

Democrats Subvert War Intelligence

By J. MICHAEL WALLER

Democrats seem willing to sacrifice both bipartisanship and national security in their attempt to use the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence as a political weapon.

It's one of the unsolved political mysteries of 2003: Exactly who drew up the plan for Democrats to abuse the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) as a stealth weapon to undermine and discredit President George W. Bush and the U.S. war effort in Iraq?

The plot, authored by aides to Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.), vice chairman of the committee, has poisoned the working atmosphere of a crucial legislative panel in a time of war, Senate sources say. It centered on duping the panel's Republican chairman, Sen. Pat Roberts of Kansas, into approving probes that in actuality would be fishing expeditions inside the State Department and Pentagon. The authors hoped to dig up and hype "improper or questionable conduct by administration officials." According to a staff memo, the committee then would release the information during the course of the "investigation," with Democrats providing their "additional views" that would, "among other things, castigate the majority [Republicans] for seeking to limit the scope of the inquiry."

In other words, they would manufacture and denounce a cover-up where none existed. The Democrats then would drag the issue through the 2004 presidential campaign by creating an independent commission to investigate, according to the memo.

The plan, made public by Fox News on Nov. 6, went like this: "Prepare to launch an independent investigation when it becomes clear we have exhausted the opportunity to usefully collaborate with the majority. We can pull the trigger on an independent investigation at any time — but we can only do so once. The best time to do so will probably be [in 2004]."

Even before the memo was written, Rockefeller's staff already was off on its own, well outside the traditional bipartisan channels. According to the memo, the "FBI Niger investigation" of reports that Saddam Hussein's regime had tried to buy uranium from West Africa "was done solely at the request of the vice chairman."

The plan wrecked more than two-and-a-half decades of unique bipartisanship on the SSCI, whose job is to oversee the CIA and the rest of the nation's intelligence services. In fact the SSCI, according to the *Wall Street Journal* after the revelation, was "one of the last redoubts of peaceful coexistence in Congress." But that bipartisanship ended last year when Democrats demanded that the committee staff be split. Instead of reporting directly to the chairman, it now was bifurcated, with Republicans answering to the GOP chairman and Democrats working for the Democratic vice chairman. Roberts didn't like the change, warning at the time that the Democrats wanted to divide the committee into "partisan camps." But the Republicans caved and the staff director of the Democrats, Christopher Mellon, built his own autonomous apparatus.

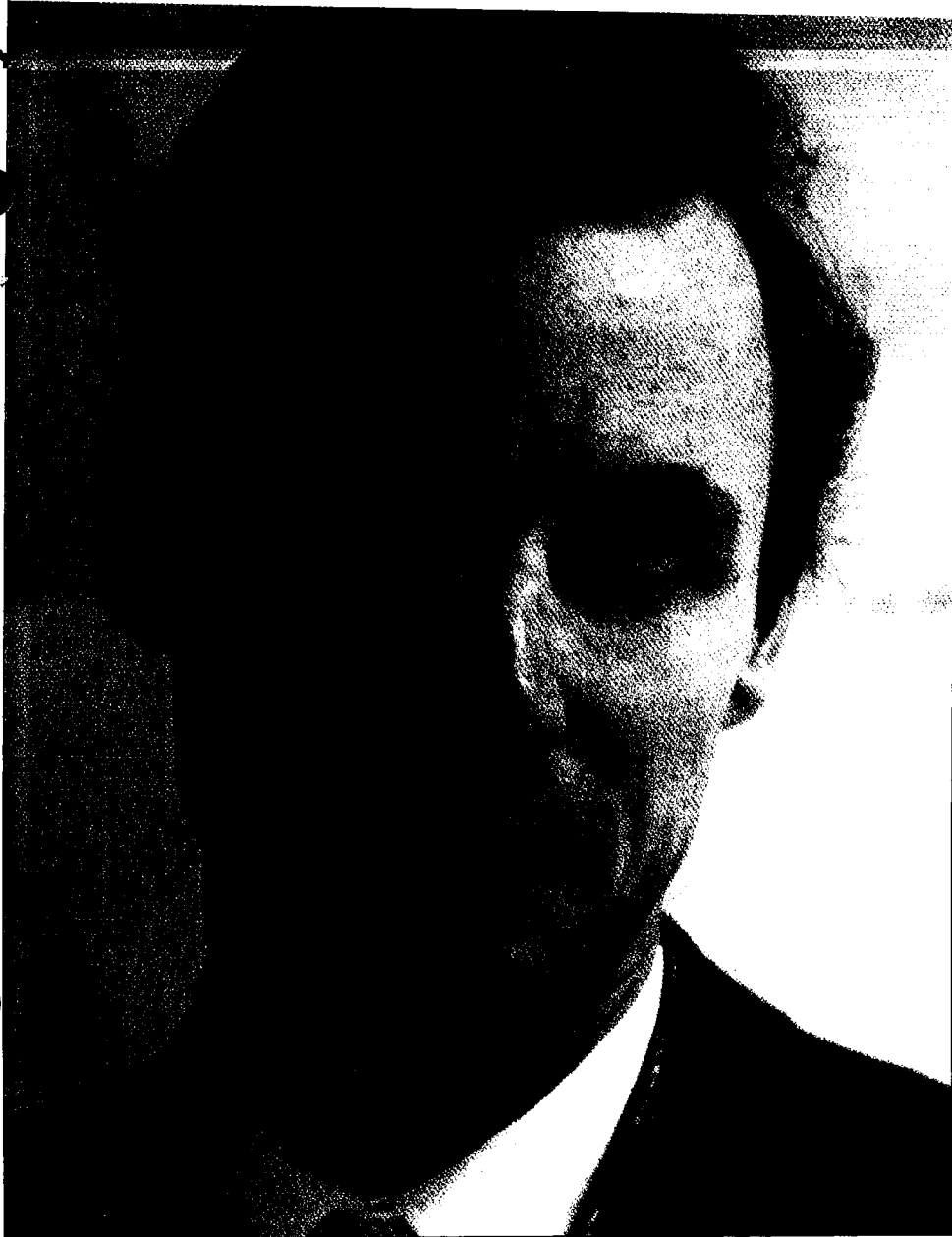
INSIGHT has pieced together how the Democrats' fishing expedition worked. According to insiders, Mellon, a former Clinton administration official, is part of a network of liberal operatives within the Pentagon and CIA who reportedly are seeking to discredit and politically disable some of the nation's most important architects of the war on terrorism and their efforts to keep weapons of mass destruction from falling into terrorist hands. Mellon already was a SSCI staffer

when the Clinton administration tapped him to work as a deputy to the assistant secretary of defense for C3I (command, control, communications and intelligence), where he was responsible for security and information operations. In the C3I office, where he held a civilian rank equivalent to a three-star general, Mellon worked on intelligence-policy issues, or in the words of a former colleague, Cheryl J. Roby, "things like personnel, training and recruiting for intelligence." The office is under the purview of the undersecretary of defense for policy, a post now held by conservative Douglas J. Feith.

Clinton-era personnel reforms allowed officials of his administration to burrow into vital Pentagon posts as careerists, administration officials say, where they have been maneuvering to keep Bush loyalists out of key positions and/or undermine their authority while pushing their own political agendas that run contrary to those of the president. This network, *INSIGHT* has discovered, extends to the Pentagon's outer reaches such as the National Defense University and far-flung academic and influential policy think tanks, or "CINC tanks," serving the commanders ("CINCs") of the U.S. military theaters around the world [see "Clinton Undead Haunting Pentagon," June 17, 2002].

Senate and Department of Defense (DoD) colleagues say Mellon has a beef against Feith and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, under whom he served briefly until the new Bush administration made its full transition into office. Intelligence sources say he tried to keep conservatives out of key Pentagon posts and to undermine tough anti-terrorism policies after 9/11. Back at the SSCI, Mellon's chief targets for criticism have been Feith and his like-minded State Department colleague, Undersecretary of State John Bolton, who holds the nonproliferation portfolio. Both Feith and Bolton are strong supporters of President Bush's advocacy of "regime change" for rogue states and are considered to be among the most faithful advocates in the administration of his personal policy positions.

DoD civilians loyal to the president have complained for more than two years about Mellon, both while he was at the Pentagon and at his new perch in the Senate. Upon his return to the SSCI, bipartisan staff cooperation broke down almost completely. "The parties aren't talking to one another," according to a committee source. After the memo became public, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) ordered an end to cooperation with the Democrats on the Iraq investigations.



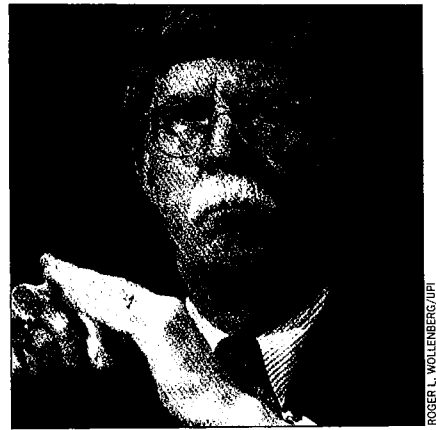
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Mellon's public record doesn't indicate any hard-core partisan leanings, showing instead a bipartisanship as a sometime floater on the liberal Republican side. Federal Election Commission records show he donated \$1,000 to the George H.W. Bush re-election campaign in 1993 and \$1,000 to the Republican National Committee in 1992. In his first tour on the Senate intelligence committee, he served as an appointee of the late liberal Sen. John Chafee (R-R.I.) when George Tenet, a Democrat who now is director of the CIA, was committee staff director. Mellon then took the C3I post at the Pentagon when William Cohen, the liberal Republican senator from Maine, became secretary of defense for Clinton.

So what might have motivated Mellon to become involved in the memo scandal to politicize the intelligence committee against the current president? Mellon did not return *INSIGHT* calls for comment.

The hatchet man: *Mellon, above, is using his position as Democrat staff chief on the Senate intelligence panel to undermine the leadership of Rumsfeld, top right, Feith and Bolton.*

Asked whether Mellon wrote the plan, Rockefeller's spokeswoman Wendy Morigi did not attempt to exonerate the staff director. "The senator has not stated who the author of that memo is," Morigi said, "and I don't think he intends to." She spoke with Rockefeller and then called *INSIGHT* again to say Sen. Rockefeller would not comment.

In any case Rockefeller, a strong liberal who had enjoyed a reputation of bipartisanship on committee matters, surprised colleagues when he allowed the Democrats on the committee staff to use the supersecret body as a political weapon. Sources with firsthand knowledge say that Rockefeller broke

the committee's bipartisan custom of requesting information from government agencies over the signatures of the chairman, representing the majority party, and the vice chairman, representing the minority.

"Rockefeller sent out his own request for information — the first time a request to the administration for information was not signed by both the chairman and vice chairman of the committee," according to a source involved with the requests. The source says the requests were worded in ways designed to elicit specific answers of a sensitive nature. When the senior Pentagon and State Department officials answered the

requests, Democrats on the intelligence committee "leaked it, though some of it was top secret," the source said without citing examples.

When the targeted officials caught on to the game, Senate Democrats led by Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), a scrappy SSCI member, denounced them for failure to provide Democrat senators with information about the war. They publicly acted outraged at what they alleged was a certain deception and demanded even more information, telling the press that top Bush officials were forcing the CIA and other intelligence agencies to skew intelligence analysis to fit a pre-conceived conclusion.

Some Democrats see through this political warfare and are troubled by it.

Keeping the SSCI and its House counterpart nonpartisan, wrote former senator Robert Kerrey (D-Neb.) in the *New York Post* in the midst of the memo controversy, "is vital for the nation's security because much of what is done to collect, process and disseminate intelligence needed by civilian and military leaders is done under conditions of rigorously regulated secrecy." Kerrey is a former vice chairman of the committee.

"Of all the committees, this is the one single committee that should unquestionably be above partisan politics," said an angry Sen. Zell Miller (D-Ga.). "The information it deals with should never, never be distorted, compromised or politicized in any shape, form or fashion. For it involves the lives of our sol-

diers and our citizens. Its actions should always be above reproach; its words never politicized."

Rockefeller defended his staff and the outrageous document itself, calling it a "private memo that nobody saw except me and the staff people that wrote it for me." He rebuffed calls from Frist, Miller and others that the staffers responsible be exposed, let alone fired, and instead accused Republicans of stealing the document from his aides' computers. "Mr. Rockefeller refuses to denounce the memo, which he says was unauthorized and written by staffers. If that's the case, at the very least some heads ought to roll," declared the *Wall Street Journal* in an editorial. Firing Mellon as the staff director for the culprits, the *Journal* said, would be "a good place to start."

Miller went even further: "I have often said that the process in Washington is so politicized and polarized that it can't even be put aside when we're at war. Never has that been proved more true than the highly partisan and perhaps treasonous memo prepared for the Democrats on the intelligence committee."

The Georgia Democrat measured his words, continuing: "If what has happened here is not treason, it is its first cousin. The ones responsible — be they staff or elected or both — should be dealt with quickly and severely, sending a lesson to all that this kind of action will not be tolerated, ignored or excused."

Chairman Roberts sees a danger to the nation through such politics: "If we give in to the temptation to exploit our good offices for political gain, we cannot expect our intelligence professionals to entrust us with our nation's most sensitive information. You can be sure that foreign intelligence services will stop cooperating with our intelligence agencies the first time they see their secrets appear in our media."

Kerrey, once a shining star among Senate Democrats, wrote, "The production of a memo by an employee of a Democratic member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence is an example of the destructive side of partisan politics. That it probably emerged as a consequence of an increasingly partisan environment in Washington and may have been provoked by equally destructive Republican acts is neither a comfort nor a defensible rationalization."

Senate Majority Leader Frist called for the culprits to come forward and apologize, angrily announcing he would suspend cooperation on the Iraq investigation. That wasn't enough for Sen. Miller, who demanded, "Heads should roll!"

Democrat Document: Text of the 'Treason' Memo

Our plan is as follows:

1) Pull the majority along as far as we can on issues that may lead to major new disclosures regarding improper or questionable conduct by administration officials. We are having some success in that regard. For example, in addition to the president's State of the Union speech, the chairman has agreed to look at the activities of the Office of the Secretary of Defense as well as Secretary Bolton's office at the State Department. The fact that the chairman supports our investigations into these offices and co-signs our requests for information is helpful and potentially crucial. We don't know what we will find but our prospects for getting the access we seek is far greater when we have the backing of the majority. (Note: We can verbally mention some of the intriguing leads we are pursuing.)

2) Assiduously prepare Democratic "additional views" to attach to any interim or final reports the committee may release. Committee rules provide this opportunity and we intend to take full advantage of it. In that regard, we have already compiled all the public statements on Iraq made by senior administration officials. We will identify the most exaggerated claims and contrast them with the intelligence estimates that have since been declassified. Our additional views will also, among other things, castigate the majority for seeking to limit the scope of the inquiry. The Democrats will then be in a strong position to reopen the question of establishing an independent commission (i.e. the Corzine amendment).

3) Prepare to launch an independent investigation when it becomes clear we have exhausted the opportunity to usefully collaborate with the majority. We can

pull the trigger on an independent investigation at any time — but we can only do so once. The best time to do so will probably be next year either:

A) After we have already released our additional views on an interim report — thereby providing as many as three opportunities to make our case to the public: 1) additional views on the interim report; 2) announcement of our independent investigation; and 3) additional views on the final investigation; or

B) Once we identify solid leads the majority does not want to pursue. We could attract more coverage and have greater credibility in that context than one in which we simply launch an independent investigation based on principled but vague notions regarding the "use" of intelligence.

In the meantime, even without a specifically authorized independent investigation, we continue to act independently when we encounter foot-dragging on the part of the majority. For example, the FBI Niger investigation was done solely at the request of the vice chairman; we have independently submitted written questions to DoD [Department of Defense]; and we are preparing further independent requests for information.

Summary

Intelligence issues are clearly secondary to the public's concern regarding the insurgency in Iraq. Yet, we have an important role to play in revealing the misleading — if not flagrantly dishonest methods and motives — of the senior administration officials who made the case for a unilateral, pre-emptive war. The approach outline above seems to offer the best prospect for exposing the administration's dubious motives and methods.

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