



**Statement of Ambassador Joseph C. Wilson, IV (ret.)
To the House Committee on the Judiciary
July 11, 2007**

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking member, members of the Committee,

Thank you for the invitation to appear before you at this hearing on the possible abuse of Presidential authority in the commutation of I. Lewis Libby, convicted on four counts of lying to federal investigators, perjury and obstruction of justice. I am not a lawyer, but I have understandably followed this case closely. This matter, after all, involves the betrayal of our national security, specifically the leaking of the identity of a covert officer of the Central Intelligence Agency, my wife, Valerie Wilson, as a vicious means of political retribution.

After it became apparent in Spring of 2003 that one of the key justifications for war in the President's State of the Union address was not supported by the facts, I felt an obligation and a sense of responsibility to the American people and to our men and women in uniform to share my first-hand knowledge about the unsubstantiated allegations of uranium yellowcake sales from Niger to Iraq. Accordingly, In a New York Times article on July 6, 2003, I disclosed the deliberate deceptions surrounding the justification for the invasion, conquest, and occupation of Iraq. Eight days later Valerie's status as a CIA operative was made public in a newspaper column by Robert Novak. We now know from testimony and evidence presented in the United States vs. I. Lewis Libby that Novak's column was the end product of a process that was initiated by Vice President Cheney who directed his chief of staff, Scooter Libby to supervise it.

Never in my twenty-three years as a member of the diplomatic service of the United States did I ever imagine a betrayal of our national security at the highest levels.

Fifteen years ago this week, I was sworn in as George Herbert Walker Bush's Ambassador to two African countries - Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe. Seventeen years ago I served as his acting Ambassador to Iraq in the first Gulf War. I was the last American diplomat to confront Saddam Hussein about his invasion of Kuwait prior to Desert Storm. As acting Ambassador, my embassy was responsible for the safe evacuation of over 2,000 Americans from Kuwait and Iraq and the release of close to 150 Americans held hostage by Saddam and his thugs.

I was proud to serve my country mostly overseas, for twenty-three years, in both Republican and Democratic administrations, and to promote and defend the values enshrined in our Constitution and Bill of Rights. I was honored to be then President Bush's envoy to Iraq and to have been part of the foreign policy team that managed the international crisis created by Saddam's invasion of Kuwait. Members of that foreign policy team remain among my closest colleagues and friends.

Given my service, it has been therefore disconcerting to see my family and my targeted in the crosshairs of a character assassination campaign launched by the Vice President and carried out by his chief of staff, and by the President's chief political aide, Karl Rove, among others.

Ultimately, this concerted effort to discredit me, ruining my wife's career along the way, has had a larger objective. This matter has always been about this administration's case for war and its willingness to mislead the American people to justify it. In order to protect its original falsehoods, the Vice President and his men decided to engage in a further betrayal of our national security. Scooter Libby sought to blame the Press, yet another deception. He was willing even to allow a journalist to spend eighty-five days in jail in a most cowardly act to avoid telling the truth.

President Bush promised that if any member of the White House staff were engaged in this matter, it would be a firing offense. However, the trial of Scooter Libby has proved conclusively that Karl Rove was involved, and although he escaped indictment, he still works at the White House. We also know as a result of evidence introduced in the trial that President Bush himself selectively declassified national security material to attempt to support the false rationale for war. The President's broken promise and his own involvement in this unseemly smear campaign reveal a chief executive willing to subvert the rule of law and system of justice that has undergirded this great republic of ours for over 200 years.

Make no mistake, the President's actions last week cast a pall of suspicion over his office and Vice President Cheney. Mr. Libby was convicted of, among other crimes, obstruction of justice – a legal term used to describe a cover-up. The Justice Department's Special Counsel, Patrick Fitzgerald, has said repeatedly that Mr. Libby's blatant lying had been the equivalent of "throwing sand in the eyes of the umpire", thereby ensuring that the umpire, the system of justice, cannot ascertain the whole truth. As a result, Fitzgerald has said, "a cloud remains over the Vice President." In commuting Mr. Libby's sentence, the President has removed any incentive for Mr. Libby to cooperate with the prosecutor. The obstruction of justice is ongoing and now the President has emerged as its greatest protector. The President's explanation for his commutation that Mr. Libby's sentence was excessive turns out to be yet another

falsehood because the sentence was quite normal, as Special Counsel Fitzgerald noted. The President, at the very least, owes the American people a full and honest explanation of his actions and those of other senior administration officials in this matter, including, but not limited to the Vice President.

In closing, let me address the question of the underlying crime. Mr. Libby's attorneys and his apologists have tried to downplay his conviction on the grounds that nobody was actually indicted for the leak of Valerie's status as a covert CIA officer. Libby's propaganda is an effort to distract from his crime – his obstruction of justice, his cover up. Who is he protecting?

I would like the committee members and all Americans to think about this matter in this way: If senior American officials take time from their busy schedules to meet with a foreign military attaché for the purpose of compromising the identity of a CIA covert officer, what would we call that? Although that scenario is hypothetical, the end result is no different from what happened in this case – the betrayal of our national security.

I look forward to answering any and all legitimate questions.