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Fact Sheet

Administration Security Breaches Involving Valerie Plame Wilson

On July 14, 2003, columnist Robert Novak revealed that the wife of Ambassador Joseph Wilson, Valerie Plame Wilson, was a covert CIA agent. This disclosure of classified information has triggered a criminal investigation by a Special Counsel and led to calls for congressional investigations.

The Novak column, however, appears to be only one of multiple leaks of Ms. Wilson's identity. As this fact sheet documents, there appear to be at least 11 separate instances in which Administration officials disclosed information about Ms. Wilson's identity and association with the CIA.

Under Executive Order 12958, the White House is required to investigate any reports of security breaches and take "prompt corrective action," such as suspending the security clearances of those involved. Unlike prosecutions for criminal violations, which require "knowing" and "intentional" disclosures, the executive order covers a wider range of unauthorized breaches, including the "negligent" release of classified information. There is no evidence that the White House has complied with its obligation to investigate any of the 11 reported instances of security breaches relating to Ms. Wilson or to apply administrative sanctions to those involved.

The Disclosures of Valerie Wilson's Identity

1. The Disclosure by Karl Rove to Columnist Robert Novak

In a column dated July 14, 2003, Robert Novak first reported that Valerie Plame Wilson was "an agency operative on weapons of mass destruction."¹ Mr. Novak cited "two senior administration officials" as his sources.² According to multiple news reports, one of these two sources was Karl Rove, the Deputy White House Chief of Staff and the President's top political advisor.³ During a phone call on July 8, 2003, Mr. Rove confirmed for Mr. Novak that Ms. Wilson worked at the CIA. During this conversation, Mr. Novak referred to Ms. Wilson "by her maiden name, Valerie Plame," and said he had heard she was involved in "the circumstances in which her husband ... traveled to Africa."⁴ Mr. Rove responded, "I heard that, too."⁵ Mr. Novak's name also appeared "on a White House call log as having telephoned Mr. Rove in the week before the publication of the July 2003 column."⁶

2. The Disclosure by a “Senior Administration Official” to Columnist Robert Novak

In addition to his communications with Mr. Rove, Mr. Novak learned about Ms. Wilson’s identity through communications with a second “senior administration official.”⁷ Mr. Novak’s second source has not yet been publicly identified. Mr. Novak has stated, however, that the source provided him with Ms. Wilson’s identity. As he stated: “I didn’t dig it out, it was given to me.”⁸ He added: “They thought it was significant, they gave me the name and I used it.”⁹

3. The Disclosure by Karl Rove to *TIME* Reporter Matt Cooper

During a phone call on July 11, 2003, Mr. Rove revealed to *TIME* reporter Matt Cooper that Ms. Wilson worked at the CIA on weapons of mass destruction.¹⁰ Mr. Cooper reported that this “was the first time I had heard anything about Wilson’s wife.”¹¹ Mr. Rove provided this information on “deep background,” said that “things would be declassified soon,” and stated, “I’ve already said too much.”¹²

4. The Disclosure by Scooter Libby to *TIME* Reporter Matt Cooper

During a phone call on July 12, 2003, *TIME* reporter Matt Cooper asked the Vice President’s chief of staff, I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby “if he had heard anything about Wilson’s wife sending her husband to Niger.”¹³ Mr. Libby replied, “Yeah, I’ve heard that too,” or words to that effect.¹⁴ Mr. Libby provided this information “on background.”¹⁵

5. The Disclosure by an “Administration Official” to *Washington Post* Reporter Walter Pincus

On July 12, 2003, an “administration official” told *Washington Post* reporter Walter Pincus that “Wilson’s trip to Niger was set up as a boondoggle by his CIA-employed wife.”¹⁶ Mr. Pincus has not publicly identified his source, but has stated that it “was not Libby.”¹⁷

6. The Disclosure by a “Top White House Official” to an Unidentified Reporter

In addition making disclosures to Mr. Novak, Mr. Cooper, and Mr. Pincus, White House officials may have had conversations about Ms. Wilson with three other reporters about Ms. Wilson’s identity. According to the *Washington Post*, a “senior administration official” confirmed that “before Novak’s column ran on July 14, 2003, two top White House officials called at least six Washington journalists and disclosed the identity and occupation of Wilson’s wife.”¹⁸ According to this official, “Clearly, it was meant purely and simply for revenge.”¹⁹ Press reports suggest that one of these unidentified reporters may be NBC correspondent Andrea Mitchell.²⁰

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9. The Disclosure by an Unidentified Source to Wall Street Journal Reporter David Cloud

On October 17, 2003, *Wall Street Journal* reporter David Cloud reported that an internal State Department memo prepared by U.S. intelligence personnel “details a meeting in early 2002 where CIA officer Valerie Plame and other intelligence officials gathered to brainstorm about how to verify reports that Iraq had sought uranium yellowcake from Niger.”²⁷ This “classified” document had “limited circulation,” according to “two people familiar with the memo.”²⁸

10. The Disclosure by an Unidentified Source to James Guckert of Talon News

On October 28, 2003, *Talon News* posted on its website an interview with Ambassador Joseph Wilson in which the questioner asked: “An internal government memo prepared by U.S. intelligence personnel details a meeting in early 2002 where your wife, a member of the agency for clandestine service working on Iraqi weapons issues, suggested that you could be sent to investigate the reports. Do you dispute that?”²⁹ *Talon News* is tied to a group called GOP USA³⁰ and is operated by Texas Republican Robert Eberle.³¹ Its only reporter, James Guckert (also known as Jeff Gannon), resigned when it was revealed that he gained access to the White House using a false name after his press credentials were rejected by House and Senate press galleries.³² In a March 2004 interview with his own news service, Mr. Guckert stated that the classified document was “easily accessible.”³³ In a February 11, 2005, interview with Wolf Blitzer of *CNN*, Mr. Guckert said the FBI interviewed him about “how I knew or received a copy of a confidential CIA memo,” but he refused to answer FBI questions because of his status as a “journalist.”³⁴ A week later, Mr. Guckert changed his account, claiming he “was given no special information by the White House or by anybody else.”³⁵

11. The Disclosure by a “Senior Administration Official” to Washington Post Reporters Mike Allen and Dana Milbank

On December 26, 2003, *Washington Post* reporters Mike Allen and Dana Milbank reported on details about the classified State Department memo, writing that it was authored by “a State Department official who works for its Bureau of Intelligence and Research.”³⁶ The *Post* story was attributed to “a senior administration official who has seen” the memo.³⁷ The *Post* also reported that the CIA was “angry about the circulation of a still-classified document to conservative news outlets” and that the CIA “believes that people in the administration continue to release classified information to damage the figures at the center of the controversy, former ambassador Joseph C. Wilson IV and his wife, Valerie Plame.”³⁸

NOTES

¹ Robert Novak, *The Mission to Niger*, Chicago Sun-Times (July 14, 2003).

² *Id.*

³ *Rove Reportedly Held Phone Talk on CIA Officer*, New York Times (July 15, 2005). See also *Rove Confirmed Plame Indirectly, Lawyer Says*, Washington Post (July 15, 2005).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Rove Confirmed Plame Indirectly, Lawyer Says*, Washington Post (July 15, 2005).

⁷ Robert Novak, *The Mission to Niger*, Chicago Sun-Times (July 14, 2003).

⁸ *Columnist Blows CIA Agent's Cover*, Newsday (July 22, 2003).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Matt Cooper, *What I Told the Grand Jury*, TIME (July 25, 2005).

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *The When and How of Leak Being Probed*, Washington Post (Nov. 26, 2004).

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Bush Administration Is Focus of Inquiry; CIA Agent's Identity Was Leaked to Media*, Washington Post (Sept. 28, 2003).

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Secrets and Leaks*, Newsweek (Oct. 13, 2003) (stating that she “heard in the White House that people were touting the Novak column and that that was the real story”).

²¹ *Bush Administration Is Focus of Inquiry; CIA Agent's Identity Was Leaked to Media*, Washington Post (Sept. 28, 2003).

²² *Id.*

²³ *Reporter Held in Contempt in CIA Leak Case*, Washington Post (Aug. 10, 2004) (describing a July 2003 telephone conversation between Mr. Russert and Mr. Libby).

²⁴ *Bush Administration Is Focus of Inquiry; CIA Agent's Identity Was Leaked to Media*, Washington Post (Sept. 28, 2003).

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Secrets and Leaks*, Newsweek (Oct. 13, 2003) (reportedly stating to Mr. Wilson, “I just got off the phone with Karl Rove, who said your wife was fair game”).

²⁷ *Memo May Aid Leak Probe*, Wall Street Journal (Oct. 17, 2003).

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Leaks Probe Is Gathering Momentum*, Washington Post (Dec. 26, 2003). See also *Senate Intel Report Discredits Wilson's Claims About Iraq, Niger*, Talon News (July 13, 2004) (confirming that Talon reported on the memo in October 2003).

³⁰ *Leaks Probe Is Gathering Momentum*, Washington Post (Dec. 26, 2003).

³¹ *Democrats Want Investigation of Reporter Using Fake Name*, New York Times (Feb. 11, 2005).

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Rumsfeld Visits Iraq*, CNN (Feb. 11, 2005).

³⁵ *Anderson Cooper 360*, CNN (Feb. 18, 2005). See also *Web Site Owner Says He Knew of Reporter's 2 Identities*, New York Times (Feb. 20, 2005) (claiming that referring to the memo as though he had it was “merely an interview technique”).

³⁶ *Leaks Probe Is Gathering Momentum*, Washington Post (Dec. 26, 2003).

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*