

Cheney: Caught In the Act of Being Himself

by Jeffrey Steinberg

During the weekend of Feb. 11-12, Vice President Dick Cheney was caught in the act of being himself. During a quail shoot at the elite Armstrong Ranch in south Texas, Cheney shot a fellow hunter, 78-year-old Texas attorney and Republican Party fundraiser Harry Whittington. While precise details of the incident may never be publicly known, and there are reliable reports that some of the shooters, including Cheney, had been drinking, one fact is certain: Cheney reacted according to profile and immediately went into full damage-control mode.

News of the incident was blacked out for 18 hours, and sheriff's deputies responding to the "accidental shooting" were blocked by Cheney's Secret Service detail from interviewing the Vice President or any other witnesses until the next morning—thus preventing any evidence of alcohol abuse from being obtained.

When Cheney's office finally did issue a statement—after local media reported the shooting—the statement was full of lies. Cheney's claims that he had authorized the Armstrong family to alert the local press were vigorously denied by the Armstrongs, who said they called the press without informing the Veep.

When Whittington suffered a reported heart attack as the result of the bird-shot, fired by Cheney, lodging near his heart, the Cheney-mandated coverup collapsed, and a media feeding frenzy ensued, which has yet to die down.

The reaction to Cheney's arrogant mishandling of what should have passed as an unfortunate, garden-variety hunting accident, peaked on Feb. 16, with a pair of opinion pieces, demanding Cheney's immediate resignation.

New York Times columnist Bob Herbert summed up the verdict in his headline, "Mr. Vice President, It's Time to Go." Herbert wrote, "It's time for Dick Cheney to step down—for the sake of the country and for the sake of the Bush Administration." Cheney "got his war, and while the nation's brave young soldiers and marines were bouncing around Iraq in shamefully vulnerable humvees and other vehicles, dodging bullets, bombs, and improvised explosive devices, Mr. Cheney (a gold-medal winner in the acquisition of wartime deferments) felt perfectly comfortable packing his fancy 28-gauge Perazzi shotgun and heading off to Texas with a covey of fat cats to shoot quail." The shooting incident, Herbert continued, "was the



White House

Vice President Cheney with other Cabinet members and senior staff, immediately after 9/11. Cheney has now become the "hate magnet" in the Administration, as leading Republicans are thinking the previously unthinkable: Dick, it's time to go back to Wyoming.

moment when the legend of the tough, hawkish, take-no-prisoners vice president began morphing into the less-than-heroic image of a reckless, scowling incompetent who mistook his buddy for a bird. This story is never going away. . . . Dick Cheney is a constant reminder of those things the White House would most like to forget. . . . Mr. Cheney would do his nation and his president a service by packing his bags and heading back to Wyoming. He's become a joke. But not a funny one."

But the real message was delivered, the same day, by a prestigious Republican policy advisor and speech writer for Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, Peggy Noonan. Writing in the flagship publication of Wall Street, Dow Jones' *Wall Street Journal*, Noonan spoke for a growing chorus of prominent GOP insiders: "The Dick Cheney shooting incident will, in a way, go away. And, in a way, not—ever. . . . Dick Cheney . . . has been painted as the dark force of the administration, and now there's a mental picture to go with the reputation. Pull! Sorry, Harry! Pull!"

Noonan voiced the thinking of many in the George W. Bush White House, writing: "I suspect what they're thinking and not saying is, 'If Dick Cheney weren't vice president, who would be a good vice president?' They're thinking, 'At some point down the road we may wind up thinking about a new plan.' And one night over drinks at a barbecue in McLean one top guy will turn to another top guy and say, 'Under the never permeable and never porous Dome of Silence, tell me . . . wouldn't you like to replace Cheney?' " Noonan explained: "It's not the shooting incident itself, it's that Dick Cheney has been the administration's hate magnet for five

years now. Halliburton, energy meetings, Libby, Plamegate. . . . But, at a certain point a hate magnet can draw so much hate you don't want to hold it in your hands anymore, you want to drop it, and pick up something else. This is a White House that likes to hit 'refresh' when the screen freezes. Right now the screen is stuck, with poll numbers in the low 40s, or high 30s." Noonan ended: "In 1992, when George H.W. Bush was in trouble . . . a lot of people urged him to hit refresh by dumping Dan Quayle. He didn't. George W. Bush loves to do what his father didn't. . . . Who would the Cheney replacement be? That's what I suspect the president's men are asking themselves."

As Lyndon LaRouche noted, in a series of widely circulated comments following the Cheney shoot-out revelations, late night pundits, like Jay Leno, David Letterman, and Jon Stewart, thoroughly outclassed most Democratic Party leaders, dubbing Cheney the "Shooter-in-Chief," and unleashing a non-stop barrage of devastating jokes. Among the Democrats, aside from LaRouche, only Sen. Patrick Leahy (Vt.) captured the moment. Referring to an incident on the U.S. Senate floor in July 2004, in which Vice President Cheney told him to his face, "Go f— yourself," Leahy, comparing himself to Whittington, said, "I guess I got off easy."

The south Texas shooting incident—and coverup—in short, became a public metaphor for every crime of imperial arrogance and "chicken hawk" war-mongering committed by Dick Cheney over the past five years. After committing a string of "high crimes and misdemeanors," Cheney may now be brought down by his own childish aversion to public displays of truth.

The Post-Cheney Era

On Nov. 16, 2005, Lyndon LaRouche delivered an international webcast address, declaring that “the post-Cheney era in world affairs” had begun. That webcast came less than three weeks after Lewis “Scooter” Libby, Vice President Cheney’s chief of staff and chief national security aide, was indicted on perjury and obstruction of justice charges by Special Counsel Patrick Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald was named in December 2003 to probe the leaking of the identity of undercover CIA officer Valerie Plame, to syndicated columnist Robert Novak and other journalists in July 2003. Plame is the wife of former Ambassador Joseph Wilson, who had conducted a CIA-sponsored fact-finding mission to Niger in February 2002, which disproved reports that Iraq had been seeking to illegally obtain uranium for a nuclear bomb from the African state.

The text of the Oct. 28, 2005 Libby indictment named Cheney as Libby’s source on Valerie Plame, and set the stage for a second-phase grand jury probe by Fitzgerald, focussing on Cheney as the target-in-chief.

Unfortunately, at precisely the moment that Cheney was

in the process of going down for the count, Congressional Democrats went limp. While Democratic and independent voters were going apoplectic over Bush-Cheney crimes and scandals—from the Iraq War quagmire and mounting death and injury toll, to the Jack Abramoff corruption scandal, to the National Security Agency’s illegal spying on American citizens, to the Medicare prescription drug blowout, to the Hurricane Katrina abject failures—Democratic lawmakers, with few exceptions, were nowhere to be found. While LaRouche called upon Democratic elected officials to hold 1,000 town hall meetings to rally the public during the year-end Congressional recess, the Democratic Party largely went on vacation. By the time the U.S. Senate reconvened in mid-January 2006, and immediately took up the nomination of Samuel Alito to the United States Supreme Court, the Democratic Party was in a full-blown state of regression, compared to its 2005 routing of the so-called “Bush mandate,” a routing that was catalyzed by LaRouche and the LaRouche Youth Movement’s active and leading role.

Nobody in their right mind could have presumed that the post-Cheney era would come in with a whimper. The Synarchist bankers who installed Cheney as their White House Grand Inquisitor, and managed him through more reliable and intelligent assets like George Shultz, moved aggressively, at the start of 2006, to launch global chaos through a stage-managed military confrontation with Iran. That confrontation had originally been scheduled for the August 2005 Congressional recess, but was postponed in the face of stiff U.S. military and intelligence community opposition and a LaRouche-led campaign to silence Cheney’s “Guns of August.”

Several factors changed between August 2005 and January-February 2006, driving the Iran military showdown. First and foremost, the global financial and monetary system moved rapidly closer to the breaking point—highlighted by skyrocketing raw-material prices, currency instabilities, and hedge-fund and private equity-fund moves to rapidly seize ownership over actually productive enterprises in North America and Western Europe.

As LaRouche warned a group of diplomats on Feb. 11, the London-centered bankers behind Shultz and Cheney are moving to provoke global chaos through a war against Iran, sure to drive oil prices up to \$100-150 a barrel overnight. British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw took the lead in accelerating the Iran showdown via a series of late-January 2006 provocations, including the British-sponsored drive to kick the Iranian nuclear program into the United Nations Security Council—a move telegraphed in advance by inflammatory statements by Shultz, in his capacity as co-chairman of the Committee on the Present Danger, a Cold War-era confrontationist front, which was recently revived to promote the “Clash of Civilizations” permanent war with Islam.

Two other factors also intervened. First, the election of President Mahmood Ahmadinejad in Iran placed a minority radical faction, centered in the Revolutionary Guard, into a

Cheney Bags His Limit

From the vast outpouring of humorous late-night TV and other commentary at the expense of Dick Cheney, here are EIR’s top picks:

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.): “In retrospect, I got off easy.”

David Letterman, CBS TV: “We can’t get bin Laden, but we nailed a 78-year-old attorney. . . . The good news, ladies and gentlemen, we finally located weapons of mass destruction: It’s Dick Cheney. . . . But here’s the sad part—before the trip, Donald Rumsfeld had denied the guy’s request for body armor.”

Jay Leno, NBC TV: “I think Cheney is starting to lose it. After he shot the guy, he screamed, ‘Anyone else want to call domestic wiretapping illegal?’ ”

Ron Coddry on the “Daily Show”: “Jon, tonight the Vice President is standing by his decision to shoot Harry Whittington.”

Then **Jon Stewart** put things in historical perspective, noting that Alexander Hamilton was the last person shot by a Vice President. “Hamilton, of course, was shot in a duel with Aaron Burr over issues of honor, integrity, and political maneuvering. Whittington? Mistaken for a bird.”

Michael Goodwin in the *New York Daily News*: “He is the Dead Veep Walking.”

position of power. Ahmadinejad's childish provocations against Israel, delivered at an Organization of Islamic Conference event in Mecca, offered a perfect pretext for the London-orchestrated Shultz-Cheney counter-provocations.

The second development was the sudden removal of Ariel Sharon from the Israeli political equation, shortly after he called new elections for late March, and split from the Likud party to form the centrist Kadima party. It is a supreme irony that "Greater Israel" fanatic Sharon had come to terms with Israel's demographic crisis, and was resolved to accepting a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli deadlock, albeit an Israeli-imposed solution. With Sharon's near-fatal stroke, permanently removing him from politics, Shultz and Cheney moved instantly to create the conditions for a Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu victory-through-war (see article, p. 24). According to senior U.S. and Israeli sources, Cheney has been "working overtime" to secure a long-shot Netanyahu Likud victory over acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, whose Kadima party would form a unity government with Labor. The price for a Bibi victory: war against Syria—in the event that U.S. military and diplomatic opposition to an Iran pre-emptive strike trumps Cheney and Shultz's maneuverings, maneuverings carefully orchestrated from within Britain's Blair government by Jack Straw.

An Institutional Reflex

Even as Congressional Democrats were dodging responsibility for bringing down Cheney for an array of borderline treasonous acts, U.S. political institutions, led by the uniformed military, were forcefully weighing in against Cheney's Iran war schemes. According to U.S. military and diplomatic sources, the Joint Chiefs of Staff unceremoniously informed the White House that there was no viable military option against Iran—especially so long as 140,000 American troops, and another 60,000 American "contractors," remain on the ground in neighboring Iraq as virtual hostages of the Shi'ite majority government imposed with Washington's blessing. According to one source, the generals and admirals delivered this stark warning to the White House: Order an attack on predominantly Shi'ite Iran—even a limited bombing strike against a few select military targets—and you will be impeached, because thousands of American soldiers will die at the hands of our Iraqi Shi'ite "allies."

Two additional institutional "shots-across-the-bow" were delivered against Cheney in early February. First, John Negroponte, President Bush's Director of National Intelligence, in his annual state of the world threat assessment to Congress, reiterated the findings of a 2005 National Intelligence Estimate: Iran is a decade away from a deliverable nuclear bomb. Reportedly, Negroponte's testimony, aimed at chilling the neo-conservative war fever against Tehran, caused fits of rage in the Vice President's Office.

Second, Paul Pillar, the recently retired Middle East director of the National Intelligence Council, penned an article for

the Council on Foreign Relations' journal, *Foreign Affairs*, assailing the Bush-Cheney White House's abuse of the pre-Iraq War intelligence assessments. Cheney and company came into office in January 2001, already determined to go to war to overthrow Saddam Hussein, and they willfully suppressed or ignored all of the extensive intelligence findings that argued against claims of Saddam's ties to al-Qaeda and stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction.

These U.S. institutions had challenged Cheney—just as LaRouche had demanded in his Jan. 11, 2006 Washington webcast. But bigger guns were also about to be fired.

Fitzgerald Speaks

In the immediate aftermath of the narrow Senate vote, confirming Federalist Society darling Samuel Alito as Supreme Court Justice, replacing Sandra Day O'Connor, Special Council Patrick Fitzgerald released a series of court documents in the Libby case, which rekindled Cheneygate.

First, Fitzgerald released a letter to Libby's attorneys, informing them that he possessed evidence that e-mails relevant to the Plame case had been destroyed in the Office of the Vice President (*EIR*, Feb. 17, 2006). Other court submissions, previously kept from the public, were then released, via an Appellate Court ruling, indicating that, in his grand jury testimony, Libby had, in effect, said that he had been ordered by "higher-ups" to leak Iraq War-related classified information, including select portions of the October 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, to reporters. Libby's now-released grand jury statements, in short, sank Dick Cheney.

The new Fitzgerald revelations sent Cheney into a predictable flight forward. During the same Feb. 15, 2006 Fox TV interview with the neo-con-friendly Brit Hume, in which he defended his stall-and-appeal behavior following the Whittington shooting, Cheney claimed that an Executive Order signed by President Bush had empowered him, as Vice President, to declassify national security secrets. In response to Libby's "the Devil made me do it" defense, Cheney replied with an assertion of Vice Presidential powers bordering on the divine rights of kings.

Well-placed Washington sources say that Cheney, now more than ever, is on the top of Fitzgerald's hit parade—along with John Bolton, Frederick Fleitz, and Stephen Hadley. Fitzgerald's grand jury mandate extends well into 2007, and the Libby trial is scheduled to begin next January. Fitzgerald is expected to interrogate the Vice President sometime before the start of that trial.

LaRouche's message, presented to the Washington diplomats on Feb. 16, emphasized immediate action: If you want to stop a policy disaster—like a pre-emptive U.S. military strike against Iran, triggering global financial disintegration and a worldwide medieval religious war—the most efficient course of action is to fire the policymaker. In this case, that means dumping Dick Cheney, now!