



[Back to Home](#) >

Thursday, Nov 0

[email this](#) [print](#)

Around the World
Correspondents
Washington

SPECIAL REPORTS

Hurricane coverage from Knight Ridder
Avian Flu
China rising to influence
Food & Drug Administration
Iraq War Coverage
Slavery in Brazil
Social Security coverage
Some Good News
Star Wars
Supreme Court
Veterans Issues
More Reports

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Our anonymous sources policy
News Tips
Comments

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Cheney's new security adviser linked to bogus information on Iraq

By Jonathan S. Landay and Warren P. Strobel
 Knight Ridder Newspapers

WASHINGTON - Vice President Dick Cheney replaced I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby as his national security adviser on Monday with an aide identified by a former Iraqi exile group as the White House official to whom it fed information on Iraq that turned out to be erroneous.

The Bush administration relied on some of the information from the Iraqi National Congress to argue that Saddam Hussein had to be ousted before he could give banned biological and chemical weapons to al-Qaida for strikes on the United States.

But no such weapons were discovered after the March 2003 invasion, and U.S. intelligence agencies and the independent commission on the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks found no evidence of operational cooperation between Iraq and al-Qaida.

The White House announced on Monday the elevation of John Hannah to replace Libby as Cheney's national security adviser. Earlier in the day it announced that Libby would be arraigned Thursday in federal court on charges of perjury, making false statements and obstruction of justice. He was expected to plead innocent.

The White House also announced that David S. Addington, who's been Cheney's legal counsel, would assume Libby's duties as chief of staff. Like Hannah, Addington has played a quiet, though influential, role in the vice president's office. The Washington director of Human Rights Watch accused Addington of helping draft policies that led to the abuse of prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The vice president's office has previously denied that Hannah received information from the Iraqi National Congress. Cheney's office didn't respond immediately to questions Monday about Hannah and Addington.

The INC's leader, Ahmad Chalabi, now a deputy prime minister in Iraq, was close to Cheney and other senior administration architects of the invasion. The INC supplied Iraqi defectives whose information turned out to be false. It has insisted that it tried its best to verify the defectives' claims before passing them to the United States.

On June 26, 2002, the INC wrote a letter to the Senate Appropriations Committee staff

identifying Hannah as the White House recipient of information gathered by the group through a U.S.-funded effort called the Information Collection Program. Knight Ridder obtained a copy of the letter and previously reported on it.

The letter, written by Entifadh Qanbar, then the director of the INC's Washington office identified 108 articles in leading Western news media to which it said the INC had funn the same information that it fed to Hannah, as well as a senior Pentagon official.

The information included a claim by an INC-supplied defector, Adnan Ihsan al-Haideri, he had visited 20 secret nuclear, biological and chemical warfare facilities in Iraq.

Haideri's claim first appeared in a Dec. 20, 2001, article in The New York Times and th White House background paper, "A Decade of Deception and Defiance," released in conjunction with a Sept. 12, 2002, speech to the U.N. General Assembly by Bush.

Haideri, however, showed deception in a CIA-administered lie detector test three days b The New York Times article appeared, and was unable to identify a single illicit arms fe when he accompanied U.S. weapons inspectors to Iraq in January 2004, Knight Ridder reported in May of last year.

The White House background paper also cited INC-produced defectors' claims that Sadi ran a terrorist training camp outside Baghdad in Salman Pak where Iraqi and non-Iraqi I extremists were schooled in assassination, sabotage and the hijacking of aircraft and trai

After the war, U.S. officials determined that a facility in Salman Pak was used to train I anti-terrorist commandos.

Addington has been a key player behind widely criticized U.S. policies that have led to and other abuse of detainees held in Afghanistan and Iraq, according to Tom Malinowski Washington director of Human Rights Watch.

He reportedly helped draft an opinion by then-White House counsel Alberto Gonzales s that the Geneva Convention didn't apply to some detainees in the war on terrorism.

"This was somebody who worked very hard to make sure the advice of senior military officials and national security professionals on the question of interrogation policies wa ignored," Malinowski said. "The result was an unmitigated disaster for the United States

Libby was both Cheney's chief of staff and national security adviser. He was accused of in a two-year grand jury investigation into the leaking to journalists of the identity of undercover CIA officer Valerie Plame in 2003.

The leak came after her husband, former Ambassador Joseph Wilson, accused President of misleading the nation by alleging in January 2003 that Iraq had tried to buy uranium the feedstock of nuclear weapons, from the African nation of Niger.

Wilson visited Niger a year earlier at the CIA's request and found no substance to the allegation.

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