

The Radical

What Dick Cheney really believes.

by Franklin Foer & Spencer Ackerman

In early 2002, Vice President Dick Cheney spoke to President George W. Bush from the heart. The war in Afghanistan had been an astonishing display of U.S. strength. Instead of the bloody quagmire many predicted, CIA paramilitary agents, Special Forces, and U.S. air power had teamed with Northern Alliance guerrillas to run the Taliban and Al Qaeda out of their strongholds. As a new interim government took power in Kabul, Cheney was telling Bush that the next phase in the war on terrorism was toppling Saddam Hussein.

Bush was well aware that several of his senior aides wanted to take the battle to Iraq. When his advisers had convened at Camp David the weekend after the September 11 attacks, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz argued on three separate occasions that the United States should immediately target Iraq instead of the more difficult Afghanistan. Bush had settled the matter by instructing his chief of staff, Andrew Card, to quiet Wolfowitz—a moment humiliatedly enshrined by Bob Woodward in his book *Bush at War*. But, in early 2002, Cheney dispensed with the policy arguments for taking down Saddam in favor of a far more personal appeal. He said simply that he had been part of the team that created what he now saw as a flawed policy—leaving Saddam in power at the end of the Gulf war—and now Bush had a chance to correct it.

His plea was enormously successful. “The reason that Cheney was able to sell Bush the policy is that he was able to say, ‘I’ve changed,’” says a senior administration official. “‘I used to have the same position as [James] Baker, [Brent] Scowcroft, and your father—and here’s why it’s wrong.’” By February, observes a since-departed senior National Security Council (NSC) staffer, “my sense was the decision was taken.” The next month, Bush interrupted a meeting between national security adviser Condoleezza Rice and three senators to boast, “Fuck Saddam. We’re taking him out.”

That Cheney had become the decisive foreign policy player in the White House is hardly surprising. Bush had, after all, added him to the ticket precisely for his national security heft. What was astonishing—even to those who thought they knew Cheney well—was that Cheney had seemingly swung so strongly against the policies of the administration he loyally served as Defense secretary, an administration that valued stability above democracy-building and crisis management above grand strategy. “Look,” confesses someone who has worked with Cheney in the past, “I am baffled.”

It’s easy to understand this bafflement. When Cheney signed on as Bush’s running mate in 2000, many people expected him to bring George H.W. Bush’s realist foreign policy instincts with him. U.S. *News & World Report* quickly dubbed him “BUSH’S BACK-TO-THE-FUTURE VEEP PICK.” After all, Cheney had spent the latter half of the 1990s as CEO of one of the world’s largest oil-services companies, where he argued against economic sanctions and for engagement with tyrannies like Iran. And Cheney had *not* spent the ’90s—as his longtime ally Wolfowitz had—publicly agonizing over the decision to leave Saddam’s regime intact.

But imparting George H.W. Bush’s cautiousness to his former Defense secretary misreads Cheney entirely. Far from fitting into 41’s foreign policy team, Cheney was its ideological outlier. On the greatest issue of the day—what to do about a declining Soviet Union and America’s place in a unipolar world—Cheney dissented vigorously. His Pentagon argued, again and again, that the only true guarantee of U.S. security lay in transforming threatening nations into democratic ones—a radical notion to the realists in the first Bush White House. Cheney’s policy allies were not national security adviser Scowcroft and Secretary of State Baker but rather a set of intellectuals on the Pentagon

policy staff who shared and helped him refine his alternative vision of U.S. power and purpose. In the '90s, this worldview came to be known as neoconservatism. Cheney was there first.

As he fought an uphill ideological battle in the first Bush administration, Cheney's foreign policy vision was paired with a tendency that would prove key to understanding his performance in W.'s White House: a willingness to circumvent the typical bureaucratic channels to gain advantage over his rivals. In particular, Cheney came to see the intelligence establishment as flawed and corrupted by political biases hopelessly at odds with his goals. By 2001, when Cheney became the most powerful adviser to the president of the United States, his vision of global democracy and his mistrust of the CIA had reached full maturity. Both convictions would be brought to bear when the vice president turned his full attention to Iraq.

Similar Wavelengths

When Dick Cheney arrived at the Pentagon in 1989, he created a brain trust in his own image, cultivating young staffers with academic backgrounds like his own. These brainy types congregated in the highest ranks of the policy directorate run by then-Undersecretary Wolfowitz. In most administrations, the policy directorate largely deals with mundane tasks, such as the negotiation of basing rights and arms sales. Those issues held little interest for Wolfowitz and his team. "They focused on geostrategic issues," says one of his Pentagon aides. "They considered themselves conceptual." Wolfowitz and his protégés prided themselves on their willingness to reexamine entire precepts of U.S. foreign policy. In Cheney, they found a like-minded patron. Wolfowitz, in 1991, described his relationship with his boss to *The New York Times*: "Intellectually, we're very much on similar wavelengths." Nowhere was this intellectual synergy more evident than on the Soviet Union.

At the time Cheney took office, Mikhail Gorbachev had been in power for four years. By then, the Soviet premier had charmed the American media and foreign policy establishment with his ebullient style. Like many hard-liners, Cheney thought he saw through these atmospheric and publicly intimated his skepticism of perestroika. Appearing on CNN in April 1989—only one month into his term as Defense secretary—he glumly announced that Gorbachev would "ultimately fail" and a leader "far more hostile" to the West would follow. Such dourness put Cheney well outside the administration mainstream. Baker, Scowcroft, and President George H.W. Bush—as well as the NSC's leading Russia hand, Condoleezza Rice—had committed themselves to Gorbachev's (and the USSR's) preservation. But Cheney believed that, with a gust of aggressive support for alternatives to Gorbachev, the United States could dismember its principal adversary once and for all.

To craft an alternative strategy, Cheney turned to alternative experts. On Saturday mornings, Wolfowitz's deputies convened seminars in a small conference room in the Pentagon's E ring, where they sat Cheney in front of a parade of Sovietologists. Many were mavericks who believed the Soviet Union was on the brink of collapse. Out of these Saturday seminars, Cheney's Soviet position emerged—with concepts and rhetoric that perfectly echo the current Bush administration's Iraq policy. They would push regime change in the Soviet Union, transforming it into a democracy. Support for rebellious Ukraine would challenge the regime from its periphery; and support for Boris Yeltsin, the elected president of the Russian Republic, would confront the regime at its core. "[Yeltsin] represents a set of principles and values that are synonymous with those that we hold for the Soviet Union—democratization, demilitarization," Cheney announced in a 1991 appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press." Bush père and Scowcroft fretted about instability, but Cheney retorted, if the demolition of the Soviet Union required a little short-term disruption, such as a nuclear-armed Ukraine, then so be

it. After all, as he observed in a 1992 speech to the Economics Club of Indianapolis, true security depended on the expansion of “the community of peaceful democratic nations.”

Cheney was unsuccessful in pushing the White House away from Gorbachev. After he mused aloud about Gorbachev’s shortcomings in a 1989 TV interview, Baker called Scowcroft and told him, “Dump on Dick with all possible alacrity.” When the “Gang of Eight”—Bush’s senior advisers—met to decide policy in the final days of the Soviet Union, the meetings featured, as CIA chief Robert Gates has recalled, “Cheney against the field.” The Soviet collapse ultimately settled the issue. But Cheney’s battle against realism had only begun.

There was, however, a moment of détente in that battle: the Gulf war. Cheney accepted ending the war with Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein still in power, as did all of Poppy’s other senior advisers. (Not even Wolfowitz—now so associated with Saddam’s toppling—dissented at the time.) The lasting effect of the war on Cheney, however, was less strategic and more bureaucratic: It shattered his faith in the CIA’s ability to produce reliable intelligence.

When Saddam first began amassing troops on the Kuwaiti border in mid-1990, conventional wisdom in the U.S. intelligence community held that he was attempting to gain leverage in OPEC talks and, at the most, might seize a Kuwaiti oil field. The analysis made little sense—Saddam was moving his elite Republican Guard units, the very guarantors of his rule, from their Baghdad positions—yet only a few analysts issued starker warnings of an all-out invasion. Worse still, a National Intelligence Estimate released just before Christmas that year concluded that Saddam would withdraw from Kuwait to avert a war with the United States. In a paper for a 1994 conference on intelligence policy, Wolfowitz reflected, “[W]hen the signs started to turn up that the projected scenario regarding Iraqi behavior was not unfolding as we wished, ... somebody within the [intelligence] community should have said, ‘Wait a minute, here are facts that we ought to take some account of.’”

Cheney saw little option at the time but to request thorough briefings from intelligence analysts and subject their judgments to as much scrutiny as he could muster. Before the Gulf war, one former analyst remembers being “whisked into a room, there’s Dick Cheney, he’s right in front of you, he starts firing questions at you, half an hour later and thirty questions later, I’m whisked out of the room, and I’m like, ‘What the hell just happened?’” Yet analysts can distinguish between thorough questioning and contempt—or pressure. Cheney showed none of it. “He would ask you factual questions like, ‘OK, about this thing you said. Do I understand you correctly that such-and-such is true? And are you sure about this, and how do you know that?’” recalls Patrick Lang, the Defense Intelligence Agency’s (DIA) Middle East expert during the Gulf war and one of the few analysts to predict the invasion of Kuwait. “And I regard that as a legitimate question. ... He wasn’t hostile or nasty about it; he just wanted to know how you knew. And I didn’t mind that in the least.”

But, as Cheney and his aides watched, the intelligence failures kept on mounting. In the fall of 1992, U.N. inspectors uncovered an Iraqi nuclear weapons program far more advanced than the intelligence community had suspected. More disturbingly, the CIA admitted to having no clue about the Soviet Union’s massive clandestine biological weapons program, which Yeltsin had spontaneously acknowledged in 1992—and this was an enemy the Agency had studied carefully for decades. Gradually, Cheney and his staff came to consider the CIA not only inept but lazy, unimaginative, and arrogant—“a high priesthood” in their derisive terminology. With uncharacteristic vitriol, Wolfowitz’s 1994 paper argued that the Agency’s style “allows [analysts] to conceal ignorance of facts, policy bias or any number of things that may lie behind the personal opinions that are presented as sanctified intelligence judgments.”

By the time Cheney arrived at Halliburton in the mid-'90s, he felt he could no longer rely on his old Langley connections to provide him the information he needed to do business in the former Soviet Union. So, according to one ex-CIA operative, Cheney hired a team of retired intelligence agents to collect information independently. The ex-agent says, "Cheney would just bitch and moan about the CIA and various parts of the world that they didn't know shit [about]. ... He was terribly frustrated."

But, while the decision to leave Saddam in power at the end of the Gulf war would reverberate through neocon circles for the next decade, a policy initiative devised by Cheney's Pentagon in 1992 would be arguably more important, laying the foundation for every major theme of George W. Bush's post-September 11 foreign policy. Under Wolfowitz's direction, the Pentagon produced a strategy paper called the Defense Planning Guidance (DPG). At a moment of strategic uncertainty—the Soviet Union had formally collapsed just months before—the document offered a vision of unbridled U.S. dominance and proposed democratization as the only true guarantor of U.S. security.

Without a Soviet Union to contain, there was no longer any obvious reason for the United States to retain its outsized presence on the world stage. To meet domestic expectations for a "peace dividend," Cheney implemented force reductions across all the armed services. But the Defense secretary and his planning staff also saw danger in these cuts. It was impossible to predict the next global rival to the United States, and, without the forward presence to encourage and cement democratization in newly freed nations, the gains of a unipolar world could be short-lived. A new conceptual framework to justify U.S. leadership was necessary.

DPGs typically explain how the Pentagon plans to implement defense requirements. They traffic in the minutiae of weapons systems and force structures, not reconceived notions of global leadership. But, just as Wolfowitz had used a modest policy office for grander ambitions, in February 1992 his staff drafted a DPG, advocating a value-driven security policy. It would be a U.S. priority to "encourage the spread of democratic forms of government." The stakes, they said, were extremely high. Everywhere the DPG authors looked, they saw the prospects for rivalry: in Russia, where there was "the possibility that democracy will fail"; in "Indian hegemonic aspiration"; in communist Asia, "with fundamental values, governance and policies decidedly at variance with our own"; even in allied Europe.

Instead of passively accepting the emergence of such rivals, the DPG proposed snuffing them out. Washington needed to convince other countries that "they need not aspire to a greater [global] role," whether through "account[ing] sufficiently for the interests of the advanced industrial nations" or through traditional deterrence. By preventing the emergence of a rival, U.S. strategy could recreate itself for a unipolar world, where U.S. power could be used more freely. "We have the opportunity to meet threats at lower levels and lower costs," the document read. Chief among those threats was the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). A full decade before George W. Bush enshrined preemption as state policy in his National Security Strategy, the DPG raised the prospect of "whether to take military steps to prevent the development or use of weapons of mass destruction."

It was uncharted territory for the United States, and it alarmed certain Pentagon officials, who leaked drafts of the DPG to *The New York Times*. Cheney, Wolfowitz, and their staffs awoke on March 8, 1992, to the headline "U.S. STRATEGY PLAN CALLS FOR ENSURING NO RIVALS DEVELOP." A horrified Senator Joseph Biden said the DPG led the way to "literally a Pax Americana." George H. W. Bush immediately disassociated himself from the document, begging the press corps, "Please do not put too much emphasis on leaked reports, particularly ones that I haven't seen." The White House strongly indicated its displeasure to the Defense secretary.

Cheney was forced to revise the document, sanding down its edges considerably, but

he did not let its ideas perish. In January 1993, as they were about to leave office, Wolfowitz's planning staff recycled all the controversial ideas in the DPG and published them in a document called the Regional Defense Strategy. Again, the strategy was based on the concept of "a democratic 'zone of peace,'" defined as "a community of democratic nations bound together in a web of political, economic and security ties." It remained the task of American leadership "to build an international environment conducive to our values." The fact that the DPG vision didn't die a quiet, bureaucratic death wasn't just a tribute to the tenacity of Wolfowitz and his staff; it was a reflection of how deeply Cheney believed in it.

To this day, his closest aides point to the document as the moment when Cheney's foreign policy coalesced. The attacks of September 11 may have given Cheney a new sense of urgency, but the framework was already there. As one former staffer puts it, "It wasn't an epiphany, it wasn't a sudden eureka moment; it was an evolution, but it was one that was primed by what he had done and seen in the period during the end of the cold war."

All The Vice President's Men

Cheney's ideology hardly made a dent in the first Bush White House. But, in the second, George W. Bush tasked him with a robust foreign policy portfolio. To ensure his ideas won out, the new vice president reassembled the intellectuals he had relied on in Wolfowitz's policy operation. Stephen Hadley, who had worked on arms control for the Wolfowitz policy staff, became deputy national security adviser. Zalmay Khalilzad, another policy aide, took over the NSC's Middle East portfolio. Others Cheney kept for his own staff. I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Wolfowitz's deputy, particularly rose in influence. In addition to becoming the vice president's chief of staff, he became Cheney's national security adviser and an adviser to the president himself. For his White House deputy, Libby tapped Eric Edelman, the Pentagon's top Sovietologist and organizer of the Saturday seminars. They brought in John Hannah, who had championed the anti-Gorbachev case at the Bush 41 State Department, to handle Middle East affairs. With a nod from Wolfowitz, they recruited a Navy officer, William Luti—who had advised former House Speaker Newt Gingrich—to work with Hannah.

Cheney didn't reconvene the group out of nostalgia. During the transition to the new administration, the NSC had been stocked with wonks from State and the CIA, and hawks felt ideologically frozen out of the new president's foreign policy staff. Other neocons—including Wolfowitz and Undersecretary of State John Bolton—were stuck a rung lower on the bureaucracy than their comrades felt they deserved. "A lot of people didn't end up at State and NSC and DOD [Department of Defense]," one senior administration hawk says. "Scooter tried to find a home for them." Cheney's office came to be viewed as the administration's neocon sanctuary.

The Office of the Vice President (OVP) was more than a consolation prize. Cheney gave his national security staff far greater responsibilities than had traditionally been accorded the vice president's team. His regional specialists wouldn't be involved only in issues relevant to the vice president—they would participate fully in the policymaking process and attend almost every interagency meeting. When Cheney first created this new structure, some Bushies openly described the operation as a "shadow" NSC. For those in the NSC itself, it often seemed like the "shadow" had more power than the real deal. One former Bush official says, "In this case, it's often the vice president's office that's driving the policy, leading the debate, leading the arguments, instead of just hanging back and recognizing that the vice president is not supposed to be driving the policy."

Not only was the OVP staff familiar, so were their ideas. Even before September 11, 2001, Cheney's staff was convinced Iraq could be a democratic outpost in the region—

much as they had hoped Ukraine would become—albeit through a U.S.-funded insurgency, not an invasion. According to his aides, Cheney had grown more convinced throughout the '90s of the futility of containing Saddam. In the early '90s, while Cheney was holed up at the American Enterprise Institute, his think-tank colleagues say he met Ahmed Chalabi and increasingly lent the Iraqi National Congress (INC) leader a sympathetic ear. In July 2000, Chalabi delighted over Cheney's vice-presidential nomination, boasting, "Cheney is good for us." He was right. Within two weeks of Bush's inauguration, Cheney helped free U.S. INC funding that had been bottlenecked during the Clinton administration. At the senior staff meetings, which considered Iraq policy almost every week during the first few months of the administration, Cheney's office supported efforts to topple Saddam through empowering the INC even further. According to former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Edward Walker, a regular attendee at those meetings, Cheney seemed increasingly exasperated with his options. "Everything that had been tried before didn't work. By a system of elimination—sanctions won't stop him, bombing won't stop him, and so on—you come down to the last resort: Then we'll have to take him out."

The attacks of September 11 violently accelerated Cheney's nascent vision of a democratic Middle East. As the ruins of the Twin Towers smoldered, Cheney decided the administration needed to change the strategic framework that had left the nation vulnerable to mass murder. He unveiled his thinking at the first NSC meeting after the attack. "To the extent we define our task broadly, including those who support terrorism, then we get at states," Cheney said, according to Bob Woodward's account of the meeting. The night before, Bush had told the nation he would make "no distinction" between Al Qaeda and its state sponsors. Cheney was pushing the president's reasoning to its next stage. As a friend recalls, Cheney now understood that "what you had to do was transform the Middle East."

But, if Cheney realized that the Middle East needed to be recast, he also believed that one of the nation's most important instruments for doing so—its intelligence community—was badly broken. An intelligence failure on the scale of September 11, in the view of the vice president and his staff, merely confirmed the OVP's already dim estimation of the CIA. Before the attacks, Cheney had mused about the centrality of intelligence to national security, telling *The New Yorker's* Nicholas Lemann in May 2001, "You need to have very robust intelligence capability if you're going to uncover threats to the U.S., and hopefully thwart them before they can be launched." Now there could be no confidence in the predictive capabilities of the country's intelligence services. Both lessons—the need to force a strategic realignment in the Middle East and the unreliability of normal intelligence channels—had deep roots in Cheney's Pentagon experience.

In mid-2002, Cheney made at least two visits to the CIA's Langley headquarters to talk with the analysts on the intelligence assembly line, who warned that they had no evidence showing that Saddam was reconstituting his nuclear program. These visits have been chewed over in the press, decried by retired Agency officials, and condemned as attempts to pressure the CIA into producing more damning intel. But they only begin to capture the depth of the vice president's personal involvement in shaping Iraq intelligence. In addition to trekking to Langley, his former aides say, Cheney paid calls to analysts at the DIA, the National Security Agency, and even the National Intelligence Mapping Agency. "He visited every element of the intelligence community," says a former Cheney staffer. When he wasn't visiting these agencies, his staff snowed them with questions. According to one former CIA analyst, "The Agency [would write] something on WMD, and it would come back from the vice president with a thousand questions: 'What's this sentence mean?' 'What's your source for this line?' 'Why are you disregarding sources that are saying the opposite?'"

Among Cheney's aides, resentment of the CIA went far beyond a healthy skepticism

of fallible intelligence analysts and an Agency with a decidedly mixed record. Whereas Cheney's questioning of intelligence during the Gulf war had been probing but respectful, now his staff belittled the intelligence community's findings, irrespective of their merits. For years, Libby and Hannah in particular had believed the Agency harbored a politically motivated animus against the INC and irresponsibly discounted intelligence reports from defectors the INC had brought forward. "This had been a fight for such a long period of time, where people were so dug in," reflects a friend of one of Cheney's senior staffers. The OVP had been studying issues like Iraq for so many years that it often simply did not accept that contrary information provided by intelligence analysts—especially CIA analysts—could be correct. As one former colleague of many OVP officials puts it, "They so believed that the CIA were wrong, they were like, 'We want to *show* these fuckers that they are wrong.'"

Intelligence analysts saw little difference between Cheney and his staffers. The vice president's aides may have made more trips to Langley and signed more memoranda asking for further information, but, as the CIA saw it, the OVP was a coordinated machine working for its engineer. "When I heard complaints from people, it was, 'Man, you wouldn't believe this shit that Libby and [Undersecretary of Defense Douglas J.] Feith and Wolfowitz do to us.' They were all lumped together," says an ex-analyst close to his former colleagues. "I would hear them say, 'Goddamn, that fucking John Hannah, you wouldn't believe.' And the next day it would be, 'That fucking Bill Luti.' For all these guys, they're interchangeable." Adds another, "They had power. Authority. They had the vice president behind them. ... What Scooter did, Cheney made possible. Feith, Wolfowitz—Cheney made it all possible. He's the fulcrum. He's the one."

From the OVP perspective, the CIA—with its caveat-riddled position on Iraqi WMD and its refusal to connect Saddam and Al Qaeda—was an outright obstacle to the invasion of Iraq. And, as Cheney and his staff remembered so vividly from their Pentagon days, the CIA was often wrong on the biggest security questions. So Cheney reverted to the intelligence-gathering method he had perfected at Halliburton: He outsourced. Even before September 11, 2001, Cheney had given his staff clear instructions to go beyond the typical information channels in the bureaucracy. "He very, very much did not want to be trapped inside the government bubble and only see intelligence reports and State Department cables and Department of Defense memos," an ex-staffer recounts. Escaping the bubble was often innocuous and intellectually healthy. The OVP arranged meetings for Cheney with Middle East experts, such as the University of Haifa's Amatzia Baram, Princeton's Bernard Lewis, and Johns Hopkins's Fouad Ajami, and it gave him documents, such as the U.N.'s 2002 Arab Human Development Report, which pointed to tyranny as the source of the region's problems.

But Cheney's office didn't escape the government bubble so much as create a new one. Any doubts expressed by the intelligence community about the OVP's sources, especially Chalabi, were ignored. During his stint as an adviser to Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Hannah had been one of the Clinton administration's most fervent INC supporters. Working for Cheney, he stayed in regular contact with the exile group. "He relied on Ahmed Chalabi for insights and advice," says a former Bush administration official. Cheney himself became an increasingly vocal Chalabi advocate. At an NSC meeting in the fall of 2002, the State Department and Pentagon feuded over releasing even more funding to the INC. In a rare burst of open influence, Cheney "weighed in, in a really big way," according to a former NSC staffer. "He said, 'We're getting ready to go to war, and we're nickel-and-diming the INC at a time when they're providing us with unique intelligence on Iraqi WMD.'" To the OVP, the CIA's hostility to such "unique" INC intelligence was evidence of the Agency's political corruption. Before long, "there was something of a willingness to give [INC-provided intelligence] greater weight" than that offered by the intelligence community, says the former administration official.

Chalabi was not the only source Hannah used to get alternative information to

Cheney. In 2001, Luti had moved from the OVP to across the Potomac to become Feith's deputy for Near East and South Asia (NESA). By late 2002, Luti's Iraq desk became the Office of Special Plans (OSP), tasked with working on issues related to the war effort. In addition to actual planning, the OSP provided memoranda to Pentagon officials recycling the most damaging—and often the most spurious—intelligence about Iraq's Al Qaeda connections and the most hopeful predictions about liberated Iraq. In the fall of 2002, one of the memos stated as fact that September 11 hijacker Mohamed Atta had met in Prague with an Iraqi intelligence agent months before the attacks—a claim the FBI and CIA had debunked months earlier after an exhaustive investigation. And the OSP didn't just comb through old intelligence for new information. It had its own sources. For example, one of Luti's aides, a Navy lieutenant commander named Youssef Aboul-Enein, was tasked with scouring Arabic-language websites and magazines to come up with what Aboul-Enein would call “something really useful”—statements by Saddam praising the September 11 attacks, Palestinian suicide bombings, or any act of terrorism.

According to those who worked in NESA, Luti's efforts had a specific customer: Cheney. “Cheney's the one with the burr under his saddle about Iraq,” says retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Karen Kwiatkowski, who worked for Luti from May 2002 until the eve of the war. During that time, Luti held only about six or seven staff meetings, she says, and “I heard Scooter Libby's name mentioned in half those meetings.” Discussing Iraq, Luti would say “things like, ‘Did you give something to Scooter?’ ‘Scooter called; hey, call him back,’ ... [or] ‘Oh, well, did you talk to Scooter about that?’” And Luti would make trips across the Potomac to see his old colleagues at the OVP. White House officials would often see Luti disappearing into Hannah's office before going on to Libby's.

The OVP didn't just generate this information for themselves. They tried to pump it back into the intelligence pipeline on visits to Langley. “Scooter and the vice president come out there loaded with crap from OSP, reams of information from Chalabi's people” on both terrorism and WMD, according to an ex-CIA analyst. One of the OVP's principal interlocutors was Alan Foley, director of the CIA's Nonproliferation Center. Cheney's office pelted Foley with questions about Iraq's nuclear weapons program—especially about Saddam's alleged attempts to purchase uranium from Niger. According to a colleague, Foley “pushed back” by “stressing the implausibility of it.” Months earlier, after all, former Ambassador Joseph Wilson had gone to Niger at the behest of the CIA—a visit that had itself been instigated by questions raised by Cheney in an Agency briefing—and concluded that the sale almost certainly did not occur. But Cheney kept pressing, and it took its toll on Foley. “He was bullied and intimidated,” says a friend of Foley.

In the view of many at Langley, the OVP wasn't simply highlighting what it considered weaknesses in CIA analysis. Rather, it was trying to stifle information that it considered counterproductive to the case for war. The tone of the questioning, some analysts felt, was less inquisitive than hostile. “It was done along the lines of: ‘What's wrong with you bunch of assholes? You don't know what's going on, you're horribly biased, you're a bunch of pinkos,’” says a retired analyst close to his active-duty colleagues. Some analysts saw the questioning as a method of diverting overtaxed CIA analysts from producing undesired intelligence product. On one occasion, officials asked analysts hard at work on Iraq to produce a paper on the history of the British occupation of Mesopotamia following World War I. The request might seem reasonable on the surface—after all, an occupation ought to be informed by precedent. But policymakers in the OVP and the DOD could just as easily have picked up histories of Iraq from the library and let the CIA go back to work on classified analysis. But, after enduring the questioning for months, an ex-analyst explains, “It gets to the point where you just don't want to fight it anymore.”

Eventually the OVP's alternative analyses found their way into the administration's public case for war. The distance between the OVP and the intelligence community was greatest on terrorism, and the OVP was determined to win. Libby wrote a draft of Colin Powell's February speech to the U.N. Security Council that outlined a far different threat than the secretary of State envisioned. "[The OVP] really wanted to make it a speech mostly about the link to terrorism," says one former NSC official. Although Powell and his staff balked at the most controversial—and poorly substantiated—details, Libby still provided the initial outline for the speech.

Cheney's own public statements went far beyond what the CIA and other intelligence agencies had verified. In an August 2002 speech in Nashville, Cheney asserted, "The Iraqi regime has in fact been very busy enhancing its capabilities in the field of chemical and biological agents, and they continue to pursue the nuclear program they began so many years ago." The intelligence community was in fact deeply divided over whether the nuclear program was again active, and a classified DIA report a month later indicated that the Agency had "no reliable information" about Iraq's chemical weapons program. But these doubts never seeped into Cheney's public statements. Days before the invasion, Cheney told NBC's Tim Russert on "Meet the Press," "We know [Saddam is] out trying once again to produce nuclear weapons, and we know that he has a long-standing relationship with ... the Al Qaeda organization." By contrast, the intelligence agencies assessed that, despite some apparently fruitless contact between Saddam's henchmen and Al Qaeda terrorists in Sudan in the mid-'90s, Iraq and Osama bin Laden were two unrelated threats.

The OVP never considered that it could be wrong, despite the fact that none of its senior members had intelligence training. The CIA, on the other hand, rather than behaving as a rigid and unshakable bastion of unquestionable truth, subjected its judgments to rigorous criticism. On Iraq, the CIA had what is known as the "red cell," a team of four highly regarded retired analysts who conducted alternative assessments of Iraq's ties to terrorism. The OVP, by contrast, put its judgments through no comparable wringer. Perhaps that is why so much of what they embraced was wrong. On the ground in Iraq today, there is no evidence that Saddam reconstituted his nuclear weapons program; according to chief American arms-hunter David Kay's interim report, the evidence of any ongoing chemical or biological weapons programs is fragmentary at best. A classified study prepared by the National Intelligence Council in early 2003 found that only one of Chalabi's defectors could be considered credible, *THE NEW REPUBLIC* has learned. A more recent investigation undertaken by the DIA has found that practically all the intelligence provided by the INC was worthless.

September 14 was a difficult moment for the occupation of Iraq. In Falluja, a seat of unrest, Iraqis had finished burying ten security officers accidentally killed when soldiers from the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment mistook them for guerrillas. One of their comrades, Ali Jassim, told a *New York Times* reporter that the United States was "training their guns on us. ... They came here to apply the occupier way—just like Saddam." That morning, Cheney returned to "Meet The Press" for his first TV interview since the war began. Despite repeated CIA warnings of postwar chaos, Cheney had insisted that the Iraqis would welcome American troops with open arms, and Russert reminded him that, on March 16, Cheney had flatly declared, "We will, in fact, be greeted as liberators." Instead, it seemed, Iraqis had decidedly mixed feelings about the occupation. A report by former Deputy Defense Secretary John Hamre, initiated at the behest of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Iraq administrator L. Paul Bremer, had warned two months earlier, "The Iraqi population has exceedingly high expectations, and the window for cooperation may close rapidly."

Cheney was unfazed. "If you go out and look at what's happening on the ground, you'll find that there is widespread support," he responded. As evidence, he cited a poll

conducted by John Zogby. “That’s got very positive news in it in terms of the numbers it shows with respect to the attitudes to what Americans have done,” he said. “One of the questions it asked is: ‘If you could have any model for the kind of government you’d like to have’—and they were given five choices—‘which would it be?’ The U.S. wins hands down. If you want to ask them, do they want an Islamic government established, by two-to-one margins they say no, including the Shia population. If you ask how long they want Americans to stay, over sixty percent of the people polled said they want the U.S. to stay for at least another year.”

Practically nothing Cheney said in his description of the poll—and the situation in Iraq—withstands scrutiny. When Iraqis were asked what model government they wanted, a breakaway plurality of 49 percent desired a democracy guided by Islamic law. The next closest contender, with 24 percent, was a clerical-dominated Islamic state. A secular, democratic Iraq—the closest choice to the U.S. model—garnered only 21 percent support. Over 60 percent of Iraqis wanted the United States and Britain to *leave* Iraq in a year; among Sunnis, the figure rose to 70 percent. Worse, fully half of Iraqis said they expected the United States to hurt their country over the next five years. Only 36 percent voiced faith that it would help. “One thing is clear,” Zogby wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, “the predicted euphoria of Iraqis has not materialized.”

Cheney’s dubious pronouncements on Iraq didn’t end there. When asked if Iraq was involved in the September 11 attacks, Cheney said, “We don’t know.” He trotted out once more the canard that Atta met in Prague with an Iraqi intelligence agent—the same charge the OSP had continued to circulate even after the intelligence community debunked it. (Cheney’s remark was so embarrassing to the administration that, three days later, Bush declared, “We’ve had no evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved with September 11.”)

In short, nothing that has happened in Iraq over the last six months—the missing WMD, the mounting violence, the massive price tag—seems to have prompted any introspection among Cheney or his staff. They continue to carp about the hopelessly dovish bent of the CIA. “Some of these people—do they not have a political view on this?” exclaims a former Cheney staffer. “Did they support or oppose the war? Shouldn’t that be factored into how they ended up judging [intelligence]?” In September, Cheney hired David Wurmser from the office of Bolton, the undersecretary of state for arms control. Recruiting Wurmser indicates Cheney’s confidence in the approach to intelligence the OVP has taken from the start. After the September 11 attacks, Wurmser and his colleague Michael Maloof had been tasked by Feith to cull the intelligence community’s amassed data on Iraq and Al Qaeda to find evidence of cooperation.

With Bush repeatedly affirming Cheney’s place on the 2004 ticket, there is no evidence the vice president has reconsidered either the ideological vision that has taken him this far or the process he has used to implement it. And, of course, there are enormous foreign policy challenges remaining on the U.S. agenda: the nuclear crises in North Korea and Iran, America’s estrangement from the rest of the world, and above all the unfinished war on terrorism. Anyone who thinks the Bush administration will take a softer line on these questions than it did on Iraq is probably kidding himself. Cheney will continue to push the agenda he set out 15 years ago: aggressive promotion of democracy through military power. This is no mere intoxication with ideas of the moment, spurred by a zealous staff or the pain of September 11. This is who Dick Cheney—the most powerful vice president in history—is.