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NEWSMAKER: CONDOLEEZZA RICE

July 30, 2003



The national security adviser discusses the inclusion of controversial information in the State of the Union address, North Korea and the refusal to declassify parts of the 9/11 report.

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GWEN IFILL: The president's defense of National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice today came at a critical time. A week ago, her chief deputy, Stephen Hadley, acknowledged he had been warned by the CIA in two separate memos that the agency would not stand by information suggesting Iraq was trying to buy uranium in Africa to reconstitute a nuclear weapons program.

That claim made it into the president's State of the Union speech and CIA Director George Tenet took the blame. But with Hadley's admission, new questions emerged. If he knew about the error in advance, who else did? Was it overlooked simply because the administration was anxious to bolster the case for war?

Here to answer these and other questions is National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. Welcome, Dr. Rice.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE,
National Security Adviser:
Thank you. Nice to be with you.



GWEN IFILL: So the first question becomes the one I just posed. Did you know, or should you have known, that the information that went into the president's State of the Union speech regarding the purchase, or the efforts to purchase uranium in Niger or from Africa, another country in Africa, did you know that that information was not

But what I feel, really, most responsible for is that this has detracted from the very strong case that the president has been making. There are people who want to say that somehow the president's case was not strong, the intelligence case was not strong. I've read a lot of intelligence cases over my almost 20 years now in this field, and this was a very strong case.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE
National Security Adviser

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correct?

CONDOLEEEZZA RICE: When the line was put into the president's State of the Union address and cleared by the Central Intelligence Agency, when I read the line I thought it was completely credible and that in fact it was backed by the agency.

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What happened here is that we are really talking about two different processes. The State of the Union was put together, the speech went out for clearance, but the speech that the president had given in Cincinnati in October had also been sent out for clearance.

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GWEN IFILL: That's the speech where he made--

CONDOLEEEZZA RICE: This is the speech where he--

GWEN IFILL: --made the case for war.

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CONDOLEEEZZA RICE:
 Well, this is one of the speeches in which he made the case for war. And in that speech, a line had been there about the uranium issue and Saddam Hussein seeking uranium in Africa. And Director Tenet had called Steve Hadley and he told him, in no specifics, he told him I don't think you should put that in the president's speech because we don't want to make the president his own fact witness. Both Steve and Director Tenet remember the conversation in that way.

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What we learned later, and I did not know at the time, and certainly did not know until just before Steve Hadley went out to say what he said last week, was that the director had also sent over to the White House a set of clearance comments that explained why he wanted this out of the speech.

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I can tell you, I either didn't see the memo, I don't remember seeing the memo, the fact is it was a set of clearance comments, it was three and a half months before the State of the Union. And we're going to try to have a process now in which we don't have to depend on people's memories to link what was taken out of the speech in Cincinnati with what was put into

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the speech at the State of the Union.

Responsibility and what went wrong

GWEN IFILL: Should you have seen the memo?

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: Well, the memo came over. It was a clearance memo. It had a set of comments about the speech. It had already

been taken out of the speech, from my point of view and from the point of view of Steve Hadley. Steve Hadley runs the clearance process. And when Director Tenet says something -- takes something out of a speech, we take it out. We don't really even ask for an explanation. If the DCI, the director of Central Intelligence, is not going to stand by something, if he doesn't think that he has confidence in it, we're not going to put that into a presidential speech. We have no desire to have the president use information that is anything but the information in which we have the best confidence, the greatest confidence.

And so when Director Tenet said take it out of the speech, I think people simply took it out of the speech and didn't think any more about why we had taken it out of the speech.

GWEN IFILL: Do you feel any personal failure or responsibility for not having seen this memo and flagged it to anybody else who was working on this speech?



CONDOLEEZZA RICE: Well, I certainly feel personal responsibility for this entire episode. The president of the United States has every right to believe that what he is saying in his speeches is of the highest confidence of his

staff. That's why we go through a clearance process. That's why the process is so rigorous. In this one case, the process did not work. We did have a clearance from the agency, but frankly, looking back, perhaps we should have remembered that it was taken out of the Cincinnati speech. We simply didn't. And what



Judgments by the intelligence community that he [Saddam Hussein] was reconstituting his programs, that he had an active procurement network, that he was gathering together nuclear scientists, that he had several designs for a nuclear weapon, and that left unchecked he might be able to have a nuclear weapon by the end of the decade, that's the judgment on which the president was going, and not the question of whether or not he was trying to acquire yellow cake in Africa.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE
 National Security Adviser

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I've assured the president, and what I want to assure myself, is that our future processes will be ones in which we double-check to make sure that something has not been taken out of a speech, in which perhaps we get an affirmative answer from the principals that they in fact will stand behind an element of a speech as important as the State of the Union.

But what I feel, really, most responsible for is that this has detracted from the very strong case that the president has been making. There are people who want to say that somehow the president's case was not strong, the intelligence case was not strong. I've read a lot of intelligence cases over my almost 20 years now in this field, and this was a very strong case. The director of central intelligence put together a national intelligence estimate. That's a disciplined document in which he takes the views of all of the various agencies and then delivers a consensus view to the president.

The case for war

GWEN IFILL: But a disciplined document, in which it concluded, in many ways, that there wasn't enough of a case to be made on this nuclear option.



CONDOLEEZZA RICE: No, in fact, Gwen, when the judgments, the key judgments in the NIE are quite the opposite from that. It says, for instance, it left unchecked Saddam Hussein would possibly have a nuclear weapon by the end of the decade. I don't know what the president of the United States is supposed to do with that except to say I have to have a policy prescription for dealing with that sit-- that circumstance.

Five of the six intelligence agencies believed that he had an active program of reconstitution of his nuclear weapons program. And one has to remember that this is against the context of someone who had in 1991, at the end of the Gulf War, been proven to be much closer to a nuclear weapon than the International Atomic Energy Agency had thought. He had been seeking nuclear weapons for a long time. This didn't happen in a vacuum.

In that context, judgments by the intelligence community that he was reconstituting his programs,

that he had an active procurement network, that he was gathering together nuclear scientists, that he had several designs for a nuclear weapon, and that left unchecked he might be able to have a nuclear weapon by the end of the decade, that's the judgment on which the president was going, and not the question of whether or not he was trying to acquire yellow cake in Africa.



GWEN IFILL: James Schlesinger, who, as you know, served in several previous administrations and was at one point at least Pentagon secretary, he said on this program last week that George Tenet was forced to fall on his sword.

If that's the case, do you regret that?

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: Director Tenet, George Tenet, said what he believed, and that is that his agency cleared the speech, that he was responsible for the clearance process of his agency. That's what George Tenet said, and he was describing a process by which we clear presidential speeches, and that is that we go both to the experts, to clear specific parts, and we go to the principal to say do you clear this speech?

But George Tenet, like all of us, would never want to see anything in a presidential speech in which the Director of Central Intelligence doesn't have confidence. And so of course I feel responsible for this. It should not have happened to the president, and I'm doing everything that I can to try and make sure that it won't happen again.

We needed to make a connection between a set of clearance comments that were sent to us on many matters, by the way, not just clearance comments on this specific issue, but on many matters, clearance comments that were sent to us in October and this line appearing in the State of the Union.

What we have to do is to go back and make certain that we don't have to depend on someone's memory in order to make that connection. But I want to say, again, Gwen, the thing that is concerning here is that the intelligence case against Saddam Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction is a broad and deep case from multiple sources over 12 years, from many

different intelligence agencies, from the United Nations itself, from the United Nations inspectors, and we are now in Iraq in a way that we will be able to find out precisely what the case was here with his weapons of mass destruction program.

It's going to take some time. A very able former inspector, David Kay, has an army of--he'd probably object to that. He probably doesn't have enough resources-- but he has a lot of people in Iraq who are going through miles of, literally miles of documents, who are interviewing--

GWEN IFILL: The question--

CONDOLEEZZA RICE:
We will know precisely what happened to Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction.



GWEN IFILL: Let me ask you about David Kay because the president said today that he met with David Kay yesterday. Did he provide him with any new information about the search for weapons of mass destruction?

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: What the president said to David Kay is take your time, do this in a comprehensive way, do this in a way that makes the case, that looks at all of the evidence, and then tells us the truth about this program. What David Kay did say to me, and to others, is that this is a program that was built for deception over many, many years.

Saddam Hussein was under weapons inspections for a period of time. He was under sanctions. He got to be very good at making certain that no one would be able to uncover the truth of his programs, and so it's not surprising that it's going to take some time to really put this picture together.

And the thing that the president most wanted David Kay to know is that we are patient in finding that out.

GWEN IFILL: So David Kay did not bring the president new information about new discoveries at that meeting yesterday.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: David Kay is going to put

this together in a way that is coherent. I think that there is a danger in taking a little piece of evidence here, a little piece of evidence there. He is a very respected and capable weapons inspector. He knows how to read the Iraqi programs, and what he will do is to take these many, many documents. He'll also interview people. If you remember back at the time of the Hans Blix mission, we wanted very much to have scientists interviewed outside of Iraq because we knew that people would not talk openly in this totalitarian country in which people's tongues were cut out for dissent.

We now have an opportunity to interview these people. But even now it is taking some time for people to get accustomed to the fact that they can be interviewed, and their families will not be harmed, but we will put this case together.

What we knew going into the war was that this man was a threat. He had weapons of mass destruction. He had used them before. He was continuing to try to improve his weapons programs. He was sitting astride one of the most volatile regions in the world, a region out of which the ideologies of hatred had come that led people to slam airplanes into buildings in New York and Washington.

Something had to be done about that threat and the president to simply allow this brutal dictator, with dangerous weapons, to continue to destabilize the Middle East.



GWEN IFILL: And what you said, going into the war, using very stark language, I believe you were the one who said that you couldn't afford to stand by and watch a, looking for a smoking gun which could become a mushroom cloud. You made not only this case about the potential for purchasing uranium, yellow cake, from Niger, you also said that there were aluminum tube purchases, which indicated that the reconstitution of the nuclear program might be underway.

You also said there were satellite photos that showed that buildings were being rebuilt in places where there had been a nuclear program before. Taken together, this was all to make the point that Saddam Hussein was possibly on the verge of reconstituting a nuclear

weapons program. Is that, in retrospect, supportable?

CONDOLEEEZZA RICE: It's absolutely supportable, and listen to the list that you just gave. What this was, was a description of his procurement network. We knew that he had, as Colin Powell talked about in his presentation at the United Nations, an active procurement network to procure items, many of which, by the way, were on the prohibited list of the nuclear suppliers group. There's a reason that they were on the prohibited list of the nuclear supplies group: Magnets, balancing machines, yes, aluminum tubes, about which the consensus view was that they were suitable for use in centrifuges to spin material for nuclear weapons.

GWEN IFILL: That's something that the International Atomic Energy Agency did not agree with.

CONDOLEEEZZA RICE: Well, the DCI, the director of Central Intelligence, the consensus view of the American intelligence agency, was that given the specifications, given that this had been Saddam Hussein's kind of personal network, given the expense that they had gone to, to get these tubes, that they were most likely for this use, but there were other elements as well--facilities that were being rebuilt.

It was a case that said he is trying to reconstitute. He's trying to acquire nuclear weapons. Nobody ever said that it was going to be the next year, but the question was that if it was possible that he might have one by the end of the decade, and if it was possible, as the national intelligence estimate said, that if he acquired fissile material, it might be far sooner than that. Was that a threat that you could allow to sit unanswered?

And I'd just like to say one other thing. The nuclear case, yes, was, was an issue, but there was also a very robust biological weapons issue. Biological weapons are also extremely dangerous, as we found out with just a small amount of anthrax on Capitol Hill and at various news outlets in the United States.

There was the fear that he might be able to use chemical weapons. This was a bad regime, an extremely tyrannical regime with a history of using weapons of mass destruction, with a 12-year history of everybody in the international community, including three administrations of the United States, President

Bush--the first President Bush-- President Clinton, and President Bush, the current President Bush, believing that he had weapons of mass destruction.

And when you look at that picture, and you look at this picture in the Middle East, this incredibly volatile region, and you look at his ambitions, Saddam Hussein's ambitions for power in the Middle East that were demonstrated in what he did in Iran and what he would later do in Kuwait, this was a threat that had been out there too long. And as the president said today, we wanted the international community to deal with it--

GWEN IFILL: I mean--

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: It sat there and sat there. It was time to deal with it.

North Korea's nuclear situation

GWEN IFILL: I want to take the opportunity to move on beyond the Middle East, even though staying on the nuclear issue, because you say there's the case-- the case was made that Saddam Hussein had the possibility of possessing nuclear weapons, or reconstituting nuclear weapons. In North Korea there seems to be evidence-- at least we don't know what to make of it; I'm hoping you can help us with that-- that the North Koreans not only have the possibility, but actually have reprocessed nuclear fuel rods, actually have weapons-grade plutonium in their possession. Why aren't we as poised to act on North Korea as we were in Iraq?

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: Well, first of all, the North Korean example is a very good case of why you don't let this continue over long periods of time. The North Koreans have been trying to acquire nuclear weapons since probably the late 1960s or early 1970s. And their program has gotten quite advanced because nothing has been done ultimately to stop it.



They lied, as we know. Not only--before the ink was dry on the agreement, they were seeking another route to a nuclear weapon, a highly enriched uranium route. It only goes without saying that it doesn't make sense to go down that road again, because you can't trust the North Koreans in a bilateral arrangement of that kind.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE
National Security
Adviser

Now, we went down a road in 1994 that I think at the time seemed like a perfectly reasonable road, which was to sign an agreement with the North Koreans that

in exchange for certain benefits to them, like help with building nuclear reactors so that they could take care of their fuel needs, that they would freeze and eventually dismantle this--

GWEN IFILL: Which didn't happen.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: --nuclear program. As we know. They lied, as we know. Not only--before the ink was dry on the agreement, they were seeking another route to a nuclear weapon, a highly enriched uranium route.

It only goes without saying that it doesn't make sense to go down that road again, because you can't trust the North Koreans in a bilateral arrangement of that kind.

GWEN IFILL: Do you believe their claims right now that they actually possess these nuclear--

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: I, I think that what--

GWEN IFILL: --bombs?

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: --we have to do is to kind of take at face value some of what they're saying. We have--we've known that this is a --this is a pretty advanced program. But what we're trying to do this time is to use the pressure of the neighbors, the international community and the neighbors, to have a process with the North Koreans which might actually this time succeed in the dismantling of the program. And the key to that is that Japan, South Korea, and even China understand that a nuclear peninsula, Korean peninsula, is not in their interest. That will bring far greater pressure on the North Koreans than the United States could bring on its own.

The 9/11 intelligence and Charles Taylor's actions



GWEN IFILL: I want to touch briefly on two other issues. The 9/11 report that has the 28-- 27 pages of blanked-out material which the Saudis believe is really about them, they're very concerned about it. They came to the White House yesterday, asked that it be declassified, and--but yet, when Prince Faisal came out yesterday, he said he understood the reasons why that wasn't going to

happen. What are the reasons? And have you heard from anybody on the Hill asking that it be declassified directly?

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: Well, of course a number of people have called for its declassification, but the president explained to Prince Saud the same thing that he explained to the American people earlier in the day, which is that this is a document, 900 pages, all of--almost all of which was made--we made it possible to have it declassified. But in this section, there are ongoing investigations that need to be protected. There are ongoing operations in which sources and methods need to be protected. And the president's most important responsibilities are, first and foremost, to try and make certain that another attack does not happen against the United States, thus the importance of the ongoing war on terrorism and doing everything that we can to chase these people down. And the president is determined to try and bring to justice those who might have been associated with the attacks on 9/11; thus the importance of protecting investigative information on this. And he received from Director Tenet and Director Mueller a recommendation that this not be declassified.

GWEN IFILL: And as far as your concerned, it remains secret.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: As far as we're concerned, it remains secret.

GWEN IFILL: Final question, and final line of questioning. On Liberia, Charles Taylor, the president of Liberia, the president has said that U.S. will go in and help logistically only if he leaves. Charles Taylor gave an interview to Newsweek today in which he said he would like to step down but not leave. Is that an acceptable alternative?

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: No, Charles Taylor needs to leave the country. And we've been in touch with the regional states. We were in touch with the president of Nigeria, President Obasanjo, earlier today. I think we're moving forward. As you know, the president has ordered that American--the American MEU, the 26th MEU will be deployed off the coast of Liberia to help ECOWAS get in. It now looks as if there is already an advanced element in Monrovia and that soon after,

The president's most important responsibilities are, first and foremost, to try and make certain that another attack does not happen against the United States, thus the importance of the ongoing war on terrorism and doing everything that we can to chase these people down. And the president is determined to try and bring to justice those who might have been associated with the attacks on 9/11; thus the importance of protecting investigative information on this.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE
National Security
Adviser

Nigerian troops will be able to begin to deploy over the next week or so. So this is moving.

Charles Taylor needs to keep his promise to his people, on whom he's wreaked a lot of havoc over the years, to leave the country and allow a constitutional transfer that will ultimately lead to a political process that will help to stabilize Liberia.

But for America, the key will be to try to assist ECOWAS in getting in and to try to help create conditions in which humanitarian assistance can begin to flow again so that the needs of the Liberian people can be met.

GWEN IFILL: Condoleezza Rice, thank you very much for joining us.

CONDOLEEZZA RICE: Thank you.

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For Immediate Release
The White House
July 11, 2003

Press Gaggle with Ari Fleischer and Dr. Condoleeza Rice

Aboard Air Force One
En Route Entebbe, Uganda

[Excerpts on Forged Iraqi Uranium Purchase Allegation]

[...]

Q: Dr. Rice, there are a lot of reports, apparently overnight, that CIA people had informed the NSC well before the State of the Union that they had trouble the reference in the speech. Can you tell us specifically what your office had heard, what you had passed along to the President on that?

DR. RICE: The CIA cleared the speech. We have a clearance process that sends speeches out to relevant agencies -- in our case, the NSC, it's usually State, Defense, the CIA, sometimes the Treasury. The CIA cleared the speech in its entirety.

Now, the sentence in question comes from the notion the Iraqis were seeking yellow cake. And, remember, it says, "seeking yellow cake in Africa" is there in the National Intelligence Estimate. The National Intelligence Estimate is the document that the Director of Central Intelligence publishes as the collective view of the intelligence agencies about the status of any particular issue.

That was relied on to, like many other things in the National Intelligence Estimate, relied on to write the President's speech. The CIA cleared on it. There was even some discussion on that specific sentence, so that it reflected better what the CIA thought. And the speech was cleared.

Now, I can tell you, if the CIA, the Director of Central Intelligence, had said, take this out of the speech, it would have been gone, without question. What we've said subsequently is, knowing what we now know, that some of the Niger documents were apparently forged, we wouldn't have put this in the President's speech -- but that's knowing what we know now.

The President of the United States, we have a higher standard for what we put in presidential speeches. The British continue to stand by their report. The CIA's NIE continues to talk about efforts to acquire yellow cake in various African countries. But we have a high standard for the President's speeches. We don't make the President his own fact witness, we have a high standard for them. That's why we send them out for clearance. And had we heard from the DCI or the Agency that they didn't want that sentence in the speech, it would not have been in the speech. The President was not going to get up and say something that the CIA --

Q: Dr. Rice, it sounds as if you're blaming the CIA here.

DR. RICE: No, this is a clearance process. And a lot of things happen. We've said now we wouldn't have put it in the speech if we had known what we know now. This was a process that we've followed many, many times. But I can just assure you that if -- and I think -- maybe you want to ask this question of the DCI, but we've talked about it. If the DCI had said, there's a problem with this, we would have said it's out of the speech.

For whatever reason -- and I'm not blaming anybody. The State of the Union -- people are writing speeches, a lot is going on. But I can assure you that the President did not knowingly, before the American people, say something that we thought to be false. It's just outrageous that anybody would claim that. He did not knowingly say anything that we thought to be false. And, in fact, we still don't know the status of Saddam Hussein's efforts to acquire yellow cake. What we know is that one of the documents underlying that case was found to be a forgery.

Q: Dr. Rice, given that, does the President -- given that the CIA cleared the speech, does the President remain confident in the CIA's Director?

DR. RICE: Absolutely. The CIA Director, George Tenet, has been a terrific DCI and he has served everybody very, very well. And we have a good relationship with the CIA. We wouldn't put anything knowingly in the speech that was false; I'm sure they wouldn't put anything knowingly in the speech that was false. In this case, this particular line shouldn't have gotten in because it was not of the quality that we would put into presidential speeches, despite the fact that it was in the NIE --

Q: But, Condi, it's apparently the case that the CIA didn't even check the documents, didn't even discover the forgery until after the speech. And now there's a report that in September of '02 -- if I have this correct -- the Post is saying the CIA was encouraging the British to back off of that claim. So I'm trying to understand the sequencing here. Are you saying -- so my question is, in hindsight, would you say that the CIA did not properly vet this alleged sale?

DR. RICE: David, this was a complicated matter of a sale. There were other reports, as well, about Saddam Hussein trying to acquire yellow cake. It was not this Niger document alone. There are even other African countries that are cited in the NIE, not just Niger.

We also knew, let's remember, that this is the context of a nuclear program in which the seeking of yellow cake is only a small piece of the story. It includes training of nuclear scientists; it includes rebuilding certain infrastructure that had been associated with nuclear weapons; it includes a clandestine procurement network. Things that we're finding out now -- for instance, that the scientist buried uranium -- I'm sorry, centrifuge pieces in his front yard. So one thing that you have to do is to put this piece about seeking yellow cake in the broader context of what was known to be an active effort by the Iranians to try and reconstitute their program.

But let me just go to the point you made, David. The CIA -- I've read the reports that you've also read, that there were -- the British were told they shouldn't put this in the paper. I've read those reports. All that I can tell you is that if there were doubts about the underlying intelligence in the NIE, those doubts were not communicated to the President. The only thing that was there in the NIE was a kind of a standard INR footnote, which is kind of 59 pages away from the bulk of the NIE. That's the only thing that's there. And you have

footnotes all the time in CIA -- I mean, in NIEs. So if there was a concern about the underlying intelligence there, the President was unaware of that concern and as was I.

Q: You just said that the sentence, itself, was constructed reflecting some thoughts that the CIA had on the doubt. If I recall, the President said in his speech that, the British are reporting this -- about the transfer. Should we infer from that that there were some doubts within the Agency about the veracity of the claim, so that in the speech it was safer to defer to what was the British intelligence that they were confident in?

DR. RICE: The British document was an unclassified document, and so cite the unclassified document. The underlying intelligence to the British document is in the NIE, which is both talking about what a foreign service had said and talking about other attempts to acquire yellow cake. So the underlying documentation here is the NIE. The Agency cleared the speech and cleared it in its entirety.

Q: If I could just follow up. On that sentence, you said that the CIA changed the -- that things were done to accommodate the CIA. What was done?

DR. RICE: Some specifics about amount and place were taken out.

Q: -- taken out then?

DR. RICE: Some specifics about amount and place were taken out.

Q: Was "place" Niger?

Q: You won't say what place --

DR. RICE: No, there are several -- there are several African countries noted. And if you say -- if you notice, it says "Africa," it doesn't say "Niger."

MR. FLEISCHER: Yes. To be clear, the sentence in the State of the Union, just off the top of my head, stated, according to British reports, Iraq is seeking to acquire uranium from African nations or Africa. That's the sentence that was stated.

Q: Dr. Rice, if the intelligence was the same used by the British government and by your government, and you had doubts about this, did you communicate to the British government at some stage that their continuing insistence --

DR. RICE: You'll have to ask the CIA what they communicated to the British government. I'm not -- I don't know --

Q: But they were still wedded to this information while you, at some stage, already said, well, this is not --

DR. RICE: No, no. That's not what we said. Let's go back over what it is we've said. We've said that given subsequent information about the Niger documents, this -- and some of the apparent uncertainty that was out there -- it doesn't rise to the level that we would put in a presidential speech. We don't say it's false. And I heartily object to headlines that say it was false, because nobody has still said that this was false. There are still reports out there that

they sought materials from the DROC, that they sought materials from Somalia. In fact, there is -- if you look at what has even come back on Niger, it says that the Niger government denies that they sold it. So I'm not standing here to say to you, we know that these claims about Africa are false.

What I'm saying to you is we have higher standards for the President's speech, and that's why we have a process that we send speeches to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence Agency, and any other affected Cabinet officer.

Q: What do we know about the source, or sources of the documents? Are they people -- again, without getting into anything that would compromise anybody or any operation -- are they people with a proven track record? Did that come up?

DR. RICE: There are a couple of bodies looking at this, including the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, and I think they'll be able to answer those questions. We don't generally get into that kind of issue.

Q: But in the back-and-forth, especially with the massaging the language to the satisfaction of the -- I mean, was there any, even casual discussion about --

DR. RICE: I'm going to be very clear, all right? The President's speech -- that sentence was changed, right? And with the change in that sentence, the speech was cleared. Now, again, if the Agency had wanted that sentence out, it would have been gone. And the Agency did not say that they wanted that speech out -- that sentence out of the speech. They cleared the speech.

Now, the State of the Union is a big speech, a lot of things happen. I'm really not blaming anybody for what happened. But there is a fact here, in the way that we clear speeches.

Q: So a week later, Colin Powell goes to the U.N., and he decides, as he told us yesterday, not to put that sentence in at all. So what was the new development in those seven days that led him to take it out all together?

DR. RICE: Well, first of all --

Q: The time line seems a bit curious.

DR. RICE: He took out a lot of things. But I was with Secretary Powell when he was doing a lot of this. You will remember that it was the Secretary's own intelligence arm, the INR, that was the one that within the overall intelligence assessment had objected to that sentence, had said that they doubts about -- not to that sentence, had doubts about the uranium yellow cake story. So remember that it was the Secretary of State's own agency, the INR, that had in the consensus report, the NIE, taken a footnote to that.

Q: But isn't it slightly strange that you have different agencies with different reports and different sentences? I mean, not everyone is singing from the same song sheet here.

DR. RICE: But let me just go through the process, because it's not at all unusual. We have several intelligence agencies, not just one. We have the Central Intelligence Agency, a

Defense Intelligence Agency, the State Department has its own intelligence agency. And there is a process which the Director of Central Intelligence, who is the coordinator for all of those agencies, runs which is called the National Intelligence Estimate. The National Intelligence Estimate is supposed to come to a conclusion that is the considered, joint opinion of all of those intelligence agencies. If at the end of that process, a particular agency still has a reservation, they take a footnote. And so the INR took a footnote in this case.

Q: But it's in the Estimate?

DR. RICE: It's in the Estimate. It's, by the way, in another section, but it is in the Estimate. But the DCI is responsible for delivering a judgment, a consensus judgment of the intelligence community, which is called the National Intelligence Estimate. And that's what the President --

Q: Is there a chance that that particular citation could be declassified, so we could see it?

DR. RICE: You know, we don't want to try to get into kind of selective declassification, but we're looking at what can be made available.

Q: -- the kind of terminology of how footnotes -- if the CIA had taken a footnote, would that have meant that's the end of the sentence?

DR. RICE: No.

Q: What are footnotes --

DR. RICE: I understand. The Americans --

Q: Bear with us, bear with us.

DR. RICE: No, no, no.

Q: We're old Europe here.

DR. RICE: The CIA sits as the CIA, as the Central Intelligence Agency. Its head is both the Director of Central Intelligence and the head of that agency. Then you have a DIA and INR, and so on and so on. I'm now speaking from my own experience, not from my -- it's fairly rare that you get a CIA objection to a DCI product, because they are one and the same.

Q: Some are more --

DR. RICE: Well, the CIA is the premier intelligence agency for the United States. And it is the one with a worldwide network, and so forth. So it's maybe not so surprising. But you do get footnotes from other agencies to the consensus argument fairly often. But what INR did not take a footnote to is the consensus view that the Iraqis were actively trying to pursue a nuclear weapons program, reconstituting and so forth.

Q: So, Condi, if you look at this --

DR. RICE: And as you remember, the aluminum tubes, INR also had a part.

Q: So if you step back from this, Secretary Powell said yesterday that relying on and reporting out intelligence amounts to a judgment call. So there was a choice here. You all could have been cautious or aggressive on this intelligence. You chose to be pretty aggressive, even though in a State of the Union speech, you hung it on the British.

DR. RICE: David, the British report was an open-source report, all right?

Q: But the American people don't know all the this. What they know is when the President stands up in the State of the Union to declare something, pretty important --

DR. RICE: When the President stood up in the State of the Union and said, we had reports from -- the British were the primary reporters on this, I mean, the NIE also relying on the British reporting on this particular piece -- that we had reporting that Saddam Hussein had sought yellow cake in Africa. That's all it says.

Now, as I've said to you several times, that may well still be true. It is not, given all that we know of equality, that we would put in a State of the Union, which is why we've been saying to you, look, it should not have gotten in. It's not that it was false. It's not that it was erroneous. It was that there was a certain quality to the reporting that we now believe doesn't rise to the level of a presidential speech.

Q: You would agree you were pretty aggressive in your interpretation then?

DR. RICE: No. The NIE says, he's seeking to acquire yellow cake, and cites several African countries. There's nothing aggressive about that. But now, knowing that some of the underlying reporting was problematic, we wouldn't put it there. But again, David, we do have a clearance process and the Agency cleared it.

Q: During the week leading up to Secretary Powell's presentation at the U.N. then, was it the State Department's concerns about this intelligence that led to the review and then the decision by Secretary Powell not to put this in? Or was it something that the CIA or you or British intelligence or somebody else was concerned about?

DR. RICE: It was not even discussed in that way. Again, the Secretary has an intelligence arm. That intelligence arm had a particular view of this issue. If you got to the Secretary's statement, you will also see that on the aluminum tubes, the Secretary says that there's some disagreement about the nature of these aluminum tubes. That was also a consensus judgment of the NIA that the aluminum tubes were likely for nuclear centrifuges. The INR had taken an exception. So the Secretary noted that exception, as well.

But I want to go back to something. This is in the context of a broad set of -- broad and deep record of intelligence about procurement networks, about training of scientists, a man who in 1991 was way closer to a nuclear weapon than anybody thought that he was, and that where there were no doubts that he was trying -- he wanted to acquire nuclear weapons and was trying to keep that infrastructure in place. So you have to put it in that context.

Q: Then what happened in those seven days --

DR. RICE: I'm saying that when we put it together, put together the Secretary's remarks, the Secretary decided that he would caveat the aluminum tubes, which he did -- he said there's some disagreement about what this might be -- and he decided that he would not use the uranium story. The Secretary also has an intelligence arm that happened to hold that view. But the NIE, which, by the way, the Agency was standing by at the time of the -- the time of the State of the Union, and was standing by at the time of the Secretary's speech, has the yellow cake story in it, had the aluminum tube story in it. Now, if there were doubts about the underlying intelligence to that NIE, those doubts were not communicated to the President, to the Vice President, or to me.

Q: What we're trying to get at -- we're trying to get at, was there in the week -- again, only a week passed between when it was useful information, worth putting out to the public, and when the Secretary decided it wasn't. We're trying to get at what discussion there was, if any, or whether it was a triage, you have other examples that he liked better? I mean --

DR. RICE: -- but I -- there was no discussion in which I was involved about any problems with this, and therefore, the Secretary would not use it. I'm not surprised that given that the Secretary's own agency, the INR, had reservations with it, that the Secretary would decide --

Q: Is it fair to conclude -- is it --

Q: -- you're saying that the Secretary of State is overruling the President --

DR. RICE: He's not overruling the President's judgment. The Secretary of State said, you know, I don't want to use this particular piece of information, as I understand it. I don't remember this -- I don't think this discussion took place of this specific piece of information, but it did not get into the Secretary's remarks because the Secretary decided not to put it there. He told me yesterday that he decided it was not of that quality.

Q: Is it fair to say then, Dr. Rice, that the only thing that changed in the seven days was just the person speaking?

DR. RICE: I can't give you -- I can't say yes or no to that. All right? What I do know is there wasn't a discussion of, oh, this should never have been in the President's speech, let's not put it in the Secretary's speech, no.

Q: Were they put together on separate tracks?

DR. RICE: To a certain extent, they were moving along in parallel.

Q: But isn't this a crucial issue? Did the President -- but you're discounting this. You're saying that the President relied upon a judgment by the CIA that it was solid enough to report out this intelligence in the State of the Union. A week later the Secretary of State decides it's not solid enough to do so. And you're saying it's because he had his own intelligence? You're shaking your head -- tell me what I'm not getting.

DR. RICE: No, David, what you're not getting is the following: The President made a statement in the State of the Union that in the NIE was the judgment of the intelligence community. The President didn't exaggerate that statement, he didn't make it up. The NIE says Saddam Hussein was seeking this yellow cake, and there are reports that he's seeking it

in other African countries. It goes into the State of the Union.

The Secretary of State is putting together, on a somewhat parallel track, a presentation before the United Nations Security Council. And it's very broad and it's got lots of stuff in it. There is a lot of things the Secretary decided not to use and a lot of things that he decided to use. I'm going to tell you, we never really thought that this yellow cake issue was a major issue, because the overwhelming story about Iraqi nuclear reconstitution was really based fundamentally on every -- on these other factors. And so this yellow cake issue, we did not consider to be a major issue. So I'm also not surprised the Secretary didn't put it in.

Q: But when we reported the State of the Union address, that was one of the headlines that came out of it.

DR. RICE: Yes, much to our surprise.

Q: But it was written as such, as well. I mean, we were meant to notice that line.

DR. RICE: It cited a public document, which probably helped. It was also Britain which probably helped.

Q: That was my next question. Sorry, Dr. Rice.

DR. RICE: But the fact is, this was one among many issues about the nuclear program. And so when the Secretary talks about the nuclear program, he talks about -- he was also, by the way, mostly concerned to do things that fit into a presentation that had some impact. So there were a lot of things he left on the cutting floor because they couldn't be visualized. There were a lot of things he left on the cutting floor because it didn't make the case powerfully enough. So a lot got left on the cutting floor.

Q: Just one brief one, Dr. Rice. Are you saying that in hindsight, with the experience that we're going through now, you would be more careful to rely on British intelligence in the future --

DR. RICE: No.

Q: -- especially when it comes to putting it into State of the Union addresses?

DR. RICE: No. It has nothing to do with British intelligence, nothing to do with British intelligence. We have great trust and faith in British intelligence. It is the fact that the underlying -- some of the underlying information later turned out not to be true, or turned out to be -- there apparently was a forged document involved. Anybody who, knowing that, would not say, oh, perhaps we shouldn't have put that in the State of the Union, would be pulling your leg. Of course, you step back and say, had I known that there was a forged document here, would I put this in the State of the Union? No.

But even with the forged document, there are other reports of his seeking yellow cake in Africa. It's just that we have a higher standard for the President. We don't make him his own fact witness. That's why we send things out to people and say, you know, you have problems with this.

Q: Did the Secretary of State, during this seven-day period between the State of the Union and when he delivered his address, did he discuss with you or anyone on your staff his concerns about the yellow cake issue?

DR. RICE: No. In fact, we had a much more extensive discussion of how to characterize the aluminum tubes, frankly. I mean, that was a much more extensive discussion, because we had -- we had a real debate going on about IAEA and the Department of Energy and so forth. That we discussed in some depth. This we did not.

Q: Dr. Rice, when did you all find out that the documents were forged?

DR. RICE: Sometime in March, I believe. Is that right?

MR. FLEISCHER: The IAEA reported it.

DR. RICE: The IAEA reported it I believe in March. But I will tell you that, for instance, on Ambassador Wilson's going out to Niger, I learned of that when I was sitting on whatever TV show it was, because that mission was not known to anybody in the White House. And you should ask the Agency at what level it was known in the Agency.

Q: When was that TV show, when you learned about it?

DR. RICE: A month ago, about a month ago.

Q: Can I ask you about something else?

DR. RICE: Yes. Are you sure you're through with this?

Q: Actually, wait a minute. Would it be -- I mean, it would probably be instructive and useful at some point before we get back to Washington to have Secretary Powell explain to us his thought process.

MR. FLEISCHER: But he did explain. He didn't think --

Q: He didn't go into it -- we'd like to know why this was left out, whether it was the subject of internal debate with him and his people, that kind of thing.

MR. FLEISCHER: We can't hear you. Everybody is speaking at one time.

Q: I'd like to know whether it was a subject -- you know, any kind of ticktock about thoughts and discussions he had about this. We know he didn't discuss it with you. That's fine, but any of his own deliberations, why he left it -- ultimately, why he left it on the cutting room floor.

MR. FLEISCHER: I will pass that on. But look at the transcript last night, because he was asked that last night.

Q: What you're saying is, even at the time of the State of the Union speech, the INR, the Secretary of State's intelligence arm, had reservations about the underlying intelligence for -

DR. RICE: As I explained -- well, the INR footnote says, we -- I should actually -- we're dubious about some of these reports about yellow cake. It's also not very specific, by the way. But what I'm saying to you is that there is a process called the National Intelligence Estimate that takes into account that some agencies may have reservations. And that's why it appears in the way that it does. It appears as a judgment and then it appears -- or as information passed. In this case, it is --

Q: Rather like a court of third opinion in the dissenting view.

Q: -- seven days later, why didn't Powell's -- Secretary Powell's presentation, you say, well, he relied upon the INR --

DR. RICE: No, I didn't say that. I said, the Secretary --

Q: -- you said --

DR. RICE: No, I said, it is not surprising to me, given that the Secretary had -- that it was his agency that had some reservations. I'm sure he talks to his people.

Q: But weren't they speaking with -- I mean, wasn't the administration speaking with one voice --

DR. RICE: And there were things that got left out of this talk.

Q: No, but you're saying that they got left out for time, but he made it clear that it was left out because it was a --

DR. RICE: David, don't put words in my mouth. I said that there were several -- first of all, things got left out because they didn't make the presentation. Secondly, the Secretary chose to leave out some things and to caveat some things that the NIE did not caveat. The NIE is -- on the aluminum tubes, the judgment is they're for particular things. The Secretary says, there's a debate about this. But going back to the President's speech, which is really the issue here, the President of the United States went up to give the State of the Union on the basis of information that was in his National Intelligence Estimate and that everybody thought to be true. The fact of the matter is, it may well still be true. But having very high standards for what we put in a presidential speech, knowing now that at least one of the documents underlying this story was a forgery, we wouldn't have put it in the President's speech. It doesn't mean we disagree with the British that it may well still be true. The British may well be right about that. There are other African countries that are cited, which is one reason that the President's speech refers to Africa, not simply to Niger.

So the process is an NIE that is the basis of this, and then if the Agency had reservations about information that was in the NIE, then the DCI -- and I think he will tell you that if he had reservations, he did not make those known to the President, to the Vice President, or to me -- if he had reservations.

Q: If you take into account the issue that we've just spent the last half an hour --

(end side one of tape; begin side two, same Q in progress)

Q: -- (in progress) -- the fact that it hasn't been found yet, the fact that Saddam Hussein is still at large, the daily attacks against American troops, how would you classify the overall situation? And do you think there's a problem that ordinary Americans might think, why did we go down this route at all?

DR. RICE: I don't think there is a problem in that way, because the President told the American people early on that when we went to war to deal with the menace that was the Saddam Hussein regime, and that had defied the world on weapons of mass destruction for more than a decade, and that was known to have had unaccounted for stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction -- U.N. reporting, not our own -- a menace that President Clinton had tried to deal with, with actual military force in 1998, he told the American people, I'm doing this because I believe it's in the best security interest of the United States. He also said it's going to be hard, but we're staying there until there is a stable postwar Iraq. We have a commitment to the region for a stable postwar Iraq; we have a commitment to the Iraqi people, having helped them to throw off this bloody tyrant; we have a commitment to the entire region, which is very much now a region of great trouble and turmoil, leading directly to the attacks on the United

States in September of 2001. The President would stand up and say that today, just as he said it in January, February and March of last year.

Everybody has known that this was going to be hard, but we shouldn't lose track of what has been accomplished. Saddam Hussein is out of power. Yes, some of his henchmen who benefited from the terror of that regime against the Iraqi people are still terrorizing the Iraqi people. And it should be notable to everybody that they're going after successes of the coalition, so -- the power grid. We rebuild the power grid; they try to go after the power grid. Oil, which we are getting back up and running -- the Iraqis are getting back up and running -- for the benefit of the Iraqi people; they want to go after that. The Iraqis who want to participate in building their own future, like the Iraqi police, those are the people that these thugs are targeting, just like they targeted the Iraqi people for the two-and-a-half decades of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Now, the Iraqi people are getting control of their own future. I think that the -- when the leadership council is in place and you have Iraqi governance structures in place, that it will be even clearer to the world that this is not targeted against the coalition, this is targeted directly against the Iraqi people. And it's maybe not surprising given the way that these thugs behaved against their own people was for two decades, the last three decades.

[...]

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*IRAQ DISPUTE GIVES CONDOLEEZZA RICE A TASTE OF CRITICISM San Jose Mercury News
(California) July 31, 2003 Thursday MORNING FINAL EDITION*

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San Jose Mercury News (California)

July 31, 2003 Thursday MORNING FINAL EDITION

SECTION: FRONT; Pg. 1A

LENGTH: 1166 words

HEADLINE: IRAQ DISPUTE GIVES **CONDOLEEZZA RICE** A TASTE OF CRITICISM

BYLINE: JIM PUZZANGHERA, Mercury News Washington Bureau

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

For the first time, President Bush on Wednesday accepted responsibility for his now-disputed charge that Iraq sought **uranium from Africa** for nuclear weapons.

In doing so he offered unqualified support for national security adviser **Condoleezza Rice**, who has been criticized for letting the claim into his State of the Union address.

"I take personal responsibility for everything I say, of course. Absolutely," Bush said during a news conference. Asked about Rice, the former Stanford University provost whose stellar reputation in one of the White House's most important jobs has taken its first significant hit, Bush responded bluntly:

"Dr. **Condoleezza Rice** is an honest, fabulous person, and America is lucky to have her service. Period."

White House officials had declined previously to directly say that Bush took responsibility for what has become known in the nation's capital simply as "the 16 words" in his January address to Congress and the nation. The allegation about Iraq, which came from the British government, offered the most compelling evidence that Saddam Hussein was pursuing nuclear weapons from **Niger** as the United States made a case for a pre-emptive attack.

But while Bush on Wednesday took ultimate responsibility for the statement, which months earlier had been disputed by U.S. intelligence officials, he did not shift the blame from Rice's office and it was unclear whether his comments would remove the tarnish from her reputation.

Critics have said Rice either failed to do her job in vetting Bush's speech or was part of an administration plan to bolster the case for war with questionable evidence.

Rice defended herself in an interview with the Mercury News on Wednesday.

"I would never want to have anything in a presidential speech," she said, that the CIA director "did not have confidence in."

The **uranium** claim came from British intelligence, which the CIA did not find credible and which the International Atomic Energy Agency said was based on forged documents. **Niger** also has denied the allegation. British Prime Minister Tony Blair, however, continues to stand by the disputed dossier.

Rice said she did not remember a memo CIA Director George Tenet sent to her last fall after he persuaded the White House to delete a similar line about Iraq's pursuit of **uranium from Niger** in a speech Bush gave in Cincinnati on Oct. 7.

"I simply don't remember seeing that memo," Rice said. "When George Tenet said he wanted it out of the speech, we just took it out of the speech."

Top Republicans in Congress have come to Rice's defense as well.

"I haven't changed my mind about Condi Rice. I think she does a good job," Sen. Pat Roberts, chair of the Senate intelligence committee, said in an interview.

But Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., the top Democrat on the committee, said the controversy had affected Rice's credibility with him.

"You do not have a State of the Union, it does not happen, without the national security adviser reading every single word, particularly one like this last one," Rockefeller said in an interview.

Allowing the line into the speech either shows that Rice was not doing her job or has not been forthcoming about what happened, he said.

"Either way, it's not good news, is it?" Rockefeller said.

The center of controversy is an unusual place for Rice.

Her historic appointment in 2001 as the first black female national security adviser, along with her eloquent speaking style and a compelling personal story of growing up in the Deep South during the height of the civil rights movement, has made her a celebrity in the job. Her strong performance during and after the Sept. 11 terrorists attacks only burnished her reputation.

California Republicans have talked of her running for governor in 2006, which some have suggested could be a stepping stone to the presidency. But now Rice has a full-blown Washington controversy to add to her resume that could continue to haunt her.

Blame for insertion of the **uranium** allegation into the most important annual presidential speech has taken a circuitous path. White House officials, including Rice, initially pointed to Tenet for not identifying the information as disputed and asking that it be removed. Tenet accepted blame July 11, saying the CIA "should have ensured that it was removed."

But last week, Rice's top deputy, Stephen Hadley, assumed the blame. In a White House news conference he admitted that Tenet had alerted him during a phone conversation to the problems with the claim before Bush's Oct. 7 speech and sent two memos to him. One of those memos was also sent to Rice, Hadley said.

Hadley, who is the senior person on the National Security Council staff directly responsible for clearing presidential speeches, said he did not recall Tenet's warnings. He said he failed in

his responsibility to vet the speech and keep the allegation out.

Wednesday, Rice said for the first time that she was responsible as Hadley's boss and as Bush's top foreign-policy adviser.

"I certainly feel personal responsibility for this entire episode," Rice said Wednesday on PBS's "NewsHour With Jim Lehrer." "The president of the United States has every right to believe that what he is saying in his speeches is of the highest confidence of his staff."

Rice's problems have been exacerbated by statements by a senior administration official that she did not read either the CIA memo from Tenet in October or last fall's 90-page National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq, the definitive prewar intelligence assessment.

An appendix in that report also raised doubts about whether Iraq was pursuing a nuclear weapons program. Bush and Rice did not read the appendix, the official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said earlier this month.

"The national security adviser has people that do that," the official said.

Rice's communications adviser, Anna Perez, later disputed the contention and said Rice had read the entire National Intelligence Estimate.

But some Democrats, such as Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., are still skeptical about the administration's explanation of what happened and of Rice's role.

"It strains credulity to think that a sentence of such import, which sent shivers and chills down the spines of Americans, would not have been scrubbed and looked at," said Boxer, who is on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "If her deputy knew that twice he was told not to refer to this, it's hard for me to believe that went into the State of the Union address."

Rep. Anna Eshoo, D-Palo Alto, said the whole episode raises serious questions about Rice's handling of her job.

"When you have that much finger-pointing, it kind of confirms that something was not right," said Eshoo, who is on the House intelligence committee. "I'm sure it's a difficult time for her because she's had really a rather impeccable record, whether you agree or disagree with her views. This kind of took the bloom off the rose."

GRAPHIC: Photos (2);

PHOTO: GEORGE BRIDGES -- KNIGHT RIDDER

President Bush, in the White House Rose Garden on Wednesday, spoke highly of national security adviser **Condoleezza Rice** as he took responsibility for the discredited claim about Iraq in his State of the Union address.

PHOTO: CHARLES DHARAPAK -- ASSOCIATED PRESS

National security adviser **Condoleezza Rice** joins White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, left, and press secretary Scott McClellan on Wednesday.

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