

More Niger Documents

22 October 2003. Thanks to David Loepp for images and English translations, who writes:

Thanks to [Hersh](#) [*The New Yorker*, October 21, 2003] I see there may still be interest in this stuff. Here are my thoughts on the matter with four Niger docs in two photos. I include translations. It shouldn't be too hard to sort out. In the photo "Niger AuthFalse 001" the two docs to the left are most likely authentic, while the one on the right is false. The idea that some of the documents are authentic has already been advanced, but I regret that I cannot remember off-hand who first voiced it. My acknowledgements & apologies...

The three documents in the photo correspond to the first three in my list of all seventeen documents in "On August 10th..." The document displayed in photo "Niger CodeFalse" corresponds to number 14.

The doc "IraqEmbAuth" is the translation of the center page of jpg "Niger Auth&False." The only difference between that page and the false underlying page is the date.

See also:

<http://cryptome.org/niger-docs2.htm>
<http://cryptome.org/niger-docs.htm>

On August 10th the Sunday Independent published an interview with former Iraqi ambassador to the Holy See:

The Niger-Iraq dossier with few exceptions continues to be given short shrift by the English language press. We are subject to repetitions of trite facts and spin culled from a next door source, with just a touch of racial profiling. Yes, the whole thing was thrown together by a providential African on the make for a fast buck, coupled with his lack of knowledge of Niger's history, rulers- and the French language. And if that doesn't work, throw in the well-smeared French, and to hell with motivations. Niger is all livestock and uranium, so why else send an Iraqi ambassador there? Must be the uranium ore. Is the dossier really all that important, even if it was thrown into major speeches and declarations by the administration? Certainly, it did not make a difference in the course of events. The Iraqi adventure went ahead despite the IAEA communiqué that the dossier was not authentic. But these are not the questions I would like to address here. The point is what is the actual state of our knowledge concerning the dossier? This is an attempt to do so.

On August 10th The Sunday Independent published an interview with former Iraqi ambassador to the Holy See Wissam Al Zahawie about his self-claimed unwitting involvement in the Niger scam. Mr. Zahawie at one point offers a detailed account of his interrogations by weapons inspectors of the IAEA shortly after February 10th about his suspected role. Although Mr. Zahawie was not allowed to see the Iraqi-Niger documents, he mentions a letter of 6 July 2000, allegedly signed by him concerning Niger uranium. He was also questioned about the Iraqi embassy seal which apparently was impressed on at least one document.

None of the seventeen pages published by Panorama and la Repubblica correspond to Mr. Zahawie's description.

Of the seventeen pages at least three are probably authentic, since they refer to Ambassador Zahawie's official visit to Niger in February 1999, related in detail by him in the interview. One of the three pages is a letter from him to the Niger Embassy in Rome confirming his planned visit to Niger with flight details. Although it is partially covered in the Panorama layout, it seems to bear no seal. A second page is a Niger embassy letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning Mr. Zahawie's official visit. The last page is a telex that confirms the planned trip.

There is only one Iraqi forged document published so far. The forgery is so blatant as to invite immediate suspicion since it is an identical copy of the probably genuine Iraqi document with only a change in date. Supposedly, Mr. Zahawie made a second trip to Niger, same flight, same hour, one week before September 11, 2001. According to Mr. Zahawie, he was not even ambassador at the time. It would be interesting to have his opinion on the alleged Iraqi documents so far published.

The presence of genuine documents could indicate that they were stolen from the Niger embassy during the New Year's holiday 2001. If this were true, it would lend strength to the hypothesis that plumbers linked to intelligence services or special interest groups were active at an early date, whatever their motives may have been at the time. The possibility of a corrupt embassy employee is not to be excluded, although chances are that if he were involved in fabricating the forgeries, he would at least know his minister's name.

The ex-VIII division of the Italian intelligence service SISMI was specialized in the gathering and assessing of information on the illegal proliferation of arms. They were probably aware of Mr. Zahawie's visit to Niger and did open a file on the possibility of a uranium transaction, perhaps at the behest of an unidentified third party that furnished some bait. According to a qualified anonymous source cited by Gianni Cipriani in the Italian center-left daily, l'Unità, the VIII division concluded that there was no substance to the uranium sales claim and informed their colleagues abroad. It is very unlikely that the original dossier put together by the SISMI was passed on to other services, or that it had been stolen and put back into circulation. It's probable that whoever fed the forgeries to the SISMI went for another outlet more likely to take the bait.

The Berlusconi government has attempted to liquidate the matter by claiming that the dossier is covered by state secret motivated by the need to protect their source or sources. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Franco Frattini, who was in charge of the intelligence services at the time flatly denied that the dossier was covered by state secrecy and added that the services had other means to protect the identity of their sources.

The Procura of Rome (Italian equivalent of the District Attorney) has opened a criminal investigation for sabotage against the state (attentato alla costituzione, articolo 289) rather than simple forgery. The alleged crime would be a conspiracy to deliberately diffuse disinformation so as to impede or interfere with the lawful prerogatives and functions of state institutions. The charge has rarely been filed partly because of the difficulty to put a case together.

A final note on the Seal of the Embassy of Iraq to the Holy See, mentioned by Mr. Zahawie. Although it is not difficult to a forge a seal, a signet of it is required to do so. Were there Iraqi documents with the seal in the Niger embassy, or did a signet of the seal come from elsewhere?

For the sake of clarity here is a summary of the documents published as of this date by Panorama and la Repubblica.

- 1) A letter in Italian from the Iraqi ambassador to the Holy See received by the Niger embassy on February 1, 1999, confirming Mr. Zahawie's forthcoming trip to Niger. Probably authentic.
- 2) A letter identical to the preceding except for the date, September 3, 2001. False.
- 3) A letter from the Niger embassy in Rome to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Niger announcing Mr. Zahawie's trip also dated February 1, 1999. Probably authentic.
- 4) A telex dated February 1, 1999, identical in text to the preceding letter. Probably authentic. [niger-doc-04]
- 5) A telex published by Panorama, partially visible and illegible, dated February 5, 1999.
- 6) A letter from the Niger Ministry of Foreign Affairs to his ambassador in Rome asking him to contact the Iraqi ambassador (sic), Mr. Zahawie, concerning an agreement signed June 28, 2000, to furnish uranium to Iraq. The letter is dated July 30, 1999. In the Panorama version the date has been hand corrected to the year 2000. False. [niger-doc-05]
- 7) Page one of a letter from the president of Niger to Saddam Hussein confirming the agreement to furnish 500 tons of uranium, dated July 27, 2000. The president swears by a constitution that has been replaced four times since independence. False. [niger-doc-01]
- 8) Page two of the same letter. [niger-doc-06]
- 9) Accompanying letter to a formal agreement between Iraq and Niger to furnish uranium to the former, sent to the Niger embassy in Rome by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The letter is dated October 10, 2000, but is received in Rome on September 28, 2000. The letter is signed by Aielele Elhadji Habibou, no longer minister since 1989. False. [niger-doc-07]
- 10) A page with the word "Accord." [niger-doc-08]
- 11) Page one of schedule n° 1 to the agreement. The actual text of the agreement has not surfaced as of this writing. False. [niger-doc-02]
- 12) Second and final page of schedule n°1 to the agreement. [niger-doc-03]
- 13) A letter in code from the Minister of Foreign Affairs dated February 7, 2001. Panorama does not furnish a deciphered version.
- 14) A letter in code from the Secretary of State of Niger to the Ambassador in Rome dated July, 2001. Panorama furnishes a deciphered version. The text details the shipping of uranium to Iraq and cautions utmost secrecy. False.
- 15) A letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Ambassador in Rome dated August 28, 2001, confirming a shipment of uranium. No destination is specified. It could just as well refer to a presumed sale to China. See below. [niger-nitra-01]
- 16) A report on a meeting between the ambassadors of Niger, Sudan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya and Iran on June 14, 2002, to set up a secret elite military corps to aid nations and groups that are victims of unjust embargos, sanctions or accusations. The ensuing pages have not surfaced yet. Badly written fantasy politics. [niger-global-01]
- 17) A letter dated May 3, 2002, from the Nigerian embassy. Since it is partially covered in the Panorama spread, the text is incomprehensible.

An eighteenth page in code was also published by Panorama. According to the author of the service, it refers to a presumed sale of uranium to China. The letter is hand dated August 9, 2001. Ms. Burba's source affirmed that he had received the documents from someone within the Niger embassy while he was investigating a presumed China-Niger uranium sale. A similar transaction seems remote. Although China- and not only China- was involved in the Pakistani atomic and has been accused of furnishing high tech to Iran, it certainly doesn't need Niger uranium. The China link appears more likely to be part of the scam.

A close scrutiny of the documents invites a few considerations. At least two of the documents are so preposterous as to question the motives of Ms. Burba's source in pawning them off as real. As noted above, the second document is identical to the first except for the date: one week before the tragedy of the Twin Towers. The other document (number 16) is simply ridiculous. One hopes that Ms. Burba's purported CIA contacts at the US Embassy had, for the sake of credibility, the good grace to trash these two documents before forwarding the dossier to Washington.

The Berlusconi-owned weekly, Panorama, has not fared well in this matter. Surprisingly or not, Panorama only informed the US Embassy of the dossier. Although they have asserted that the false dossier was offered to other news agencies at the same time presumably by their source, no one has come forth as yet to substantiate the claim. Although Panorama may not have connected the dots after the State Department's December 19th allegation against Niger, they must have realized they were sitting on a smoking gun after ElBaradei declared the Niger- Iraq dossier "not authentic" on March 7th. Apparently, following an editorial line has its advantages over professionalism. The least that can be said is that Ms. Burba missed the false scoop of her lifetime.

Her editor-in-chief, Carlo Rosella, has fared better in duty but not in coherence. In an introductory editorial to Ms. Burba's article he denied the charges that money had been paid for the dossier, asserted the sacrosanct right to protect the identity of one's sources and praised the high professional standards of his weekly, ironically only days after being reprimanded by the national syndicate of journalists for having run a cover picture of Berlusconi with hair airbrushed in where baldness reigns. When Mr. Berlusconi's interests are at stake, Mr. Rosella has few qualms in dealing with facts. Panorama ran a false scoop in December 2001 claiming that an international cartel of judges had met secretly in Switzerland to conspire against Mr. Berlusconi. On another occasion the head of the Procura of Palermo, Pietro Grasso, declared that he actually turned one of Panorama's false scoops to his advantage. Although Rosella pointed out that Grasso had qualified his remark, the fact remains that Panorama did publish a false scoop against him. As of this writing, Panorama along with the rest of the Berlusconi press is engaged in an intense smear campaign against the political opposition based on false dossiers and false testimony (the so-called Telekom-Serbia scandal) apparently put together by some old hands affiliated with the outlawed Masonic lodge, Propaganda Due.

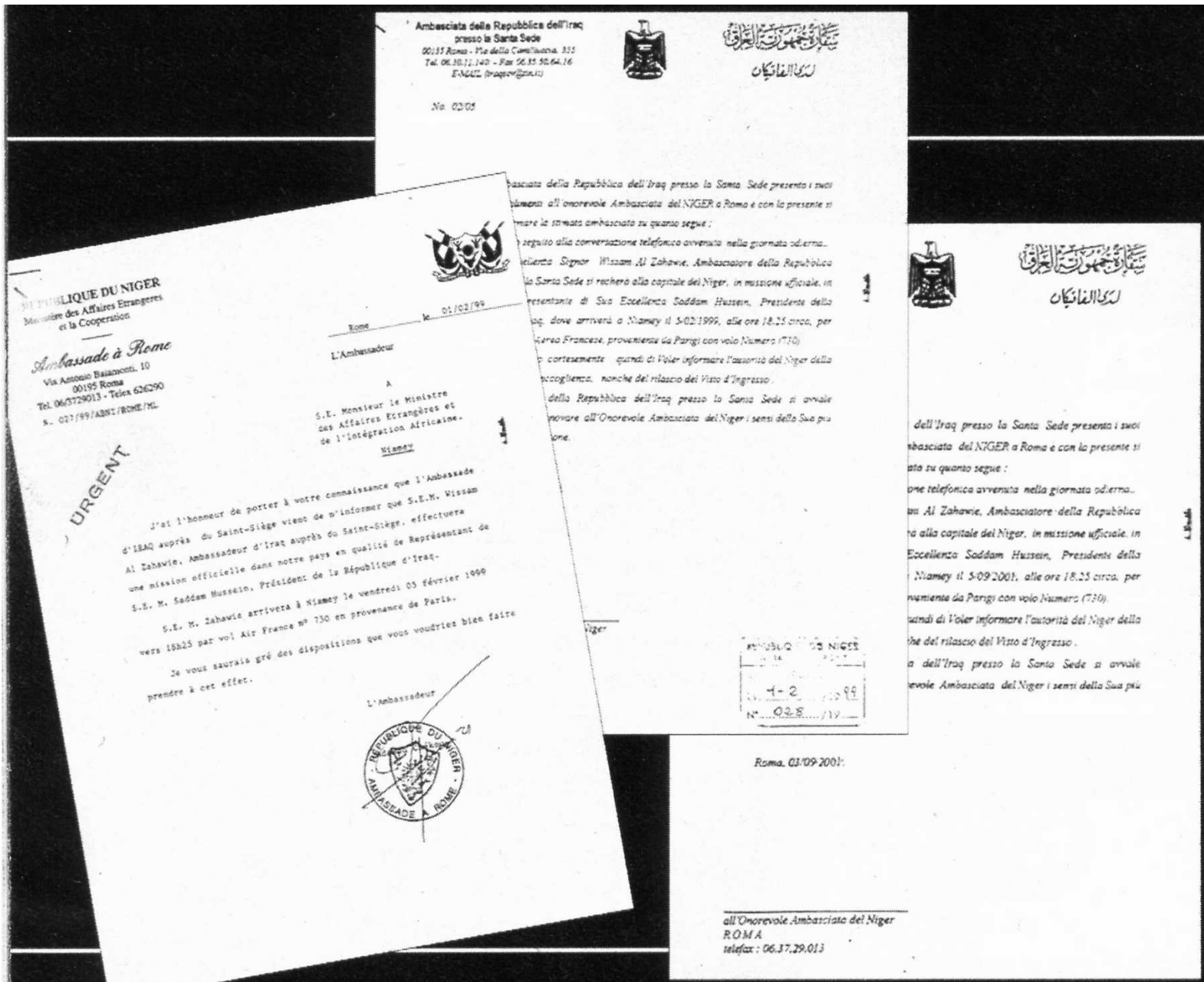
Panorama's role in the Niger scam should be addressed with a dose of scepticism.

A good deal of verifiable information published in the foreign press has not found its way into the mainstream English language press. According to a French-African dossier Niger denied State's allegations immediately on December 21st and made a number of detailed declarations the following days. The Minister of Mines, Rabiou Hassan Yari, qualified State's allegations as "defamatory" and challenged them to prove it. He explained at length the mechanisms of exploitation and control of the uranium ore, which would preclude any possibility of autonomous government accords or skimming off by the Niger state. Five days later Prime Minister Hama Amadou declared that Iraq had tried to buy an unspecified amount of uranium ore in the 1980's, but President Kountché after consulting his partners declined to sell. Mr. Amadou added that Iraq has never again requested uranium ore from Niger. According to The Independent of September 24, 2002, Saddam Hussein legally acquired 2.8 kg of uranium from Niger in 1981 or 1982, far from the 500 tons that are regularly reported.

In a January 29th Washington Post interview, immediately following the State of the Union address, ElBaradei, head of the IAEA declared that Niger had denied the charges made by the US government.

On February 21st, Niger, through the Minister of Economy and Finances, Ali Badio Gamatié, again denied selling uranium ore to Iraq, once again detailing the commercial and legal obligations that Niger is party to. Yahaya Baaré, Minister of Mines in 2000 when the supposed negotiations were underway, further declared that during the military transition a country "that was not Iraq" tried unsuccessfully to purchase uranium ore. He added that two Nigerian citizens also attempted to clench a deal for an unknown third party, "Niger cannot sell to a state that has not signed all the conventions against the proliferation of nuclear arms."

Although the Department of State had an interest in ignoring Niger's immediate and repeated denials, it is regrettable that the press wasn't doing its job.



Niger AuthFalse 001

[Translation of] Niger AuthFalse 001 at left above.]

URGENT

Republic of Niger
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

The Embassy in Rome
Via Antonio Baiamonti, 10
00195 Rome
Tel: 06/3729013 - Telex 626290
S. 027/49/ABNI/ROME/ML [?]

Rome, February 1, 1999

The Ambassador

TO

His Excellency The Minister
Of Foreign Affairs and
African Integration
Niamey

I am honoured to inform you that the Embassy of Iraq to the Holy See has just informed me that His Excellency Mister Wissam Al Zahawie, Ambassador of Iraq to the Holy See, will make an official visit to our country as a representative of His Excellency Mister Saddam Hussein, President of the Iraqi Republic.

His Excellency Mister Zahawie will arrive in Niamey on Friday, February 5, 1999, at 6:25 PM with Air France flight 730 from Paris.

I would be grateful for whatever measures you may kindly take.

The Ambassador

[Translation of Niger AuthFalse 001 at middle above.]

[...] Embassy of the Republic of Iraq to the Holy See presents his [...] to the honourable Embassy of NIGER in Rome and with the present [...] informs the esteemed embassy as follows:

[...] Following our telephone conversation today [...] Excellency Mister Wissam Al Zahawie, Ambassador of the Republic [of Iraq] to the Holy See, will visit the capital of Niger on an official mission, as [...] representative of His Excellency Saddam Hussein, President of the [Republic of Iraq], where he will arrive in Niamey February 5, 1999 at approximately 6:25 PM on the French air[li]ne] from Paris, flight number 730.

[...] courteously therefore to inform the authorities of Niger of the [...] welcome, as well as the release of a visa.

[...] of the Republic of Iraq to the Holy See avails [...] re]new to the Honourable Embassy of Niger the sense of his most [...]

MESSAGGIO B

Luglio 2001

Ambasciatore Niger
Roma

Représentant gouvernement réputé (si intende dell'IRAQ) vient de visiter son homologue nigérien -
Excellents négociations en cours -
De votre côté faut-il maintenir strict contact avec l'ambassadeur (si intende dell'IRAQ) à Rome concernant transport metal 551 91 (?) . Autorisation demandée survol arrivée tardivement. Notre gouvernement a décidé envoyer marchandise confidentiellement par bateau sous drapeau Gabon et sera transbordé en dehors des eaux territoriales. Repris contact. Travail très favorable avec envoi personnel l'President IRAQ -
Bien entendu garder cette information confidentiellement secreta et personnelle et méfier de tout le personnel -

Secrétaire d'Etat
MAMADOU EL HADJI

00-02-2
REP
MINISTER
DE LA COO
DIRECTIO
E
CON

CONFIDENTIEL

(B)

294.69	316.80				
168.97					
648.93	766.25	014.50	723.08	007.65	082.02
594.07	406.77				704.13
222.65	021.62		978.63		
697.81	851.0	542.0	465.2	04	01 Tangara
296.69	048.30	169.97	149.9	05	03
551.81	780.69	213.61	976.4	06	06 Timber fiscal
766.29	661.62	401.97	924.	08	08 Liquidation
674.11	061.41	581.83	379	13	10 Sénégalais
432.64	521.36	506.07	030	14	12 Mandar
503.28	17	738.42		15	19 Irak
562.53	245.19	316.30		16	20 Hermétique -ité rigoureuse
813.36	024.20	450.04		21	21 Okou
184.43	728.70			24	24
200.19				25	25 Koni
				30	30 Recevoir de nouveaux, nouvelles
				31	31 Alfa
				32	32 Adkar
				37	37 El Sidi Mahmoud
				41	41 Journal

Niger CodeFalse

[Translation of Niger CodeFalse at top above.]

Confidential

July 2001

Nigerien Ambassador

Rome

A government representative [from Iraq] has concluded his visit with his Nigerian colleague.

Negotiations are underway and look very promising.

It's necessary that you keep in close contact with the ambassador in Rome concerning the transportation of metal 551.91 [sic- 551.81 in original]. The authorization for overflight arrived too late. Our government has decided to send the merchandise secretly by sea under the Gabon banner and tranship in international waters. Contact re-established. Very good work done together with the personal emissary of the Iraqi president.

It's understood that this information is top secret and personal. Be on guard as far as all embassy personnel are concerned.

Secretary of State

Mamadou El Hadji

27 July 2003. More forged Nigerien documents published in Italy 27 July 2003:

<http://cryptome.org/niger-docs2.htm>

22 July 2003. Thanks to D., moved page 6 to properly follow page 1.

22 July 2003. Add translations of documents by Lars Vonpacker, who writes:

As you can see from the translation, it's a really bad case of trying to make these documents pass as official government communications.

While doing the translation, I stayed true to the essence of the French text.

The French of the documents sounds as if it comes right out of a Babelfish translation.

21 July 2003

Source of the 8 images: Robert Windrem, *NBC News*, which received them from *La Repubblica*.

PDF of the eight images: <http://cryptome.org/niger-docs.pdf> (135KB)

Five of these images appeared in hardcopy of the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* on July 16, 2003. The online story without the images:

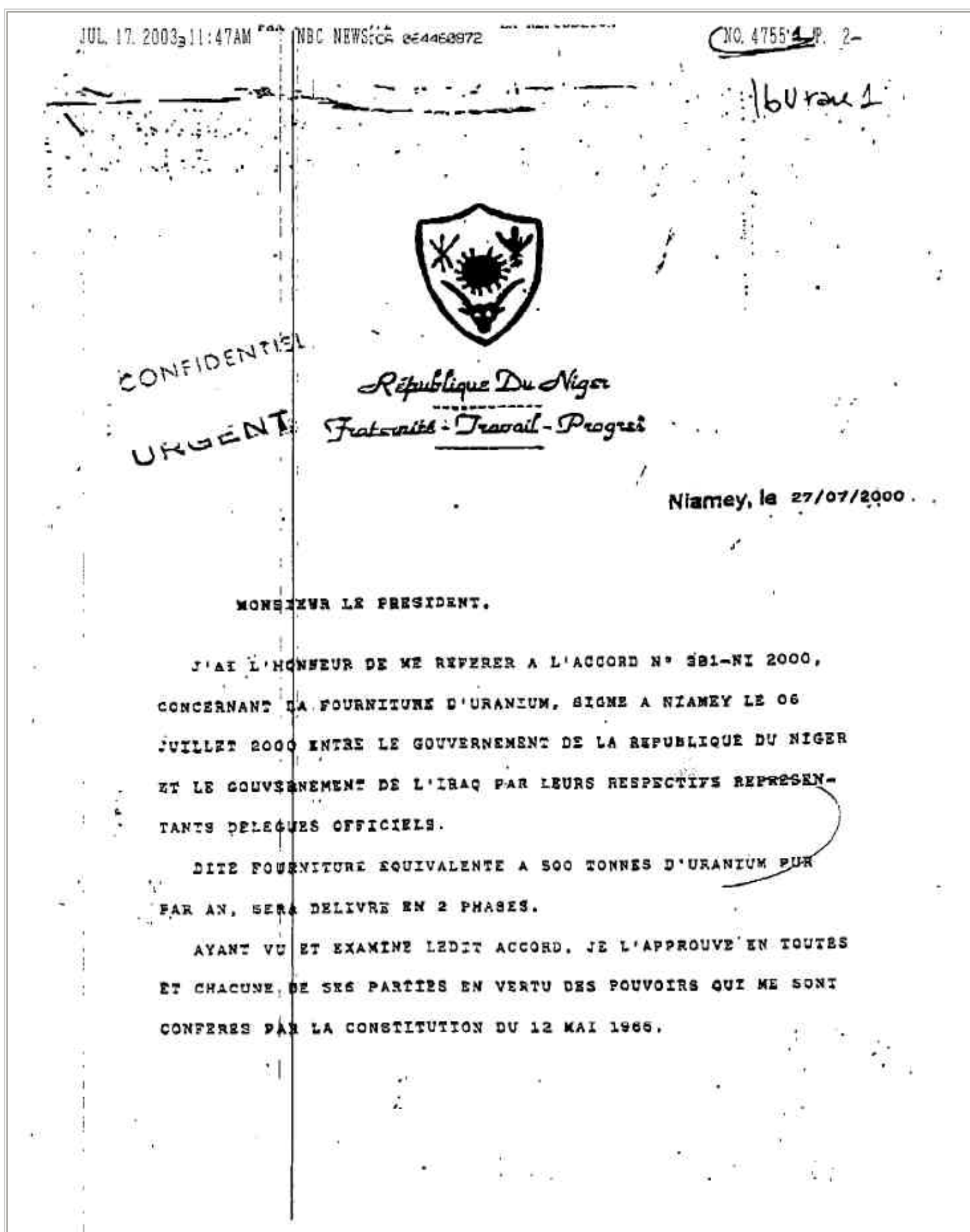
<http://www.repubblica.it/online/esteri/iraqattacotentacinque/dossier/dossier.html>

They are reportedly portions of forged documents on supply of uranium materials by Niger to Iraq and were allegedly provided by Italian intelligence, SISMI, to British intelligence, MI6.

Cryptome published the five *La Repubblica* images on July 18:

<http://cryptome.org/niger-docs-lr.htm>

NBC News obtained the eight images from *La Repubblica* and provided them to Cryptome today.



[Translation.]

CONFIDENTIAL
URGENT

REPUBLIC OF NIGER

FRATERNITY-WORK-PROGRESS

NIAMEY, 07/27/2000

MR PRESIDENT,

IT'S MY HONOR TO REFER TO THE AGREEMENT # 3*1-NI 2000, REGARDING THE SUPPLY OF URANIUM, SIGNED IN NIAMEY ON THE 6TH OF JULY 2000 BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NIGER

AND THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ BY THEIR RESPECTIVE REPRESENTATIVES
OFFICIAL DELEGATES.

ABOVE MENTIONED SUPPLY EQUIVALENT TO 500 TONS OF PURE URANIUM
PER YEAR, WILL BE DELIVERED IN TWO PHASES.

HAVING SEEN AND INSPECTED THE SAID DEAL. I APPROVE IN ALL
AND EACH OF ITS INVOLVED PARTIES IN REGARD TO THE POWERS

INVESTED IN ME BY THE CONSTITUTION OF THE 12TH OF MAY 1966.

JUL 17. 2003 11:48AM

NBC NEWS TEL: 064460072

NO. 4755 P. 7e

AMUS 8

CONFIDENTIEL

URGENT

EN CONSÉQUENCE, JE VOUS PRIE DE BIEN VOULOIR CONSIDÉRER
LA PRÉSENTE LETTRE COMME ÉTANT L'INSTRUMENT FORMAL D'APPRO-
BATION DE CET ACCORD PAR LE GOUVERNEMENT DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE
DU NIGER QUI SE TROUVE AINSI VALABLEMENT ENGAGÉ.

VEUILLEZ AGREER, MONSIEUR LE PRÉSIDENT, L'ASSURANCE
DE MA HAUTE CONSIDÉRATION.



[Translation.]

CONFIDENTIAL
URGENT

ACCORDINGLY, I PRAISE YOU TO CONSIDER
THIS LETTER AS BEING THE FORMAL TOOL OF APPROVAL
OF THIS AGREEMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF NIGER THAT BECOMES BY THIS RIGHTFULLY ENGAGED.

PLEASE ACCEPT, MR. THE PRESIDENT, THE CERTAINTY
OF MY HIGHEST REGARDS

SIGNATURE

SEAL OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NIGER

ANNEXE 1

La direction des affaires juridiques du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères dans la personne de S.E. Monsieur le Ministre et la tian du Ministère des Mines dans la personne de M. le Ministre en Charge, unis en assemblée ont déclaré ce qui suit:

- La Cour d'Etat, appelée à donner son avis conformément à l'article 20 de l'ordonnance n° 74-19 du 5 juillet 2000, portant création, composition, attribution et fonctionnement de la Cour d'Etat, s'est réunie en chambre de Conseil au Palais de ladite Cour le Mercredi 7 juillet 2000, à neuf Heures;
- Vu la lettre n° 488/MJ/SO du 3 juillet 2000 de M. le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères et de la Coopération:
demandant de "solliciter l'avis favorable de la Cour d'Etat sur les points à savoir:
- D'une part si le Protocole d'Accord entre le gouvernement de la République du Niger et le Gouvernement de l'Iraq, relatif à la vente d'uranium pur, signé le 6 juillet 2000 à Niamey est conforme au droit interne de la République du Niger, et s'il constitue pour elle un engagement valable et obligatoire;
- D'autre part, s'il a été dûment signé et approuvé par le gouvernement d'Iraq conformément à toutes les normes administratives qui lui sont applicables et constituant ainsi pour elle un

[Translation.]

ANNEX 1

THE DIRECTION OF JUDICIAL AFFAIRS OF THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN THE PERSON OF HIS EXCELLENCY MR. THE MINISTER AND THE (TIER ?) OF THE MINISTER OF MINES IN THE PERSON OF MR THE MINISTER IN CHARGE, UNITED IN ASSEMBLY STATED THE FOLLOWING:

- THE STATE COURT, CALLED UPON TO GIVE HIS ADVICE ACCORDING TO THE 20TH ARTICLE OF ORDONNANCE # 74-19 OF THE 5TH OF JULY 2000, REGARDING CREATION, COMPOSITION, ATTRIBUTION AND WORKINGS OF THE STATE COURT, MET IN THE CHAMBER OF THE COUNCIL IN THE PALACE OF THE SAID COURT ON WEDNESDAY JULY 7, 2000, AT NINE O'CLOCK;

-READ THE LETTER # 488/MJ/SO OF THE 3RD OF JULY 2000 OF MR. THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND COOPERATION:

DEMANDING TO SOLICITATE A FAVORABLE ADVICE TO THE STATE COURT ON THE POINTS TO BE KNOWN:

-ON ONE PART, IF THE PROTOCOL OF THE DEAL BETWEEN THE GOVERMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NIGER AND THE GOVERMENT OF IRAQ, RELATED TO THE SALE OF PURE URANIUM, SIGNED ON THE 6TH OF JULY 2000 IN NIAMEY CONFORMS TO THE INTERNAL LAWS OF THE REPUBLIC OF NIGER, AND IF IT CONSTITUTES FOR THE REPUBLIC A VALID AND INCUBENT ENGAGEMENT;

-IN OTHER MATTERS, IF IT HAS BEEN RIGHTFULLY SIGNED AND APPROVED BY THE GOVERMENT OF IRAQ IN COMPLIANCE TO ALL ADMINISTRATIVE NORMS THAT ARE APPLICABLE AND CONSTITUING FOR HER A

JUL 17 2003 11:47AM

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NBC NEWS

B14

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LA REPUBLICA

NO. 4755

P. 4

3

CONF

pag. 2.

engagement valable et obligatoire;

EMET L'AVIS

Que l'Etat du Niger a satisfait à toute les exigences de son droit constitutionnel et de es autres principes de droit pour la prise en charge valable et juridiquement obligatoire de toutes ses obligations résultant du Protocole d'Accord;

Que le représentant de l'Etat du Niger et le représentant de l'Iraq qui ont signé au nom de leur respectif gouvernement, avaient juridiquement pouvoir de représentation.

Qu siégeaient Messieurs: Mamadou Malan Aouami, Président de la Cour du Niger; Madj Madjir, Conseiller du gouvernement d'Iraq, Mahamane Boukari Conseiller intérimaire du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères du Niger, en présence de M. Bandiaire Ali, Procureur Général de l'Iraq et avec l'assistance de Maître Maiga Ali, Greffier en Chef.

Maiga



[Translation.]

VALID AND INCUBENT AGREEMENT;

ISSUES THE ADVICE

THAT THE STATE OF NIGER SATISFIED ALL THE REQUIRINGS OF ITS CONSTITUNIONAL LAWS AND OF *** OTHERS PRINCIPLES OF LAWS FOR THE TAKING CHARGE OF VALID AND JURIDICALLY INCUBENT TO ALL ITS ENGAGEMENTS RESULTING FROM THE PROTOCOL OF THE AGREEMENT

THAT THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE STATE OF NIGER AND THE REPRESENTATIVE OF IRAQ WHO HAVE SIGNED IN THE NAME OF THEIR RESPECTIVE GOVERMENT, HAD JURIDICALLY POWER OF REPRESENTATION.

WERE SITTING MISTER: MAMADOU MALAN AOUAMI, PRESIDENT OF THE COURT OF NIGER; MADJ MADJIR, ADVISOR TOTHE GOVERMENT OF IRAK, MAHAMANE BOUKARI INTERIM ADVISOR TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF NIGER, IN THE PRESENCE OF MR BANDIAIRE ALI, ATTORNEY GENERAL OF IRAQ AND WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF MASTER MAIGA ALI, CLERK OF THE COURT IN CHIEF.

SIGNATURE

SEAL OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

REPUBLIC OF NIGER

JUL 17 2003 11:48AM

NBC NEWS

NO. 4755 P. 5

009765220-
01/02 14.57
MINAFET 520ENI
626290 NIGER I
*
MINAFET 5200NI
626290 NIGER I

TELEX N° 803:9* ASA**RONE OF 01/02/99

DEST: S.E.M. LE MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
ET DE L'INTEGRATION AFRICAINE.
NIAMEY

J'AI L'HONNEUR DE PORTER A VOTRE CONNAISSANCE QUE L'AMBASSADE
D'IRAQ AUPRES DU SAINT SIEGE VIENT DE M'INFORMER QUE S.E.
M. WISSAM AL ZAKAWIE, ANBASSADEUR D'IRAQ AUPRES DU SAINT SIEGE,
EFFECTUERA UNE MISSION OFFICIELLE DANS NOTRE PAYS EN QUALITE DE
REPRESENTANT DE S.E. M. SADDAM HUSSEIN, PRESIDENT DE LA REPUBLIQUE
D'IRAQ.

S.E.M. ZAKAWIE ARRIVERA A NIAMEY LE VENDREDI 05 FEVRIER 1999 VERS
18 H 25 PAR VOL AIR FRANCE N° 730 EN PROVENANCE DE PARIS.

JE VOUS SAURAI S GRE DES DISPOSITIONS QUE VOUS VOUDRIEZ BIEN FAIRE
PRENDRE A CET EFFET.

TRES HAUTE CONSIDERATION

SIGNE: S.E. AMNON CHEKOU
----- AMBASSADEUR NIGER ROME.

636290 NIGER I*

0029

[Translation.]

0097652**
01/02 14:57
MINAFET 520****
626290 NIGER I

MINAFET 5200NI
626290 NIGER I

FAX # 803:9*: ASA**RONE OF 02/01/99

DESTINATION: HIS EXCELLENCY MISTER THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND OF AFRICAN INTEGRATION

NIAM**

I HAVE THE HONOR TO BRING TO YOUR ATTENTION THAT THE EMBASSY
OF IRAQ AT THE VATICAN JUST INFORMED ME THAT HIS EXCELLENCY
MR. WISSAM AL ZAMA**E, AMBASSADOR OF IRAQ TO THE VATICAN,
WILL CARRY OUT AN OFFICIAL VISIT IN OUR COUNTRY IN THE ROLE
OF REPRESENTATIVE OF HIS EXCELLENCY MR. SADDAM HUSSEIN, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF IRAQ.

HIS EXCELLENCY MR. ZAMAWIE WILL ARRIVE IN NIAMEY ON FRIDAY THE 5TH OF FEBRUARY
1999 AROUND
18:25 THROUGH AIR FRANCE FLIGHT # 730 FROM PARIS.

I WOULD BE GRATEFUL OF THE DISPOSITIONS THAT YOU COULD MAKE HAPPEN REGARDING
THIS.

REALLY HIGH CONSIDERATION

SIGNED: HIS EXCELLENCY A*MNON CHE*OU

----- AMBASSADOR NIGER ROME

636290 NIGER I*

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MBC NEWS LCA 064460872

NO. 4755 P. 65

REPUBLIQUE DU NIGER

CONSEIL DE RECONCILIATION NATIONALE

MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
ET DE L'INTEGRATION AFRICAINEDIRECTION DES AFFAIRES JURIDIQUES
ET CONSULAIRES

Niamey, le

30 JUL 1999

05055

N° MAE/IA/DAJC/DIR

URGENT

HONNEUR VOUS DEMANDER BIEN VOULOIR CONTACTER S.E.
L'AMBASSADEUR D'IRAQ M. WISSAM AL ZAHAWIE POUR CON-
NAITRE REPONSE DE SON PAYS CONCERNANT FOURNITURE
D'URANIUM SELON DERNIERS ACCORDS ETABLIS A NIAMEY
LE 28 JUIN 2000.

PRIERE SUIVRE CE DOSSIER TRES CONFIDENTIEL AVEC
TOUTE DISCRETION ET DILIGENCE.



[Translation.]

REPUBLIC OF NIGER
COUNCIL OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND AFRICAN INTEGRATION
DIRECTORATE OF JUDICIARY AND CONSULATE AFFAIRS

NIAMY, THE 30TH OF JULY 19*9

N- 05055 /MAE/IA/DAJC/DIR

URGENT

HONOR TO ASK YOU TO CONTACT HIS EXCELLENCY
THE AMBASSADOR OF IRAQ MR. WISSAM AL ZAHAWIE TO
RECEIVE ANSWER FOR HIS COUNTRY REGARDING PROVIDING
URANIUM ACCORDING TO LAST AGREEMENTS ESTABLISHED IN NIAMEY
ON THE 28TH JUNE 2000

PLEASE FOLLOW THIS HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL DOSSIER WITH
ALL DISCRETION AND CARE.

SIGNATURE

SEAL OF THE REPUBLIC OF NIGER

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

JUL 17 2003 11:48AM 54

NBC NEWS BILOR 064460972

NO. 4755 MP. 879

TA/KA
 REPUBLIQUE DU NIGER
 CONSEIL MILITAIRE SUPREME
 MINISTERE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
 ET DE LA COOPERATION
 DIRECTION
 DES AFFAIRES JURIDIQUES
 ET CONSULAIRES

Niamey, le 10 OCT. 2000

LE MINISTERE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
 ET DE LA COOPERATION

N° MAE/COAD

Monsieur l'Ambassadeur du Niger/
 A

ROME

№ 07254

OBJET: Protocole d'accord entre le Gouvernement
 du Niger et le Gouvernement d'Iraq
 relatif à la fourniture d'uranium
 signé les 5 et 6 Juillet 2000 à Niamey.

J'ai l'honneur de vous faire tenir ci-joint, pour informa-
 tion, copie du Protocole d'Accord signé à Niamey entre la Republi-
 que du Niger et le Gouvernement d'Iraq concernant la fourniture
 d'uranium que l'Etat nigérien a émis au sujet du Protocole cité en
 objet./.

P.J. : 1



[Translation.]

REPUBLIC OF NIGER
 COUNCIL OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION
 MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
 AND AFRICAN INTEGRATION
 DIRECTORATE OF JUDICIARY AND CONSULATE AFFAIRS

NIAMEY, THE 10TH OF OCTOBER 2000

THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
 AND OF COOPERATION

#07254

MR. THE AMBASSADOR OF NIGER

ROME

SUBJECT: PROTOCOL OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT
 OF NIGER AND THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ
 RELATED TO THE SUPPLYING OF URANIUM

SIGNED ON THE 5TH AND THE 6TH OF JULY 2000 IN NIAMEY

I HAVE THE HONOR TO SEND TO YOU THE ATTACHED, FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES,
 COPY OF THE PROTOCOL OF AGREEMENT SIGNED IN NIAMEY BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC
 OF NIGER AND THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAK REGARDING THE SUPPLYING
 OF URANIUM THAT THE NIGER STATE ISSUED REGARDING THE PROTOCOL CITED IN THE
 SUBJECT

ATTACHED PAPER: 1

SIGNATURE

SEAL

RUBLIQUE DU NIGER

ACCORD

[Translation.]

REPUBLIC OF NIGER

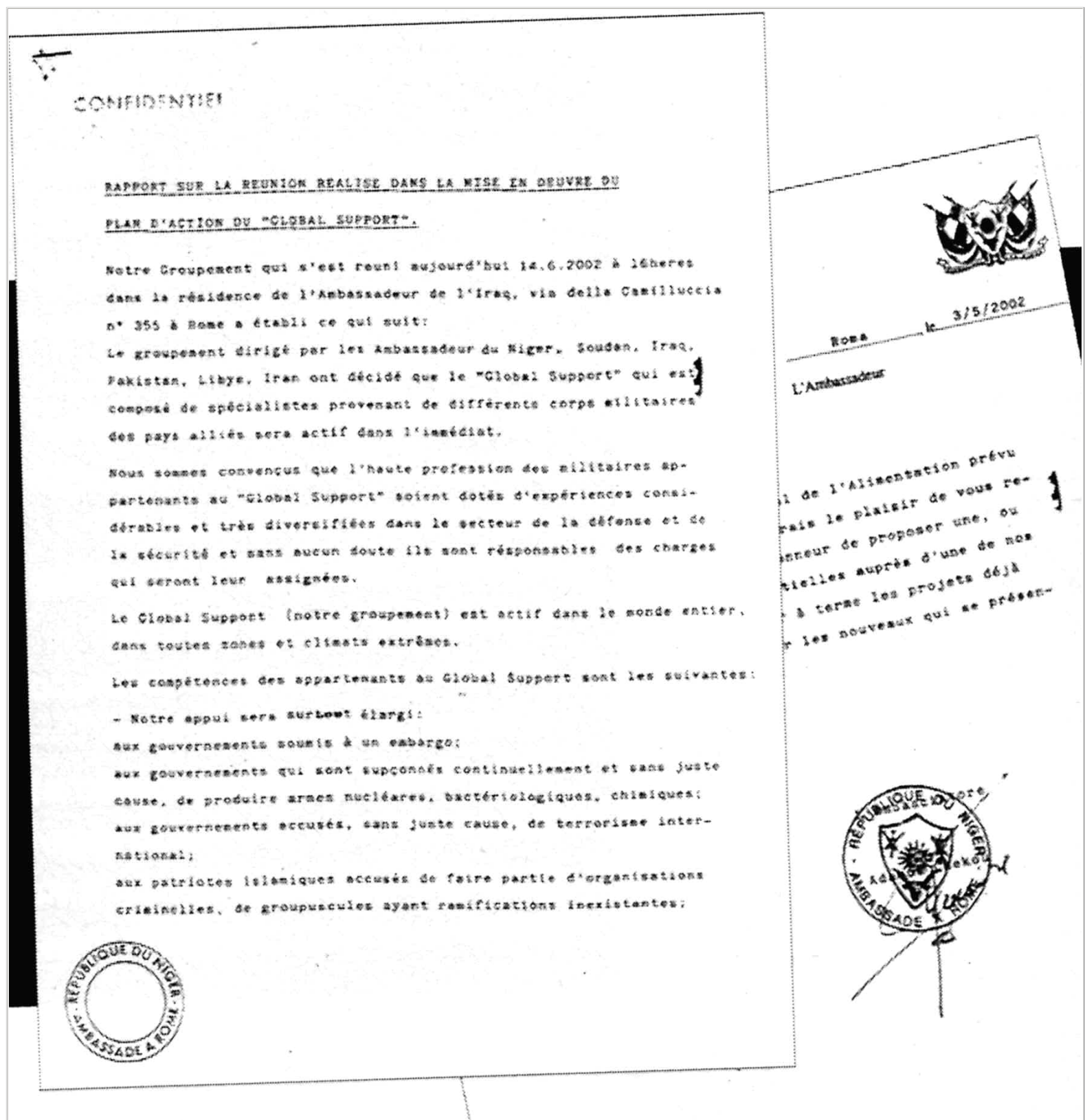
AGREEMENT

David Loepp writes:
Last Friday the Berlusconi weekly "Panorama" published an article by Elisabetta Burba in which she tells her version of how she got the Niger documents, realized they were false, and on advice from her editor-in-chief, turned copies over to the US Embassy in Rome in October 2002. She asserts that she received seventeen pages of documents and a Niger codebook from 1967. The story is at
<http://www.panorama.it/mondo/reportage/articolo/isl-A020001020115>

In the layout of the print version of the weekly many of the published pages are overlapping, so it is not possible to have full and good copies of the new documents. I hope you can eventually get better copies from other sources.

Attached you will find two new documents with my translations. In keeping with [previous translations](#) by Lars, I have done my best to put them in equivalently bad English.

The document "Global Support" (English brandname in the original) refers to an utterly ridiculous coalition of "Islamic" nations put together during the annual meeting of the FAO in Rome, to combat western injustices.



[Translation.]
CONFIDENTIAL
REPORT ON THE MEETING REALIZE[D] WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION "GLOBAL SUPPORT"

Our group, which met today June 14, 2002, at 4 PM in the residence of the Iraqi ambassador, via della Camilluccia n° 355 in Rome has determined as follows:

The group directed by the ambassadors of Niger, Sudan, Iraq, Pakistan, Libya, Iran have [plural in original] decided that "Global Support" which is composed of specialists belonging to different military corps of the allied countries will be active immediately.

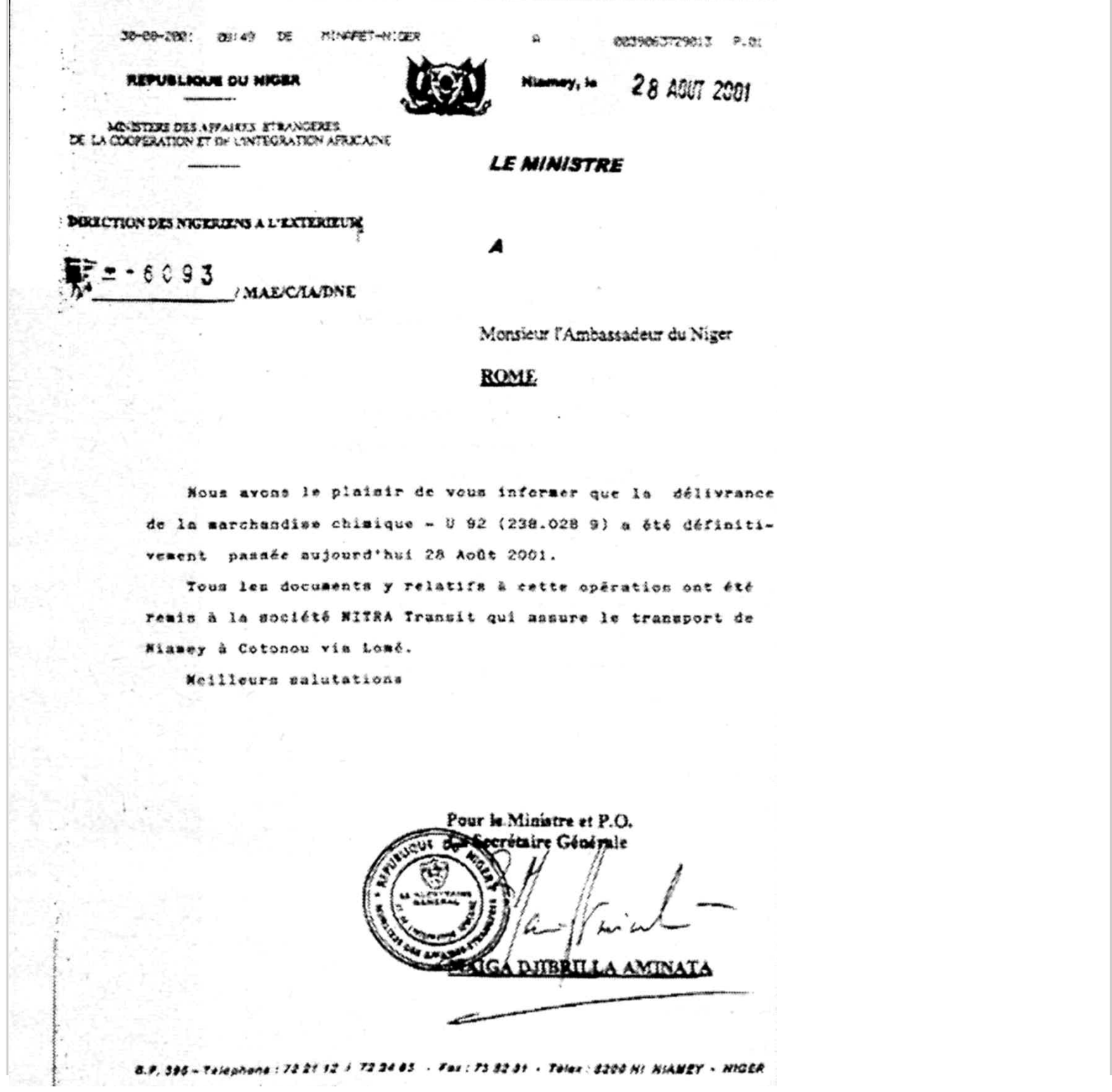
We are convinced [sic] that the high profession of the military belonging to "Global Support" are [subjunctive plural in original] qualified with considerable experiences and very diversified in the sectors of defence and security and without a doubt they are responsible for the tasks assigned to them.

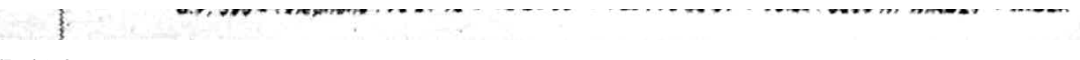
The Global Support (our group) is active worldwide, in all areas and extreme climates.

The competences of the members of Global Support are the following:

- Our support will above all be extended to:
 - governments submitted to an embargo;
 - governments continually suspected, and without just cause, of producing nuclear, bacteriological, chemical weapons; governments accused, without just cause, of international terrorism;
 - Islamic patriots accused of belonging to criminal organizations, to cells having non-existent ramifications;

SEAL OF THE EMBASSY IN ROME OF THE REPUBLIC OF NIGER





[Translation.]

REPUBLIC OF NIGER

Niamey, August 28, 2001

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and African Integration

Directorate of Nigeriens Abroad

[.] - 6093/ MAE/CA/DNE[?]

[From] the Minister to the Ambassador of Niger [in] Rome

It is our pleasure to inform you that the delivery of the chemical merchandise- U 92 (238.028 9) has finally concluded today August 28, 2001.

All documents concerning this operation have been remitted to the NITRA Transit Society which will assure transportation from Niamey to Cotonou via Lomé.

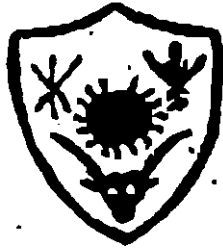
Best regards,

For the Minister and P.O.
The Secretary General

MAIGA[?] DJIBRILLA AMINATA

SIGNED AND SEALED WITH THE SEAL OF THE MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF NIGER

Bureau 1



CONFIDENTIEL

URGENT

République Du Niger
Fraternité - Travail - Progrès

Niamey, le 27/07/2000.

MONSIEUR LE PRESIDENT.

J'AI L'HONNEUR DE ME REFERER A L'ACCORD N° 381-NI 2000,
CONCERNANT LA FOURNITURE D'URANIUM, SIGNE A NIAMEY LE 06
JUILLET 2000 ENTRE LE GOUVERNEMENT DE LA REPUBLIQUE DU NIGER
ET LE GOUVERNEMENT DE L'IRAQ PAR LEURS RESPECTIFS REPRESENTANTS
DELEGUES OFFICIELS.

DITE FOURNITURE EQUIVALENTE A 500 TONNES D'URANIUM PUR
PAR AN, SERA DELIVRE EN 2 PHASES.

AYANT VU ET EXAMINE LEDIT ACCORD, JE L'APPROUVE EN TOUTES
ET CHACUNE DE SES PARTIES EN VERTU DES POUVOIRS QUI ME SONT
CONFERES PAR LA CONSTITUTION DU 12 MAI 1965.

ANNEXE 1

La direction des affaires juridiques du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères dans la personne de S.E. Monsieur le Ministre et la direction du Ministère des Mines dans la personne de M. le Ministre en Charge, réunis en assemblée ont déclaré ce qui suit:

- La Cour d'Etat, appelée à donner son avis conformément à l'article 20 de l'ordonnance n° 74-13 du 5 juillet 2000, portant création, composition, attribution et fonctionnement de la Cour d'Etat, s'est réunie en chambre de Conseil au Palais de ladite Cour le Mercredi 7 juillet 2000, à neuf Heures;

- Vu la lettre n° 480/MJ/SG du 3 juillet 2000 de M. le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères et de la Coopération;

demandant de "solliciter l'avis favorable de la Cour d'Etat sur les points à savoir:

- D'une part si le Protocole d'Accord entre le gouvernement de la République du Niger et le Gouvernement de l'Iraq, relatif à la vente d'uranium pur, signé le 6 juillet 2000 à Niamey est conforme au droit interne de la République du Niger, et s'il constitue pour elle un engagement valable et obligatoire;

- D'autre part, s'il a été dûment signé et approuvé par le gouvernement d'Iraq conformément à toutes les normes administratives qui lui sont applicables et constituant ainsi pour elle un

engagement valable et obligatoire;

EMET L'AVIS

Que l'Etat du Niger a satisfait à toute les exigences de son droit constitutionnel et de es autres principes de droit pour la prise en charge valable et juridiquement obligatoire de toutes ses obligations résultant du Protocole d'Accord;

Que le représentant de l'Etat du Niger et le représentant de l'Iraq qui ont signé au nom de leur respectif gouvernement, avaient juridiquement pouvoir de représentation.

Où siégeaient Messieurs: Mamadou Malam Aouami, Président de la Cour du Niger; Hadj Madjir, Conseiller du gouvernement d'Iraq, Mahamane Boukari Conseiller intérimaire du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères du Niger, en présence de M. Bandiaire Ali, Procureur Général de l'Iraq et avec l'assistance de Maître Maiga Ali, Greffier en Chef.

Maiga



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01/02 14.57
MINAFET 5200NE
020200 NIGER Z
*
MINAFET 0200NI
020200 NIGER Z

TELEX N° 0031901ASNIYRONE DU 01102199

EST: S.E.M. LE MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
ET DE L'INTEGRATION AFRICAINE.
NIAMEY

J'AI L'HONNEUR DE PORTER A VOTRE CONNAISSANCE QUE L'AMBASSADE
D'IRAQ AUPRES DU SAINT SIEGE VIENT DE M'INFORMER QUE S.E.
M. WISSAM AL ZAHAWIE, ANBASSADEUR D'IRAQ AUPRES DU SAINT SIEGE,
EFFECTUERA UNE MISSION OFFICIELLE DANS NOTRE PAYS EN QUALITE DE
REPRESENTANT DE S.E. M. SADDAM HUSSEIN, PRESIDENT DE LA REPUBLIQUE
D'IRAQ.

S.E.M. ZAHAWIE ARRIVERA A NIAMEY LE VENDREDI 05 FEVRIER 1999 VERS
19 H 25 PAR UOL AIR FRANCE N° 730 EN PROVENANCE DE PARIS.

JE VOUS SAURAI SURE DES DISPOSITIONS QUE VOUS VOUDRIEZ BIEN FAIRE
PRENDRE A CET EFFET.

TRES HAUTE CONSIDERATION

SIGNE: S.E. ADAMOU CHEKOU
AMBASSADEUR NIGER ROME.

020200 NIGER Z

0029

REPUBLIQUE DU NIGER



30 JUL 1999

CONSEIL DE RECONCILIATION NATIONALE

Niamey, le

MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
ET DE L'INTEGRATION AFRICAINE

DIRECTION DES AFFAIRES JURIDIQUES
ET CONSULAIRES

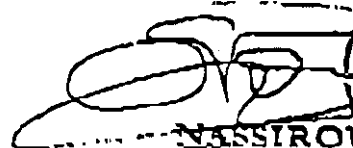
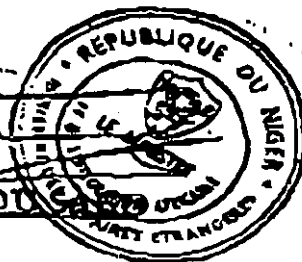
05055

N° MAE/ADAJC/DIR

URGENT

HONNEUR VOUS DEMANDER BIEN VOULOIR CONTACTER S.E.
L'AMBASSADEUR D'IRAQ M. VISSAM AL ZAHAWIE POUR CON-
NAITRE REPONSE DE SON PAYS CONCERNANT FOURNITURE
D'URANIUM SELON DERNIERS ACCORDS ETABLIS A NIAMEY
LE 28 JUIN 2000.

PRIERE SUIVRE CE DOSSIER TRES CONFIDENTIEL AVEC
TOUTE DISCRETION ET DILIGENCE.

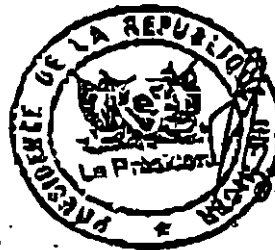

NASSIROU


CONFIDENTIEL

URGENT

EN CONSQUENCE. JE VOUS PRIE DE BIEN VOULOIR CONSIDERER LA PRESENTE LETTRE COMME ETANT L'INSTRUMENT FORMEL D'APPROBATION DE CET ACCORD PAR LE GOUVERNEMENT DE LA REPUBLIQUE DU NICER QUI SE TROUVE AINSI VALABLEMENT ENGAGE.

VEUILLEZ AGREER, MONSIEUR LE PRESIDENT, L'ASSURANCE DE MA HAUTE CONSIDERATION.



Handwritten signature or initials

TA/KA

REPUBLIQUE DU NIGER

Niamey, le 10 Oct. 2000

CONSEIL MILITAIRE SUPREME

MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
ET DE LA COOPERATION

LE MINISTERE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
ET DE LA COOPERATION

DIRECTION
DES AFFAIRES JURIDIQUES
ET CONSULAIRES

N° MAE/COA/0001

Monsieur l'Ambassadeur du Niger/
à

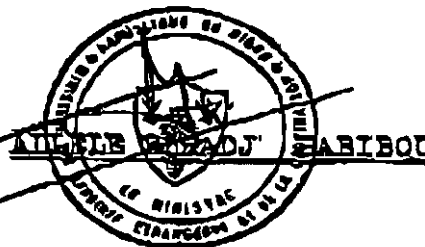
ROME

N° 07254

OBJET: Protocole d'accord entre le Gouvernement
du Niger et le Gouvernement d'Iraq
relatif à la fourniture d'uranium
signé les 5 et 6 Juillet 2000 à Niamey.

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que du Niger et le Gouvernement d'Iraq concernant la fourniture
d'uranium que l'Etat nigérien a émis au sujet du Protocole cité en
objet./.

P.J. : 1



RUBLIQUE DU NIGER

ACCORD

MIBTEL -1,27
MIB 30 -1,44
DOW JONES -1,53
NASDAQ -2,21

Meteo **ROMA** ☀️
MILANO ☁️ **NAPOLI** ☀️
 previsioni per oggi alle
 ore 12

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ESTERI

Fu un diplomatico africano a consegnare ai servizi italiani e inglesi le carte citate da George W. Bush

Ecco il falso dossier sull'uranio di Saddam

Tutto iniziò da un misterioso furto nell'ambasciata del Niger a Roma
 di **CARLO BONINI** e **GIUSEPPE D'AVANZO**

LA STORIA, come una spy-story senza soverchia fantasia, inizia con un'effrazione.

L'appartamento è al quinto piano di via Antonio Baiamonti 10. Nel quartiere Mazzini, a Roma. La porta è solida e blindata e protegge gli uffici dell'ambasciata del Niger nella Capitale. Un corridoio triste divide gli uffici del consigliere politico dalla stanza dell'ambasciatore. In una notte tra il 29 dicembre del 2000 e l'1 gennaio del 2001, i "soliti ignoti" cercano confusamente qualcosa, mettendo a soqquadro l'ambasciata. Fogli dappertutto, cassetti rovesciati, armadi aperti. Quando il 2 gennaio, di buon mattino, il secondo segretario per gli affari amministrativi Arfou Mounkaila denuncia il furto ai carabinieri della stazione Trionfale, deve però ammettere che quei ladri sono stati alquanto bizzarri. Tanto rumore, e fatica, per nulla. Se si esclude un orologio di acciaio Breil e tre piccole boccette di profumo, i "ladri" non hanno portato via altro. Apparentemente. Oggi, se si bussa alla porta dell'ambasciata e si fa qualche domanda su quel curioso furto si ottiene da una gentile signora un sorriso e queste parole: "Tutto comincia da lì, tutto comincia con quel furto".



Un deposito di barre di uranio

Dall'effrazione in via Baiamonti nasce l'affare che porterà ventiquattro mesi dopo, il 28 gennaio 2003, George W. Bush a pronunciare le 16 parole del discorso sullo stato dell'Unione ("...Il governo inglese ha appreso che Saddam ha recentemente cercato di acquisire significative quantità di uranio dall'Africa...") che oggi lo tengono pericolosamente in bilico sul baratro dell'Iraqgate. O Nigergate, se preferite. Comunque, un affare che prende forma in Italia perché a Roma accadono quattro fatti che indirizzeranno Bush nella direzione di quelle avventate parole:

- 1) È il Sismi, tra l'ottobre e il novembre del 2001, a entrare in contatto con un diplomatico africano che vende i falsi documenti (i 6 fogli riprodotti in queste pagine) su un traffico di "500 tonnellate di uranio puro l'anno, da consegnare in due tranches" tra il Niger e l'Iraq.
- 2) È a Roma che l'MI6, il controspionaggio inglese, entra in possesso di quei documenti.
- 3) È il Sismi a informare della vicenda, come da prassi, la presidenza del Consiglio (attraverso il Cesis) e la Farnesina (attraverso il gabinetto del ministro).
- 4) È il direttore del Sismi, Niccolò Pollari, nel novembre del 2002, a confermare al Comitato parlamentare di controllo sui servizi di sicurezza che "il Servizio è in possesso di documentazione che prova il commercio di uranio puro tra un paese centroafricano e l'Iraq".

* * *

L'appartamento di via Baiamonti è da anni una delle postazioni di ascolto dell'intelligence militare italiana. Lo è dal 1983, da quando il Sismi riuscì a mettere le mani su una richiesta di uranio al Niger avanzata da Saddam. Il lavoro di ascolto mette a fuoco il filo diretto che l'ambasciatore nigerino Adamou Chekou (oggi consigliere del presidente del Niger Tandja Mamadou) ha con la diplomazia irachena a Roma. E, soprattutto, con Wissam Al Zahawie, ambasciatore di Bagdad accreditato presso la Santa Sede. È un'attività spionistica "interna" che incrocia i report della divisione "R" (Ricerche), incaricata delle operazioni all'estero. A Niamey, capitale del Niger, l'intelligence italiana, con la collaborazione degli agenti inglesi, lavora al dossier Adm (Armi di distruzione di massa) dell'Iraq.

Queste indagini fanno un salto tra gli ultimi giorni di ottobre 2001 e i primi giorni di novembre. Riferisce a Repubblica una fonte del Sismi: "In quei giorni, un diplomatico di un Paese africano, rappresentato con un'ambasciata a Roma, entra in contatto con il Sismi. E offre un carteggio che lui ritiene preziosissimo per il nostro lavoro". Nel carteggio ci sono cifrari; una corrispondenza relativa a un contratto di spedizione di uranio da trasferire in Iraq con nave via Lomè (Togo) da Cotonou in Benin (dove vengono stoccate tutte le 2.900 tonnellate di uranio puro estratte nel 2000 dalle miniere nigerine di Arlit e Akouta) e, soprattutto, documenti diplomatici:

- un telex datato 1 febbraio 1999 dell'ambasciatore nigerino di Roma Chekou al ministro degli esteri di Niamey;
- una lettera datata 30 luglio 1999 dal ministero degli affari esteri all'ambasciata di Roma;
- una lettera indirizzata al presidente della Repubblica del Niger, datata 27 luglio 2000;

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→ [Ecco il falso dossier sull'uranio di Saddam](#)

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[Palazzo Chigi "Il dossier uranio non è roba nostra"](#)

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[Iraq, Al Qaeda rivendica gli attacchi ai marines](#)

[Bagdad, insediato il nuovo governo](#)

[La Cia: "Sull'uranio abbiamo sbagliato"](#)

[Uccisi altri tre soldati Usa](#)

[Saddam parla su all Jazera e tv libanese](#)

[Blair difende la guerra: "Giusto battere Saddam"](#)

[Bagdad, uccisi due soldati Usa](#)

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[Saddam: "Iracheni, combattete gli infedeli"](#)

[Bagdad: "Agguati contro i soldati Usa"](#)

DOSSIER

[La guerra in Iraq](#)

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- un "protocollo d'intesa" tra i governi nigerino e iracheno "relativo alla fornitura d'uranio siglato il 5 e 6 luglio 2000 a Niamey". Il protocollo ha un allegato di due pagine dal titolo "Accord".

- Pubblicità -

* * *

L'intelligence italiana acquista i documenti "a scatola chiusa". O forse, se ha ragione il ministro degli Esteri Franco Frattini ("I servizi italiani non hanno mai fornito alcuna documentazione"), ne media l'acquisto a favore degli inglesi dell'MI6. A guardare con occhio sgombro i documenti, la loro infondatezza balza agli occhi. Come ha scritto Seymour Hersh il 31 marzo 2003 sul settimanale New Yorker: "La lettera datata 10 ottobre 2000 (si tratta del protocollo d'intesa tra Niger e Iraq *n.d.r.*) è firmata da Allele Habibou, ministro degli esteri e della cooperazione, cessato dall'incarico nel 1989. Un'ulteriore lettera (del 27 luglio 2000 *n.d.r.*) ha un testo così grossolano che se ne sarebbe accorto chiunque usando Google su Internet". E si potrebbe aggiungere che 500 tonnellate di uranio puro sono una quantità così importante che avrebbe dovuto insospettire chiunque abbia una qualche confidenza con quel Paese e con quel prodotto. O ancora che la lettera del 30 luglio 1999 fa riferimento ad accordi raggiunti a Niamey il 29 giugno 2000. Che la lettera del 27 luglio 2000 al presidente del Niger ha il suo timbro e la sua firma.

A bocce ferme, si può capire però dove si nasconde il trucco che inganna. Il diplomatico che vende i documenti è perfettamente a conoscenza delle intercettazioni (telefonate, fax, telex) sull'ambasciata nigerina dell'intelligence italiana. Infila quindi, come primo documento del fascicolo che offre, il telex 003/99/ABNI/Rome, indirizzato al ministero degli Affari esteri del Niger. Si legge: "Ho l'onore di portare a vostra conoscenza che l'ambasciata irachena presso la Santa Sede, mi informa che sua Eccellenza Wissam Al Zahawie, ambasciatore iracheno presso la Santa Sede, effettuerà una missione ufficiale nel nostro Paese in qualità di rappresentante di Saddam, presidente della Repubblica irachena. Sua Eccellenza Zahawie arriverà a Niamey...".

Questo telex (intercettato) è già nel "dossier Niger" di Forte Braschi. La circostanza conferma agli agenti italiani che "quella roba è buona" o quanto meno attendibile. E, "buono" viene dunque ritenuto anche il resto della documentazione. Quindi il messaggio del 30 luglio con cui si chiede "la risposta per la fornitura d'uranio"; la nota confidenziale del 27 luglio che certifica l'avvenuto accordo (n[b0] 381-NI 2000) per la "fornitura di 500 tonnellate di uranio" e, naturalmente, il protocollo di intesa tra i due governi che sembra chiudere il cerchio su una certezza: Bagdad è riuscita a procurarsi in Niger l'uranio per la costruzione di armi di sterminio.

Conviene ora tornare in via Baiamonti, negli uffici dell'ambasciata del Niger, e chiedersi: chi ha fabbricato il falso dossier? Alcune circostanze potrebbero suggerire una prima risposta. Nell'inverno del 2002, l'ambasciatore nigerino a Roma, Chekou, è richiamato a Niamey "per consultazioni". Dovrebbe fare ritorno in Italia ma, al contrario, non vi metterà più piede. Chekou viene sollevato dall'incarico e il 2 dicembre di quell'anno, al suo posto, si insedia la signora Hadjio Abdoulmoumine, in qualità di consigliere incaricato d'affari e capo della sezione consolare. È un avvicendamento di routine? O - come lascia intendere uno 007 che ha accettato di rispondere alle domande di *Repubblica* - è la conseguenza della scoperta da parte del governo nigerino che qualcosa nell'ambasciata di Roma è andato storto? Niamey è convinta che lo strano furto del gennaio 2001 sia stato, in realtà, soltanto una copertura necessaria ad accreditare la sottrazione dagli uffici di via Baiamonti del materiale cartaceo necessario a confezionare il falso dossier.

L'intelligence americana - citata anche ieri dalla rete tv Abc - è convinta al contrario che l'ambasciata del Niger a Roma sia dietro il falso. "Un diplomatico di basso livello - riferisce la fonte interpellata dalla tv statunitense - ha fabbricato il dossier fasullo in ambasciata e lo ha poi venduto al Sismi per poche migliaia di dollari". Una convinzione, questa, già espressa il 22 marzo scorso da un funzionario delle Nazioni Unite interpellato dal Washington Post: "Le lettere sul traffico di uranio sono state consegnate agli italiani da un diplomatico nigerino". La signora Hadjio Abdoulmoumine, oggi responsabile della sede diplomatica del Niger a Roma, dice che si tratta di fantasie: "Nessun membro del corpo diplomatico è dietro i falsi: è stato lo stesso presidente del Niger Tandja Mamadou, la scorsa settimana, a riferire di persona al George W. Bush questa netta smentita".

Due fatti, tuttavia, sono certi. Che "tutto è cominciato dal furto" in via Baiamonti. Che, il 21 dicembre 2002, dopo neppure due settimane dall'avvicendamento nell'ambasciata di Roma, il governo di Niamey dirama una durissima nota sui sospetti di essere al centro di un traffico di uranio con l'Iraq. "Le accuse americane sono diffamazione. Non abbiamo mai pensato di vendere uranio all'Iraq. Non c'è mai stato alcun contratto".

* * *

Siamo ora tra la fine del 2001 e i primi giorni del 2002. Sono due mesi decisivi. Il Sismi conosce il dossier e l'MI6 ne è in possesso: "Gli inglesi lo hanno acquisito senza alcuna valutazione - spiega l'uomo di Forte Braschi - ma la fonte è stata indicata come "attendibile". Nessuno si deve meravigliare di quel che accade con quel dossier. Rientra nella rituale collaborazione d'intelligence tra Paesi alleati. È naturale che quel materiale rende più intensi sia la collaborazione che lo scambio informativo con gli inglesi. Ci sono diversi incontri, al livello più qualificato, quasi esclusivamente a Londra. Nonostante questo clima positivo, noi non sappiamo se siano stati gli inglesi a passare quella roba alla Cia. È assai probabile. Secondo la consuetudine, gli inglesi non sono tenuti a dirci a chi danno le informazioni condivise con noi".

La conferma che gli inglesi informano Langley è in una data. A febbraio del 2002, l'ex ambasciatore americano in Gabon, Joseph Wilson, viene spedito dalla Cia in Niger per verificare la fondatezza delle informazioni sul traffico di uranio ricevute dagli inglesi. Ne torna con una risposta netta. La storia è falsa. Sono dubbi che non giungono in Italia dove la storia si muove ancora e le notizie del traffico Niamey-Bagdad lasciano le palazzine di Forte Braschi per raggiungere i Palazzi nel cuore di Roma. Gli analisti della divisione "Situazione" (tengono i contatti con l'intelligence straniera e preparano le note quotidiane per il direttore) inviano il loro rapporto sulla vicenda dell'uranio nigerino. È una nota assai sintetica. "Non più di una pagina", dice la fonte di Repubblica. La notarella, che non racconta il per chi e il per come ma l'essenziale del dossier (500 tonnellate di uranio puro sono state acquistate da Bagdad), finisce sul tavolo del Cesis a Palazzo Chigi e alla Farnesina nell'ufficio di gabinetto del ministro. È la Farnesina - spiegano oggi a Forte Braschi - a sollevare "forti obiezioni" e "contestazioni" a quella informazione del nostro servizio segreto. Le maggiori perplessità giungono

dalla direzione generale dei Paesi africani, diretta da un dirigente di eccellente reputazione, Bruno Cabras.

* * *

La storia dell'uranio nigerino sembra morta. Ma, il 24 settembre 2002, il governo di Tony Blair con un dossier di 50 pagine rende noto che l'Iraq ha cercato di comprare "significative quantità di uranio da un Paese africano nonostante non abbia alcun programma di nucleare civile che lo richieda". Due giorni dopo, ricorda Seymour Hersh, il segretario di Stato Colin Powell, di fronte alla commissione del Senato degli Affari esteri, cita "il tentativo iracheno di ottenere l'uranio come la prova delle sue persistenti ambizioni nucleari". Sono le dichiarazioni che indurranno il Congresso a dare via libera con una maggioranza schiacciante al presidente Bush per le operazioni militari in Iraq.

È ottobre ormai e il direttore del Sismi, Nicolò Pollari, è ascoltato una prima volta dal Comitato parlamentare di controllo. Se ne sta sul vago. Dice e non dice. Esplicitamente tace la circostanza del "dossier uranio" acquistato a Roma e in possesso degli inglesi. Però, spiega: "Non abbiamo prove documentali, ma informazioni che un paese centroafricano ha venduto uranio puro a Bagdad". Trenta giorni dopo, il generale ci ripensa. È più esplicito. Indica "prove documentali". Sempre dinanzi al Comitato parlamentare, aggiunge il dettaglio che mancava. Dice: "Abbiamo le prove documentali dell'acquisto di uranio naturale da parte dell'Iraq nella repubblica centroafricana. Ci risulta anche il tentativo iracheno di acquistare centrifughe per l'arricchimento dell'uranio da industrie tedesche e, forse, italiane". Pollari non drammatizza. È prudente. Non disegna un quadro a tinte forti dove Bagdad appare in grado di costruire una atomica. Il direttore del Sismi sostiene che, una volta ottenuto l'uranio, una volta ottenute le centrifughe, "gli iracheni impiegheranno nella migliore delle ipotesi tre anni, e mediamente cinque, per mettere a punto, con quell'uranio arricchito, un'arma di distruzione di massa".

* * *

Nel marzo di quest'anno, il Sismi è in allarme. L'Aiea di Vienna, agenzia internazionale per l'energia atomica, ha finalmente ricevuto dagli americani ed esaminato i documenti del "dossier Niger". Il 7 marzo, Mohamed El Baradei, direttore generale dell'Aiea, spiega al Consiglio di sicurezza dell'Onu: "La mia agenzia, anche con il concorso di esperti esterni, ha concluso che i documenti in questione non sono autentici".

A Forte Braschi il clima si fa cattivo. Chi ha guardato con diffidenza e sospetto i documenti venduti dal diplomatico africano tira su la testa, dopo averla tenuta per mesi ben chinata dinanzi al successo che quelle informazioni raccoglievano sulle due sponde dell'Atlantico. Chi, di quei documenti, ha sopravvalutato la fondatezza comincia a cercare una via d'uscita alla crisi imminente sull'esterno e al prevedibile scontro interno. Come sempre capita in questi casi, dentro il servizio nascono alcune ricostruzioni che non trovano alcuna conferma e hanno, al momento, tutta l'aria di essere state costruite ad arte per sollevare un polverone che, coinvolgendo le responsabilità politiche, allontani dagli 007 critiche e censure. La prima riguarda il ruolo del presidente Berlusconi. La seconda, l'attività del suo consigliere diplomatico, Giovanni Castellaneta. Vediamo. Secondo alcune fonti del Sismi, sarebbe stato il premier italiano, in una conversazione telefonica, a confermare a George W. Bush l'esistenza del "dossier uranio" e soprattutto la sua fondatezza. Effettivamente Berlusconi parlò al telefono con il presidente degli Stati Uniti alle 8,45 (ora di Washington) del 25 gennaio 2003, a tre giorni (dunque) del discorso di Bush sullo stato dell'Unione. A cinque giorni dall'incontro a Washington dove i due presidenti convennero "sull'importanza di disarmare Saddam", ma dove - fonti diplomatiche italiane assicurano a Repubblica - "non si fece alcun accenno né al dossier uranio né dunque alla possibile attendibilità di quelle informazioni". Più o meno della stessa (velenosa) trama, è la storiella che gira intorno al nome di Giovanni Castellaneta. Il consigliere diplomatico, con buoni legami con la comunità dell'intelligence e in corsa per diventare direttore del Cesis, avrebbe assicurato "copertura politica" al dossier del Sismi in alcuni incontri non ufficiali con i legworkers della Cia a Roma.

Su questa ricostruzione dell'affaire, interpellata da *Repubblica*, la direzione del Sismi ha scelto di non rispondere ad alcuna domanda. Di Palazzo Chigi si conosce il comunicato di domenica scorsa (13 luglio): "Le notizie di trasmissione da parte italiana ad altri organismi d'intelligence di documenti di provenienza nigerina o irachena sono destituite di ogni fondamento: i servizi italiani non hanno mai fornito alcun documento". Sono parole che non spiegano e, oggi, richiedono una pubblica spiegazione, un'assunzione politica di responsabilità, quale che sia il grado di coinvolgimento che il nostro Paese ha avuto in questa storia.

(16 luglio 2003)

[Invia questo articolo](#)

These five images appeared in hardcopy of the Italian newspaper La Repubblica on July 16, 2003. The online story without the images:
<http://www.repubblica.it/online/esteri/iraqattacotentacineque/dossier/dossier.html>

They are reportedly portions of forged documents on supply of uranium materials by Niger to Iraq and were allegedly provided by Italian intelligence, SISMI, to British intelligence, MI6.

A sixth document shown in La Repubblica is a portion of document No. 3 below.

1

IL TELEX
1 febbraio 1999.
L'ambasciata del Niger a Roma informa il suo governo: l'ambasciatore iracheno Al Zahawie, è in arrivo nella Sede Wissam Al Zahawie, è in arrivo nella capitale Niamey. E precisa: "E in missione speciale per il governo di Sua Eccellenza Saddam Hussein. Vi sarò grato per ogni disposizione vogliate prendere a riguardo"

0077532007
01/02 14.57
MINAFET 5200N18
020290 NIGER I
MINAFET 5200N1
020290 NIGER I

TELEX N° 0031991ABNIIROME BU 01/02/1999

DEST: S.E.M. LE MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
ET DE L'INTEGRATION AFRICAINE.
NIAMEY

J'AI L'HONNEUR DE PORTER A VOTRE CONNAISSANCE QUE D'IRAQ HUPRES DU SAINT SIEGE UIENT DE M'INFORMER M. WISSAM AL ZAHAWIE, AMBASSADEUR D'IRAQ AUPRES D'EFFECTUERA UNE MISSION OFFICIELLE DANS NOTRE PAYS REPRESENTANT DE S.E. M. SADDAM HUSSEIN, PRESIDENT D'IRAQ, S.E.M. ZAHAWIE ARRIVERA A NIAMEY LE VENDREDI 05 F 15 H 25 PAR VOL AIR FRANCE N° 730 EN PROVENANCE D

JE VOUS SAURAI GRE DES DISPOSITIONS QUE VOUS VOURENDRE A CET EFFET.

TRES HAUTE CONSIDERATION

SIGNEE: S.E. ADAMOU CHEROU
AMBASSADEUR NIGER ROM

2

REPUBLIQUE DU NIGER
CONSEIL DE RECONCILIATION NATIONALE
MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
ET DE L'INTEGRATION AFRICAINE
DIRECTION DES AFFAIRES JURIDIQUES
ET CONSULAIRES

Niamey, le 30 JUIL. 1999

05055

N° MAERADAJC/DNR

URGENT

HONNEUR VOUS DEMANDER BIEN VOULOIR CONTACTER S.E. L'AMBASSADEUR D'IRAQ M. WISSAM AL ZAHAWIE POUR CONNAITRE REPONSE DE SON PAYS CONCERNANT FOURNITURE D'URANIUM SELON DERNIERS ACCORDS ETABLIS A NIAMEY LE 29 JUIN 2000.

PRIERE SUIVRE CE DOSSIER TRES CONFIDENTIEL AVEC TOUTE DISCRETION ET DILIGENCE.

IL SOLLECITO
Il ministero degli Esteri nigerino chiede all'ambasciatore a Roma di premere sul suo collega iracheno Al Zahawie perché rispetti l'impegno a comprare uranio in Niger per il suo paese. Impegno che sarebbe stato preso durante la sua visita ufficiale in Africa, il 29 giugno del 2000. Ma chi ha compilato e firmato la lettera commette un errore singolare: segna una data di un anno prima: 30 luglio 1999

3

AL PRESIDENTE
27 luglio 2000 una lettera indirizzata al presidente della repubblica del Niger conferma l'accordo con l'Iraq per la vendita di 500 tonnellate di uranio. Ma chi firma la lettera scritta su carta intestata della repubblica del Niger? Lo stesso presidente del Niger con tanto di bollo dell'ufficio presidenziale. E la parte più grossolana del falso dossier

CONFIDENTIEL
URGENT

Republique Du Niger
Fraternité - Travail - Progrès

Niamey, le 27/07/2000.

MONSIEUR LE PRESIDENT,

J'AI L'HONNEUR DE ME REFERER A L'ACCORD N° 381-NI 2000, CONCERNANT LA FOURNITURE D'URANIUM, SIGNE A NIAMEY LE 06 JUILLET 2000 ENTRE LE GOUVERNEMENT DE LA REPUBLIQUE DU NIGER ET LE GOUVERNEMENT DE L'IRAQ PAR LEURS RESPECTIFS REPRESENTANTS DELEGUES OFFICIELS.

DITE FOURNITURE EQUIVALENTE A 500 TONNES D'URANIUM PUR PAR AN, SERA DELIVRE EN 2 PHASES.

AYANT VU ET EXAMINE LEDIT ACCORD, JE L'APPROUVE EN TOUTES ET CHACUNE DE SES PARTIES EN VERTU DES POUVOIRS QUI ME SONT CONFERES PAR LA CONSTITUTION DU 12 MAI 1990.

4

PROTOCOLLO
10 ottobre 2000. Ecco il protocollo dell'accordo per la cessione dell'uranio. E inviato per conoscenza all'ambasciatore nigerino a Roma. Il mittente è il ministro degli Esteri di Niamey. Ma c'è un altro grave errore: Ailele Habibou è stato sì ministro degli Esteri del paese africano ma solo fino al 1989.

2A/EA
REPUBLIQUE DU NIGER
CONSEIL MILITAIRE SUPREME
MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
ET DE LA COOPERATION
DIRECTION DES AFFAIRES JURIDIQUES
ET CONSULAIRES

Niamey, le 10 OCT. 2000

LE MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
ET DE LA COOPERATION

Monsieur l'Ambassadeur du Niger
ROME

N° MAE/C/D/ACD
N° 07254

OBJET: Protocole d'accord entre le Gouvernement du Niger et le Gouvernement d'Iraq relatif à la fourniture d'uranium signé les 5 et 6 Juillet 2000 à Niamey.

J'ai l'honneur de vous faire tenir ci-joint, pour information, copie du Protocole d'Accord signé à Niamey entre la République du Niger et le Gouvernement d'Iraq concernant la fourniture d'uranium sous l'Etat nigerien à Aita au sujet du Protocole cité

5

ENET L'AVIS

Que l'Etat du Niger a satisfait à toute les exigences de son droit constitutionnel et de ses autres principes de droit pour la prise en charge valable et juridiquement obligatoire de toutes ses obligations résultant du Protocole d'Accord;

Que le représentant de l'Etat du Niger et le représentant de l'Iraq qui ont signé au nom de leur respectif gouvernement, avaient juridiquement pouvoir de représentation.

Où siégeaient Messieurs: Mamadou Talon Aouassi, Président de la Cour du Niger; Madj Madjir, Conseiller du gouvernement d'Iraq; Mahamane Soukari, Conseiller Intérimaire du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères du Niger, en présence de M. Boudiara Ali, Procureur Général de l'Iraq et avec l'assistance de Maître Maiga Ali, Greffier en Chef.

3/11/2000

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ANNALS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

THE STOVEPIPE

by SEYMOUR M. HERSH

How conflicts between the Bush Administration and the intelligence community marred the reporting on Iraq's weapons.

Issue of 2003-10-27

Posted 2003-10-20

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In a Q. & A., Seymour M. Hersh discusses the current state of the Bush Administration

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Since midsummer, the Senate Intelligence Committee has been attempting to solve the biggest mystery of the Iraq war: the disparity between the Bush Administration's prewar assessment of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and what has actually been discovered.

The committee is concentrating on the last ten years' worth of reports by the C.I.A. Preliminary findings, one intelligence official told me, are disquieting. "The intelligence community made all kinds of errors and handled things sloppily," he said. The problems range from a lack of quality control to different agencies' reporting contradictory assessments at the same time. One finding, the official went on, was that the intelligence reports about Iraq provided by the United Nations inspection teams and the International Atomic Energy Agency, which monitored Iraq's nuclear-weapons programs, were far more accurate than the C.I.A. estimates. "Some of the old-timers in the community are appalled by how bad the analysis was," the official said. "If you look at them side by side, C.I.A. versus United Nations, the U.N. agencies come out ahead across the board."

There were, of course, good reasons to worry about Saddam Hussein's possession of W.M.D.s. He had manufactured and used chemical weapons in the past, and had experimented with biological weapons; before the first Gulf War, he maintained a multibillion-dollar nuclear-weapons program. In addition, there were widespread doubts about the efficacy of the U.N. inspection teams, whose operations in Iraq were repeatedly challenged and disrupted by Saddam Hussein. Iraq was thought to have manufactured at least six thousand more chemical weapons than the U.N. could account for. And yet, as some former U.N. inspectors often predicted, the tons of chemical and biological weapons that the American public was led to expect have thus far proved illusory. As long as that remains the case, one question will be asked more and more insistently: How did the American intelligence community get it so wrong?

Part of the answer lies in decisions made early in the Bush Administration, before the events of September 11, 2001. In interviews with present and former intelligence officials, I was told that some senior Administration people, soon after coming to power, had bypassed the government's customary procedures for vetting intelligence.

A retired C.I.A. officer described for me some of the questions that would normally arise in vetting: "Does dramatic information turned up by an overseas spy square with his access, or does it exceed his plausible reach? How does the agent behave? Is he on time for meetings?" The vetting process is especially important when one is dealing with foreign-agent reports—sensitive intelligence that can trigger profound policy decisions. In theory, no request for action should be taken directly to higher authorities—a process known as "stovepiping"—without the information on which it is based having been subjected to rigorous scrutiny.

The point is not that the President and his senior aides were consciously lying. What was taking place was much more systematic—and potentially just as troublesome. Kenneth Pollack, a former National Security Council expert on Iraq, whose book "The Threatening Storm" generally supported the use of force to remove Saddam Hussein, told me that what the Bush people did was "dismantle the existing filtering process that for fifty years had been preventing the policymakers from getting bad information. They created stovepipes to get the information they wanted directly to the top leadership. Their position is that the professional bureaucracy is deliberately and maliciously keeping information from them.

"They always had information to back up their public claims, but it was often very bad information," Pollack continued. "They were forcing the intelligence community to defend its good information and good analysis so aggressively that the intelligence analysts didn't have the time or the energy to go after the bad information."

The Administration eventually got its way, a former C.I.A. official said. "The analysts at the C.I.A. were beaten down defending their assessments. And they blame George Tenet"—the C.I.A. director—"for not protecting them. I've never seen a government like this."

A few months after George Bush took office, Greg Thielmann, an expert on disarmament with the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, or INR, was assigned to be the daily intelligence liaison to John Bolton, the Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control, who is a prominent conservative. Thielmann understood that his posting had been mandated by Secretary of State Colin Powell, who thought that every important State Department bureau should be assigned a daily intelligence officer. "Bolton was the guy with whom I had to do business,"

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Thielmann said. “We were going to provide him with all the information he was entitled to see. That’s what being a professional intelligence officer is all about.”

But, Thielmann told me, “Bolton seemed to be troubled because INR was not telling him what he wanted to hear.” Thielmann soon found himself shut out of Bolton’s early-morning staff meetings. “I was intercepted at the door of his office and told, ‘The Under-Secretary doesn’t need you to attend this meeting anymore.’” When Thielmann protested that he was there to provide intelligence input, the aide said, “The Under-Secretary wants to keep this in the family.”

Eventually, Thielmann said, Bolton demanded that he and his staff have direct electronic access to sensitive intelligence, such as foreign-agent reports and electronic intercepts. In previous Administrations, such data had been made available to under-secretaries only after it was analyzed, usually in the specially secured offices of INR. The whole point of the intelligence system in place, according to Thielmann, was “to prevent raw intelligence from getting to people who would be misled.” Bolton, however, wanted his aides to receive and assign intelligence analyses and assessments using the raw data. In essence, the under-secretary would be running his own intelligence operation, without any guidance or support. “He surrounded himself with a hand-chosen group of loyalists, and found a way to get C.I.A. information directly,” Thielmann said.

In a subsequent interview, Bolton acknowledged that he had changed the procedures for handling intelligence, in an effort to extend the scope of the classified materials available to his office. “I found that there was lots of stuff that I wasn’t getting and that the INR analysts weren’t including,” he told me. “I didn’t want it filtered. I wanted to see everything—to be fully informed. If that puts someone’s nose out of joint, sorry about that.” Bolton told me that he wanted to reach out to the intelligence community but that Thielmann had “invited himself” to his daily staff meetings. “This was my meeting with the four assistant secretaries who report to me, in preparation for the Secretary’s 8:30 a.m. staff meeting,” Bolton said. “This was within my family of bureaus. There was no place for INR or anyone else—the Human Resources Bureau or the Office of Foreign Buildings.”

There was also a change in procedure at the Pentagon under Paul Wolfowitz, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and Douglas Feith, the Under-Secretary for Policy. In the early summer of 2001, a career official assigned to a Pentagon planning office undertook a routine evaluation of the assumption, adopted by Wolfowitz and Feith, that the Iraqi National Congress, an exile group headed by Ahmad Chalabi, could play a major role in a coup d’état to oust Saddam Hussein. They also assumed that Chalabi, after the coup, would be welcomed by Iraqis as a hero.

An official familiar with the evaluation described how it subjected that scenario to the principle of what planners call “branches and sequels”—that is, “plan for what you expect not to happen.” The official said, “It was a ‘what could go wrong’ study. What if it turns out that Ahmad Chalabi is not so popular? What’s Plan B if you discover that Chalabi and his boys don’t have it in them to accomplish the overthrow?”

The people in the policy offices didn’t seem to care. When the official asked about the analysis, he was told by a colleague that the new Pentagon leadership wanted to focus not on what could go wrong but on what would go right. He was told that the study’s exploration of options amounted to planning for failure. “Their methodology was analogous to tossing a coin five times and assuming that it would always come up heads,” the official told me. “You need to think about what would happen if it comes up tails.”

Getting rid of Saddam Hussein and his regime had been a priority for Wolfowitz and others in and around the Administration since the end of the first Gulf War. For years, Iraq hawks had seen a coup led by Chalabi as the best means of achieving that goal. After September 11th, however, and the military’s quick victory in Afghanistan, the notion of a coup gave way to the idea of an American invasion.

In a speech on November 14, 2001, as the Taliban were being routed in Afghanistan, Richard Perle, a Pentagon consultant with long-standing ties to Wolfowitz, Feith, and Chalabi, articulated what would become the Bush Administration’s most compelling argument for going to war with Iraq: the possibility that, with enough time, Saddam Hussein would be capable of attacking the United States with a nuclear weapon. Perle cited testimony from Dr. Khidhir Hamza, an Iraqi defector, who declared that Saddam Hussein, in response to the 1981 Israeli bombing of the Osirac nuclear reactor, near Baghdad, had ordered future nuclear facilities to be dispersed at four hundred sites across the nation. “Every day,” Perle said, these sites “turn out a little bit of nuclear materials.” He told his audience, “Do we wait for Saddam and hope for the best, do we wait and hope he doesn’t do what we know he is capable of . . . or do we take some preemptive action?”

In fact, the best case for the success of the U.N. inspection process in Iraq was in the area of nuclear arms. In October, 1997, the International Atomic Energy Agency issued a definitive report declaring Iraq to be essentially free of nuclear weapons. The I.A.E.A.’s inspectors said, “There are no indications that there remains in Iraq any physical capability for the production of amounts of weapon-usable nuclear material of any practical significance.” The report noted that Iraq’s nuclear facilities had been destroyed by American bombs in the 1991 Gulf War.

The study's main author, Garry Dillon, a British nuclear-safety engineer who spent twenty-three years working for the I.A.E.A. and retired as its chief of inspection, told me that it was "highly unlikely" that Iraq had been able to maintain a secret or hidden program to produce significant amounts of weapons-usable material, given the enormous progress in the past decade in the technical ability of I.A.E.A. inspectors to detect radioactivity in ground locations and in waterways. "This is not kitchen chemistry," Dillon said. "You're talking factory scale, and in any operation there are leaks."

The Administration could offer little or no recent firsthand intelligence to contradict the I.A.E.A.'s 1997 conclusions. During the Clinton years, there had been a constant flow of troubling intelligence reports on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, but most were in the context of worst-case analyses—what Iraq could do without adequate United Nations inspections—and included few, if any, reliable reports from agents inside the country. The inspectors left in 1998. Many of the new reports that the Bush people were receiving came from defectors who had managed to flee Iraq with help from the Iraqi National Congress. The defectors gave dramatic accounts of Iraq's efforts to reconstitute its nuclear-weapons program, and of its alleged production of chemical and biological weapons—but the accounts could not be corroborated by the available intelligence.

Greg Thielmann, after being turned away from Bolton's office, worked with the INR staff on a major review of Iraq's progress in developing W.M.D.s. The review, presented to Secretary of State Powell in December, 2001, echoed the earlier I.A.E.A. findings. According to Thielmann, "It basically said that there is no persuasive evidence that the Iraqi nuclear program is being reconstituted."

The defectors, however, had an audience prepared to believe the worst. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had long complained about the limits of American intelligence. In the late nineteen-nineties, for example, he had chaired a commission on ballistic-missile programs that criticized the unwillingness of intelligence analysts "to make estimates that extended beyond the hard evidence they had in hand." After he became Secretary of Defense, a separate intelligence unit was set up in the Pentagon's policy office, under the control of William Luti, a senior aide to Feith. This office, which circumvented the usual procedures of vetting and transparency, stovepiped many of its findings to the highest-ranking officials.

In the fall of 2001, soon after the September 11th attacks, the C.I.A. received an intelligence report from Italy's Military Intelligence and Security Service, or *sismi*, about a public visit that Wissam al-Zahawie, then the Iraqi Ambassador to the Vatican, had made to Niger and three other African nations two and a half years earlier, in February, 1999. The visit had been covered at the time by the local press in Niger and by a French press agency. The American Ambassador, Charles O. Cecil, filed a routine report to Washington on the visit, as did British intelligence. There was nothing untoward about the Zahawie visit. "We reported it because his picture appeared in the paper with the President," Cecil, who is now retired, told me. There was no article accompanying the photograph, only the caption, and nothing significant to report. At the time, Niger, which had sent hundreds of troops in support of the American-led Gulf War in 1991, was actively seeking economic assistance from the United States.

None of the contemporaneous reports, as far as is known, made any mention of uranium. But now, apparently as part of a larger search for any pertinent information about terrorism, *sismi* dug the Zahawie-trip report out of its files and passed it along, with a suggestion that Zahawie's real mission was to arrange the purchase of a form of uranium ore known as "yellowcake." (Yellowcake, which has been a major Niger export for decades, can be used to make fuel for nuclear reactors. It can also be converted, if processed differently, into weapons-grade uranium.)

What made the two-and-a-half-year-old report stand out in Washington was its relative freshness. A 1999 attempt by Iraq to buy uranium ore, if verified, would seem to prove that Saddam had been working to reconstitute his nuclear program—and give the lie to the I.A.E.A. and to intelligence reports inside the American government that claimed otherwise.

The *sismi* report, however, was unpersuasive. Inside the American intelligence community, it was dismissed as amateurish and unsubstantiated. One former senior C.I.A. official told me that the initial report from Italy contained no documents but only a written summary of allegations. "I can fully believe that *sismi* would put out a piece of intelligence like that," a C.I.A. consultant told me, "but why anybody would put credibility in it is beyond me." No credible documents have emerged since to corroborate it.

The intelligence report was quickly stovepiped to those officials who had an intense interest in building the case against Iraq, including Vice-President Dick Cheney. "The Vice-President saw a piece of intelligence reporting that Niger was attempting to buy uranium," Cathie Martin, the spokeswoman for Cheney, told me. Sometime after he first saw it, Cheney brought it up at his regularly scheduled daily briefing from the C.I.A., Martin said. "He asked the briefer a question. The briefer came back a day or two later and said, 'We do have a report, but there's a lack of details.'" The Vice-President was further told that it was known that Iraq had acquired uranium ore from Niger in the early nineteen-eighties but that that material had been placed in secure storage by the I.A.E.A., which was monitoring it. "End of

story,” Martin added. “That’s all we know.” According to a former high-level C.I.A. official, however, Cheney was dissatisfied with the initial response, and asked the agency to review the matter once again. It was the beginning of what turned out to be a year-long tug-of-war between the C.I.A. and the Vice-President’s office.

As the campaign against Iraq intensified, a former aide to Cheney told me, the Vice-President’s office, run by his chief of staff, Lewis (Scooter) Libby, became increasingly secretive when it came to intelligence about Iraq’s W.M.D.s. As with Wolfowitz and Bolton, there was a reluctance to let the military and civilian analysts on the staff vet intelligence.

“It was an unbelievably closed and small group,” the former aide told me. Intelligence procedures were far more open during the Clinton Administration, he said, and professional staff members had been far more involved in assessing and evaluating the most sensitive data. “There’s so much intelligence out there that it’s easy to pick and choose your case,” the former aide told me. “It opens things up to cherry-picking.” (“Some reporting is sufficiently sensitive that it is restricted only to the very top officials of the government—as it should be,” Cathie Martin said. And any restrictions, she added, emanate from C.I.A. security requirements.)

By early 2002, the *sismi* intelligence—still unverified—had begun to play a role in the Administration’s warnings about the Iraqi nuclear threat. On January 30th, the C.I.A. published an unclassified report to Congress that stated, “Baghdad may be attempting to acquire materials that could aid in reconstituting its nuclear-weapons program.” A week later, Colin Powell told the House International Relations Committee, “With respect to the nuclear program, there is no doubt that the Iraqis are pursuing it.”

The C.I.A. assessment reflected both deep divisions within the agency and the position of its director, George Tenet, which was far from secure. (The agency had been sharply criticized, after all, for failing to provide any effective warning of the September 11th attacks.) In the view of many C.I.A. analysts and operatives, the director was too eager to endear himself to the Administration hawks and improve his standing with the President and the Vice-President. Senior C.I.A. analysts dealing with Iraq were constantly being urged by the Vice-President’s office to provide worst-case assessments on Iraqi weapons issues. “They got pounded on, day after day,” one senior Bush Administration official told me, and received no consistent backup from Tenet and his senior staff. “Pretty soon you say ‘Fuck it.’” And they began to provide the intelligence that was wanted.

In late February, the C.I.A. persuaded retired Ambassador Joseph Wilson to fly to Niger to discreetly check out the story of the uranium sale. Wilson, who is now a business consultant, had excellent credentials: he had been deputy chief of mission in Baghdad, had served as a diplomat in Africa, and had worked in the White House for the National Security Council. He was known as an independent diplomat who had put himself in harm’s way to help American citizens abroad.

Wilson told me he was informed at the time that the mission had come about because the Vice-President’s office was interested in the Italian intelligence report. Before his departure, he was summoned to a meeting at the C.I.A. with a group of government experts on Iraq, Niger, and uranium. He was shown no documents but was told, he said, that the C.I.A. “was responding to a report that was recently received of a purported memorandum of agreement” —between Iraq and Niger—“that our boys had gotten.” He added, “It was never clear to me, or to the people who were briefing me, whether our guys had actually seen the agreement, or the purported text of an agreement.” Wilson’s trip to Niger, which lasted eight days, produced nothing. He learned that any memorandum of understanding to sell yellowcake would have required the signatures of Niger’s Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Minister of Mines. “I saw everybody out there,” Wilson said, and no one had signed such a document. “If a document purporting to be about the sale contained those signatures, it would not be authentic.” Wilson also learned that there was no uranium available to sell: it had all been pre-sold to Niger’s Japanese and European consortium partners.

Wilson returned to Washington and made his report. It was circulated, he said, but “I heard nothing about what the Vice-President’s office thought about it.” (In response, Cathie Martin said, “The Vice-President doesn’t know Joe Wilson and did not know about his trip until he read about it in the press.” The first press accounts appeared fifteen months after Wilson’s trip.)

By early March, 2002, a former White House official told me, it was understood by many in the White House that the President had decided, in his own mind, to go to war. The undeclared decision had a devastating impact on the continuing struggle against terrorism. The Bush Administration took many intelligence operations that had been aimed at Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups around the world and redirected them to the Persian Gulf. Linguists and special operatives were abruptly reassigned, and several ongoing anti-terrorism intelligence programs were curtailed.

Chalabi’s defector reports were now flowing from the Pentagon directly to the Vice-President’s office, and then on to the President, with little prior evaluation by intelligence professionals. When INR analysts did get a look at the reports, they were troubled by what they found. “They’d pick apart a report and find out that the source had been

wrong before, or had no access to the information provided,” Greg Thielmann told me. “There was considerable skepticism throughout the intelligence community about the reliability of Chalabi’s sources, but the defector reports were coming all the time. Knock one down and another comes along. Meanwhile, the garbage was being shoved straight to the President.”

A routine settled in: the Pentagon’s defector reports, classified “secret,” would be funnelled to newspapers, but subsequent C.I.A. and INR analyses of the reports—invariably scathing but also classified—would remain secret.

“It became a personality issue,” a Pentagon consultant said of the Bush Administration’s handling of intelligence. “My fact is better than your fact. The whole thing is a failure of process. Nobody goes to primary sources.” The intelligence community was in full retreat.

In the spring of 2002, the former White House official told me, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz began urging the President to release more than ninety million dollars in federal funds to Chalabi. The 1998 Iraq Liberation Act had authorized ninety-seven million dollars for the Iraqi opposition, but most of the funds had not been expended. The State Department opposed releasing the rest of the money, arguing that Chalabi had failed to account properly for the funds he had already received. “The Vice-President came into a meeting furious that we hadn’t given the money to Chalabi,” the former official recalled. Cheney said, “Here we are, denying him money, when they”—the Iraqi National Congress—“are providing us with unique intelligence on Iraqi W.M.D.s.”

In late summer, the White House sharply escalated the nuclear rhetoric. There were at least two immediate targets: the midterm congressional elections and the pending vote on a congressional resolution authorizing the President to take any action he deemed necessary in Iraq, to protect America’s national security.

On August 7th, Vice-President Cheney, speaking in California, said of Saddam Hussein, “What we know now, from various sources, is that he . . . continues to pursue a nuclear weapon.” On August 26th, Cheney suggested that Saddam had a nuclear capability that could directly threaten “anyone he chooses, in his own region or beyond.” He added that the Iraqis were continuing “to pursue the nuclear program they began so many years ago.” On September 8th, he told a television interviewer, “We do know, with absolute certainty, that he is using his procurement system to acquire the equipment he needs in order to enrich uranium to build a nuclear weapon.” The President himself, in his weekly radio address on September 14th, stated, “Saddam Hussein has the scientists and infrastructure for a nuclear-weapons program, and has illicitly sought to purchase the equipment needed to enrich uranium for a nuclear weapon.” There was no confirmed intelligence for the President’s assertion.

The government of the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, President Bush’s closest ally, was also brought in. As Blair later told a British government inquiry, he and Bush had talked by telephone that summer about the need “to disclose what we knew or as much as we could of what we knew.” Blair loyally took the lead: on September 24th, the British government issued a dossier dramatizing the W.M.D. threat posed by Iraq. In a foreword, Blair proclaimed that “the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt that Saddam . . . continues in his efforts to develop nuclear weapons.” The dossier noted that intelligence—based, again, largely on the *sismi* report—showed that Iraq had “sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.” A subsequent parliamentary inquiry determined that the published statement had been significantly toned down after the C.I.A. warned its British counterpart not to include the claim in the dossier, and in the final version Niger was not named, nor was *sismi*.

The White House, meanwhile, had been escalating its rhetoric. In a television interview on September 8th, Condoleezza Rice, the national-security adviser, addressing questions about the strength of the Administration’s case against Iraq, said, “We don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud”—a formulation that was taken up by hawks in the Administration. And, in a speech on October 7th, President Bush said, “Facing clear evidence of peril, we cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.”

At that moment, in early October, 2002, a set of documents suddenly appeared that promised to provide solid evidence that Iraq was attempting to reconstitute its nuclear program. The first notice of the documents’ existence came when Elisabetta Burba, a reporter for *Panorama*, a glossy Italian weekly owned by the publishing empire of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, received a telephone call from an Italian businessman and security consultant whom she believed to have once been connected to Italian intelligence. He told her that he had information connecting Saddam Hussein to the purchase of uranium in Africa. She considered the informant credible. In 1995, when she worked for the magazine *Epoca*, he had provided her with detailed information, apparently from Western intelligence sources, for articles she published dealing with the peace process in Bosnia and with an Islamic charity that was linked to international terrorism. The information, some of it in English, proved to be accurate. *Epoca* had authorized her to pay around four thousand dollars for the documents—a common journalistic practice in Italy.

Now, years later, “he comes to me again,” Burba told me. “I knew he was an informed person, and that he had contacts all over the world, including in the Middle East. He deals

with investment and security issues.” When Burba met with the man, he showed her the Niger documents and offered to sell them to her for about ten thousand dollars.

The documents he gave her were photocopies. There were twenty-two pages, mostly in French, some with the letterhead of the Niger government or Embassy, and two on the stationery of the Iraqi Embassy to the Holy See. There were also telexes. When Burba asked how the documents could be authenticated, the man produced what appeared to be a photocopy of the codebook from the Niger Embassy, along with other items. “What I was sure of was that he had access,” Burba said. “He didn’t receive the documents from the moon.”

The documents dealt primarily with the alleged sale of uranium, Burba said. She informed her editors, and shared the photocopies with them. She wanted to arrange a visit to Niger to verify what seemed to be an astonishing story. At that point, however, *Panorama*’s editor-in-chief, Carlo Rossella, who is known for his ties to the Berlusconi government, told Burba to turn the documents over to the American Embassy for authentication. Burba dutifully took a copy of the papers to the Embassy on October 9th.

A week later, Burba travelled to Niger. She visited mines and the ports that any exports would pass through, spoke to European businessmen and officials informed about Niger’s uranium industry, and found no trace of a sale. She also learned that the transport company and the bank mentioned in the papers were too small and too ill-equipped to handle such a transaction. As Ambassador Wilson had done eight months earlier, she concluded that there was no evidence of a recent sale of yellowcake to Iraq. The *Panorama* story was dead, and Burba and her editors said that no money was paid. The documents, however, were now in American hands.

Two former C.I.A. officials provided slightly different accounts of what happened next. “The Embassy was alerted that the papers were coming,” the first former official told me, “and it passed them directly to Washington without even vetting them inside the Embassy.” Once the documents were in Washington, they were forwarded by the C.I.A. to the Pentagon, he said. “Everybody knew at every step of the way that they were false—until they got to the Pentagon, where they were believed.”

The documents were just what Administration hawks had been waiting for. The second former official, Vincent Cannistraro, who served as chief of counter-terrorism operations and analysis, told me that copies of the Burba documents were given to the American Embassy, which passed them on to the C.I.A.’s chief of station in Rome, who forwarded them to Washington. Months later, he said, he telephoned a contact at C.I.A. headquarters and was told that “the jury was still out on this”—that is, on the authenticity of the documents.

George Tenet clearly was ambivalent about the information: in early October, he intervened to prevent the President from referring to Niger in a speech in Cincinnati. But Tenet then seemed to give up the fight, and Saddam’s desire for uranium from Niger soon became part of the Administration’s public case for going to war.

On December 7th, the Iraqi regime provided the U.N. Security Council with a twelve-thousand-page series of documents in which it denied having a W.M.D. arsenal. Very few in the press, the public, or the White House believed it, and a State Department rebuttal, on December 19th, asked, “Why is the Iraqi regime hiding their Niger procurement?” It was the first time that Niger had been publicly identified. In a January 23rd Op-Ed column in the *Times*, entitled “Why We Know Iraq Is Lying,” Condoleezza Rice wrote that the “false declaration . . . fails to account for or explain Iraq’s efforts to get uranium from abroad.” On January 26th, Secretary Powell, speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, asked, “Why is Iraq still trying to procure uranium?” Two days later, President Bush described the alleged sale in his State of the Union address, saying, “The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa.”

Who produced the fake Niger papers? There is nothing approaching a consensus on this question within the intelligence community. There has been published speculation about the intelligence services of several different countries. One theory, favored by some journalists in Rome, is that *sismi* produced the false documents and passed them to *Panorama* for publication.

Another explanation was provided by a former senior C.I.A. officer. He had begun talking to me about the Niger papers in March, when I first wrote about the forgery, and said, “Somebody deliberately let something false get in there.” He became more forthcoming in subsequent months, eventually saying that a small group of disgruntled retired C.I.A. clandestine operators had banded together in the late summer of last year and drafted the fraudulent documents themselves.

“The agency guys were so pissed at Cheney,” the former officer said. “They said, ‘O.K, we’re going to put the bite on these guys.’” My source said that he was first told of the fabrication late last year, at one of the many holiday gatherings in the Washington area of past and present C.I.A. officials. “Everyone was bragging about it—‘Here’s what we did. It was cool, cool, cool.’” These retirees, he said, had superb contacts among current officers in the agency and were informed in detail of the *sismi* intelligence.

“They thought that, with this crowd, it was the only way to go—to nail these guys who were not practicing good tradecraft and vetting intelligence,” my source said. “They thought it’d be bought at lower levels—a big bluff.” The thinking, he said, was that the documents would be endorsed by Iraq hawks at the top of the Bush Administration, who would be unable to resist flaunting them at a press conference or an interagency government meeting. They would then look foolish when intelligence officials pointed out that they were obvious fakes. But the tactic backfired, he said, when the papers won widespread acceptance within the Administration. “It got out of control.”

Like all large institutions, C.I.A. headquarters, in Langley, Virginia, is full of water-cooler gossip, and a retired clandestine officer told me this summer that the story about a former operations officer faking the documents is making the rounds. “What’s telling,” he added, “is that the story, whether it’s true or not, is believed”—an extraordinary commentary on the level of mistrust, bitterness, and demoralization within the C.I.A. under the Bush Administration. (William Harlow, the C.I.A. spokesman, said that the agency had no more evidence that former members of the C.I.A. had forged the documents “than we have that they were forged by Mr. Hersh.”)

The F.B.I. has been investigating the forgery at the request of the Senate Intelligence Committee. A senior F.B.I. official told me that the possibility that the documents were falsified by someone inside the American intelligence community had not been ruled out. “This story could go several directions,” he said. “We haven’t gotten anything solid, and we’ve looked.” He said that the F.B.I. agents assigned to the case are putting a great deal of effort into the investigation. But “somebody’s hiding something, and they’re hiding it pretty well.”

President Bush’s State of the Union speech had startled Elisabetta Burba, the Italian reporter. She had been handed documents and had personally taken them to the American Embassy, and she now knew from her trip to Niger that they were false. Later, Burba revisited her source. “I wanted to know what happened,” she said. “He told me that he didn’t know the documents were false, and said he’d also been fooled.”

Burba, convinced that she had the story of the year, wanted to publish her account immediately after the President’s speech, but Carlo Rossella, *Panorama*’s editor-in-chief, decided against it. Rossella explained to me, “When I heard the State of the Union statement, I thought to myself that perhaps the United States government has other information. I didn’t think the documents were that important—they weren’t trustable.” Eventually, in July, after her name appeared in the press, Burba published an account of her role. She told me that she was interviewed at the American consulate in Milan by three agents for the F.B.I. in early September.

The State of the Union speech was confounding to many members of the intelligence community, who could not understand how such intelligence could have got to the President without vetting. The former intelligence official who gave me the account of the forging of the documents told me that his colleagues were also startled by the speech. “They said, ‘Holy shit, all of a sudden the President is talking about it in the State of the Union address!’ They began to panic. Who the hell was going to expose it? They had to build a backfire. The solution was to leak the documents to the I.A.E.A.”

I subsequently met with a group of senior I.A.E.A. officials in Vienna, where the organization has its headquarters. In an interview over dinner, they told me that they did not even know the papers existed until early February of this year, a few days after the President’s speech. The I.A.E.A. had been asking Washington and London for their evidence of Iraq’s pursuit of African uranium, without receiving any response, ever since the previous September, when word of it turned up in the British dossier. After Niger was specified in the State Department’s fact sheet of December 19, 2002, the I.A.E.A. became more insistent. “I started to harass the United States,” recalled Jacques Baute, a Frenchman who, as director of the I.A.E.A.’s Iraq Nuclear Verification Office, often harassed Washington. Mark Gwozdecky, the I.A.E.A.’s spokesman, added, “We were asking for actionable evidence, and Jacques was getting almost nothing.”

On February 4, 2003, while Baute was on a plane bound for New York to attend a United Nations Security Council meeting on the Iraqi weapons dispute, the U.S. Mission in Vienna suddenly briefed members of Baute’s team on the Niger papers, but still declined to hand over the documents. “I insisted on seeing the documents myself,” Baute said, “and was provided with them upon my arrival in New York.” The next day, Secretary Powell made his case for going to war against Iraq before the U.N. Security Council. The presentation did not mention Niger—a fact that did not escape Baute. I.A.E.A. officials told me that they were puzzled by the timing of the American decision to provide the documents. Baute quickly concluded that they were fake.

Over the next few weeks, I.A.E.A. officials conducted further investigations, which confirmed the fraud. They also got in touch with American and British officials to inform them of the findings, and give them a chance to respond. Nothing was forthcoming, and so the I.A.E.A.’s director-general, Mohamed ElBaradei, publicly described the fraud at his next scheduled briefing to the U.N. Security Council, in New York on March 7th. The story slowly began to unravel.

Vice-President Cheney responded to ElBaradei’s report mainly by attacking the messenger. On March 16th, Cheney,

appearing on “Meet the Press,” stated emphatically that the United States had reason to believe that Saddam Hussein had reconstituted his nuclear-weapons program. He went on, “I think Mr. ElBaradei frankly is wrong. And I think if you look at the track record of the International Atomic Energy Agency on this kind of issue, especially where Iraq’s concerned, they have consistently underestimated or missed what it was Saddam Hussein was doing. I don’t have any reason to believe they’re any more valid this time than they’ve been in the past.” Three days later, the war in Iraq got under way, and the tale of the African-uranium-connection forgery sank from view.

Joseph Wilson, the diplomat who had travelled to Africa to investigate the allegation more than a year earlier, revived the Niger story. He was angered by what he saw as the White House’s dishonesty about Niger, and in early May he casually mentioned his mission to Niger, and his findings, during a brief talk about Iraq at a political conference in suburban Washington sponsored by the Senate Democratic Policy Committee (Wilson is a Democrat). Another speaker at the conference was the *Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, who got Wilson’s permission to mention the Niger trip in a column. A few months later, on July 6th, Wilson wrote about the trip himself on the *Times* Op-Ed page. “I gave them months to correct the record,” he told me, speaking of the White House, “but they kept on lying.”

The White House responded by blaming the intelligence community for the Niger reference in the State of the Union address. Condoleezza Rice, the national-security adviser, told a television interviewer on July 13th, “Had there been even a peep that the agency did not want that sentence in or that George Tenet did not want that sentence . . . it would have been gone.” Five days later, a senior White House official went a step further, telling reporters at a background briefing that they had the wrong impression about Joseph Wilson’s trip to Niger and the information it had yielded. “You can’t draw a conclusion that we were warned by Ambassador Wilson that this was all dubious,” the unnamed official said, according to a White House transcript. “It’s just not accurate.”

But Wilson’s account of his trip forced a rattled White House to acknowledge, for the first time, that “this information should not have risen to the level of a Presidential speech.” It also triggered retaliatory leaks to the press by White House officials that exposed Wilson’s wife as a C.I.A. operative—and led to an F.B.I. investigation.

Among the best potential witnesses on the subject of Iraq’s actual nuclear capabilities are the men and women who worked in the Iraqi weapons industry and for the National Monitoring Directorate, the agency set up by Saddam to work with the United Nations and I.A.E.A. inspectors. Many of the most senior weapons-industry officials, even those who voluntarily surrendered to U.S. forces, are being held in captivity at the Baghdad airport and other places, away from reporters. Their families have been told little by American authorities. Desperate for information, they have been calling friends and other contacts in America for help.

One Iraqi émigré who has heard from the scientists’ families is Shakir al Kha Fagi, who left Iraq as a young man and runs a successful business in the Detroit area. “The people in intelligence and in the W.M.D. business are in jail,” he said. “The Americans are hunting them down one by one. Nobody speaks for them, and there’s no American lawyer who will take the case.”

Not all the senior scientists are in captivity, however. Jafar Dhia Jafar, a British-educated physicist who coordinated Iraq’s efforts to make the bomb in the nineteen-eighties, and who had direct access to Saddam Hussein, fled Iraq in early April, before Baghdad fell, and, with the help of his brother, Hamid, the managing director of a large energy company, made his way to the United Arab Emirates. Jafar has refused to return to Baghdad, but he agreed to be debriefed by C.I.A. and British intelligence agents. There were some twenty meetings, involving as many as fifteen American and British experts. The first meeting, on April 11th, began with an urgent question from a C.I.A. officer: “Does Iraq have a nuclear device? The military really want to know. They are extremely worried.” Jafar’s response, according to the notes of an eyewitness, was to laugh. The notes continued:

Jafar insisted that there was not only no bomb, but no W.M.D., period. “The answer was none.” . . . Jafar explained that the Iraqi leadership had set up a new committee after the 91 Gulf war, and after the unscm [United Nations] inspection process was set up . . . and the following instructions [were sent] from the Top Man [Saddam]—“give them everything.”

The notes said that Jafar was then asked, “But this doesn’t mean all W.M.D.? How can you be certain?” His answer was clear: “I know all the scientists involved, and they chat. There is no W.M.D.”

Jafar explained why Saddam had decided to give up his valued weapons:

Up until the 91 Gulf war, our adversaries were regional. . . . But after the war, when it was clear that we were up against the United States, Saddam understood that these weapons were redundant. “No way we could escape the United States.” Therefore, the W.M.D. warheads did Iraq little strategic good.

Jafar had his own explanation, according to the notes, for one of the enduring mysteries of the U.N. inspection process—the six-thousand-warhead discrepancy between the number of chemical weapons thought to have been manufactured by Iraq before 1991 and the number that were accounted for by the U.N. inspection teams. It was this

discrepancy which led Western intelligence officials and military planners to make the worst-case assumptions. Jafar told his interrogators that the Iraqi government had simply lied to the United Nations about the number of chemical weapons used against Iran during the brutal Iran-Iraq war in the nineteen-eighties. Iraq, he said, dropped thousands more warheads on the Iranians than it acknowledged. For that reason, Saddam preferred not to account for the weapons at all.

There are always credibility problems with witnesses from a defeated regime, and anyone involved in the creation or concealment of W.M.D.s. would have a motive to deny it. But a strong endorsement of Jafar's integrity came from an unusual source—Jacques Baute, of the I.A.E.A., who spent much of the past decade locked in a struggle with Jafar and the other W.M.D. scientists and technicians of Iraq. "I don't believe anybody," Baute told me, "but, by and large, what he told us after 1995 was pretty accurate."

In early October, David Kay, the former U.N. inspector who is the head of the Administration's Iraq Survey Group, made his interim report to Congress on the status of the search for Iraq's W.M.D.s. "We have not yet found stocks of weapons," Kay reported, "but we are not yet at the point where we can say definitively either that such weapon stocks do not exist or that they existed before the war." In the area of nuclear weapons, Kay said, "Despite evidence of Saddam's continued ambition to acquire nuclear weapons, to date we have not uncovered evidence that Iraq undertook significant post-1998 steps to actually build nuclear weapons or produce fissile material." Kay was widely seen as having made the best case possible for President Bush's prewar claims of an imminent W.M.D. threat. But what he found fell far short of those claims, and the report was regarded as a blow to the Administration. President Bush, however, saw it differently. He told reporters that he felt vindicated by the report, in that it showed that "Saddam Hussein was a threat, a serious danger."

The President's response raises the question of what, if anything, the Administration learned from the failure, so far, to find significant quantities of W.M.D.s in Iraq. Any President depends heavily on his staff for the vetting of intelligence and a reasonable summary and analysis of the world's day-to-day events. The ultimate authority in the White House for such issues lies with the President's national-security adviser—in this case, Condoleezza Rice. The former White House official told me, "Maybe the Secretary of Defense and his people are short-circuiting the process, and creating a separate channel to the Vice-President. Still, at the end of the day all the policies have to be hashed out in the interagency process, led by the national-security adviser." What happened instead, he said, "was a real abdication of responsibility by Condi."

Vice-President Cheney remains unabashed about the Administration's reliance on the Niger documents, despite the revelation of their forgery. In a September interview on "Meet the Press," Cheney claimed that the British dossier's charge that "Saddam was, in fact, trying to acquire uranium in Africa" had been "revalidated." Cheney went on, "So there may be a difference of opinion there. I don't know what the truth is on the ground. . . . I don't know Mr. Wilson. I probably shouldn't judge him."

The Vice-President also defended the way in which he had involved himself in intelligence matters: "This is a very important area. It's one that the President has asked me to work on. . . . In terms of asking questions, I plead guilty. I ask a hell of a lot of questions. That's my job."♦

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