

EXHIBIT A

7 of 8 DOCUMENTS

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CIA Agent's Identity Was Leaked to Media

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BODY:

At CIA Director George J. Tenet's request, the Justice Department is looking into an allegation that administration officials leaked the name of an undercover CIA officer to a journalist, government sources said yesterday.

The operative's identity was published in July after her husband, former U.S. ambassador Joseph C. Wilson IV, publicly challenged President Bush's claim that Iraq had tried to buy "yellowcake" uranium ore from Africa for possible use in nuclear weapons. Bush later backed away from the claim.

The intentional disclosure of a covert operative's identity is a violation of federal law.

The officer's name was disclosed on July 14 in a syndicated column by Robert D. Novak, who said his sources were two senior administration officials.

Yesterday, a senior administration official said that before Novak's column ran, two top White House officials called at least six Washington journalists and disclosed the identity and occupation of Wilson's wife. Wilson had just revealed that the CIA had sent him to Niger last year to look into the uranium claim and that he had found no evidence to back up the charge. Wilson's account touched off a political fracas over Bush's use of intelligence as he made the case for attacking Iraq.

"Clearly, it was meant purely and simply for revenge," the senior official said of the alleged leak.

Sources familiar with the conversations said the leakers were seeking to undercut Wilson's credibility. They alleged that Wilson, who was not a CIA employee, was selected for the Niger mission partly because his wife had recommended him. Wilson said in an interview yesterday that a reporter had told him that the leaker said, "The real issue is Wilson and his wife."

A source said reporters quoted a leaker as describing Wilson's wife as "fair game."

The official would not name the leakers for the record and would not name the journalists. The official said there was no indication that Bush knew about the calls.

It is rare for one Bush administration official to turn on another. Asked about the motive for describing the leaks, the senior official said the leaks were "wrong and a huge miscalculation, because they were irrelevant and did nothing to diminish Wilson's credibility."

Bush Administration Is Focus of Inquiry; CIA Agent's Identity Was L

Wilson, while refusing to confirm his wife's occupation, has suggested publicly that he believes Bush's senior adviser, Karl C. Rove, broke her cover. Wilson said Aug. 21 at a public forum in suburban Seattle that it is of keen interest to him "to see whether or not we can get Karl Rove frog-marched out of the White House in handcuffs."

White House press secretary Scott McClellan said yesterday that he knows of no leaks about Wilson's wife. "That is not the way this White House operates, and no one would be authorized to do such a thing," McClellan said. "I don't have any information beyond an anonymous source in a media report to suggest there is anything to this. If someone has information of this nature, then he or she should report it to the Department of Justice."

McClellan, who Rove had speak for him, said of Wilson's comments: "It is a ridiculous suggestion, and it is simply not true." McClellan was asked about Wilson's charge at a White House briefing Sept. 16 and said the accusation is "totally ridiculous."

Administration officials said Tenet sent a memo to the Justice Department raising a series of questions about whether a leaker had broken federal law by disclosing the identity of an undercover officer. The CIA request was reported Friday night by MSNBC.com. Administration sources familiar with the matter said the Justice Department is determining whether a formal investigation is warranted.

An intelligence official said Tenet "doesn't like leaks."

The CIA request could reopen the rift between the White House and the intelligence community that emerged this summer when Bush and his senior aides blamed Tenet for the inclusion of the now-discredited uranium claim -- the so-called "16 words" -- in the State of the Union address in January.

Tenet issued a statement taking responsibility for the CIA's approval of the address before it was delivered, but made clear the CIA had earlier warned the White House not to use the allegations about uranium ore. After an ensuing rush of leaks over White House handling of intelligence, Bush's aides said they believed in retrospect it had been a political mistake to blame Tenet.

The Intelligence Protection Act, passed in 1982, imposes maximum penalties of 10 years in prison and \$ 50,000 in fines for unauthorized disclosure by government employees with access to classified information.

Members of the administration, especially Vice President Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, have been harshly critical of unauthorized leakers, and White House spokesmen are often dismissive of questions about news reports based on unnamed sources. The FBI is investigating senators for possibly leaking intercept information about Osama bin Laden.

The only recipient of a leak about the identity of Wilson's wife who went public with it was Novak, the conservative columnist, who wrote in The Washington Post and other newspapers that Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, "is an agency operative on weapons of mass destruction." He added, "Two senior administration officials told me that Wilson's wife suggested sending him to Niger."

When Novak told a CIA spokesman he was going to write a column about Wilson's wife, the spokesman urged him not to print her name "for security reasons," according to one CIA official. Intelligence officials said they believed Novak understood there were reasons other than Plame's personal security not to use her name, even though the CIA has declined to confirm whether she was undercover.

Novak said in an interview last night that the request came at the end of a conversation about Wilson's trip to Niger and his wife's role in it. "They said it's doubtful she'll ever again have a foreign assignment," he said. "They said if her name was printed, it might be difficult if she was traveling abroad, and they said they would prefer I didn't use her name. It was a very weak request. If it was put on a stronger basis, I would have considered it."

After the column ran, the CIA began a damage assessment of whether any foreign contacts Plame had made over the years could be in danger. The assessment continues, sources said.

The CIA occasionally asks news organizations to withhold the names of undercover agents, and news organizations usually comply. An intelligence official told The Post yesterday that no further harm would come from repeating Plame's name.

Wilson was acting U.S. ambassador to Iraq during the run-up to the Persian Gulf War of 1991. He was in the diplomatic service from 1976 until 1998, and was the Clinton administration's senior director of African affairs on the Na-

Bush Administration Is Focus of Inquiry; CIA Agent's Identity Was L

tional Security Council. He is now an international business consultant. Wilson said the mission to Niger was unpaid except for expenses.

Wilson said he believes an inquiry from Cheney's office launched his eight-day mission to Niger in February 2002 to check the uranium claim, which turned out to be based at least partly on forged documents. "The way it was briefed to me was that the office of the vice president had expressed an interest in a report covering uranium purchases by Iraq from Niger," Wilson said in a telephone interview yesterday.

He said that if Novak's account is accurate, the leak was part of "a deliberate attempt on the part of the White House to intimidate others and make them think twice about coming forward."

Sources said that some of the other journalists who received the leak did not use the information because they were uncomfortable with unmasking an undercover agent or because they did not consider the information relevant to Wilson's report about Niger.

Sen. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.), who has been pushing the FBI to investigate the disclosure since July, said yesterday that it "not only put an agent's life in danger, but many of that agent's sources and contacts."

Staff writer Richard Leiby contributed to this report.

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