questions about who had leaked the information that Wilson's wife worked at the CIA. The President said he didn't know, but wanted the truth. Thinking back, I realize that one of the few people in the world who could have told him the truth, Colin Powell, was sitting right next to him.

So, who was actually guilty of obstruction of justice? Was it Scooter Libby or Colin Powell? Or was it prosecutor Patrick J. Fitzgerald, who told Armitage to keep his mouth shut or face prosecution, [and] did not tell the President who the leaker was and spent the taxpayers' money in a costly prosecution against an innocent man.



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Is it not a crime for a U.S. government official to deliberately withhold vital information from the President of the United States? Is it not a crime for a federal prosecutor to threaten a suspect with prosecution if he dared to tell the President that he was responsible for the leak? Had Powell told the President the truth, there would have been no need for a special prosecutor or grand inquisition.

When is the government going to indict Patrick J. Fitzgerald or Colin Powell for obstruction of justice? Of course, never. Meanwhile, Scooter Libby's life has been ruined. But we await his own memoirs.



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