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GUEST COLUMN

Rule can head off dirty tricks at CIA

By ZELL MILLER

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It's like a spy thriller. Institutional rivalries and political loyalties have fostered an intelligence officer's resentment against the government. Suddenly, an opportunity appears for the agent to undercut the national leadership. A vital question of intelligence forms the core justification for controversial military actions by the current leaders. If this agent can get in the middle of that question, distort that information and make it public, the agent might foster regime change in the upcoming election.

But the rules on agents are clear. They can't purposely distort gathered intelligence, go public with secret information or use their position or information to manipulate domestic elections or matters without risking their job or jail.

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But their spouse can!

The agent realizes her spouse can go out on behalf of the spy agency, can distort information, go public with classified information and use all this spy-agency-sponsored material and credentials to try to pull down the current government, and it is all perfectly legal.

Suppose the spouse adds just one more brilliant, well-aimed lie: claim your foremost political opponent put the spouse up to the trip. As your spouse uses your agency's name to mount attacks, your enemy may fall into your trap. Will your enemy suffer your spouse's lies or take the bait and try to clarify his non-role? If he tells the press he didn't hire your spouse, the press will demand to know, "Then who did?"

Instead of you violating secrecy laws, it is your victim who is guilty because he tried to set the record straight. Heads, you win; tails, he loses.

It sounds unbelievable, a fiction, perhaps to be called "To Sting a King." But it is no fiction. This is the story behind Valerie Plame, Joe Wilson and the Bush administration. And it appears that Plame and Wilson will get away with the biggest sting operation ever.

No one seems to care that our intelligence agency has crippled our president. Certainly not the media. They are determined to make Wilson a hero. Recall the dozens of times the Washington Post and The New York Times carried his lies on the front page, above the fold. The conclusive story discrediting Wilson was buried 6 feet deep, back by the obituaries.

To the media, it doesn't matter that the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence says Wilson lied about what he did and with whom he met while investigating Iraqi attempts to purchase "yellowcake" uranium.

To the media, it doesn't matter that the CIA says what Wilson did actually find supported that Iraq was attempting to buy the uranium — a direct contradiction to Wilson's public claims.

To the media, it doesn't matter that he claimed the vice president assigned him to the uranium investigation when we all know now it was his wife.

Some absurdly claim that Plame had nothing to do with her husband's political activities against President Bush. But let it be clear. Plame could not have done what Wilson did and gotten away with it. Wilson could not have done what he did without Plame giving him a way to do it.

Something has to be done. We can't let the CIA become the domestic dirty tricks shop, with Republican and Democratic agents each trying to pull down their opposing presidents.

We need a Plame rule. Any family member of a CIA agent tapped to help out must live by the same rules regarding information disclosure and domestic political manipulations as those imposed on the agent. If the family member fails to live by those rules, the agent is terminated.

Clearly this will restrict the flexibility of the CIA. But who ever thought that the flexibility given to CIA agents would be misused to destabilize a

U.S. president? No one — until Valerie Plame.

Zell Miller is a former Georgia governor and U.S. senator.

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