

## Senators set deadline for CIA in Iraq probe

REUTERS, Washington

The leaders of the Senate Intelligence Committee on Wednesday demanded that the CIA produce documents and schedule interviews for the panel's review of prewar intelligence on Iraq by noon on Friday.

"It is our desire that the committee's review will serve to validate the good work of the intelligence community and, where necessary, provide corrective suggestions where the intelligence product might have been better," said a joint letter from committee chairman Sen. Pat Roberts (news, bio, voting record), a Kansas Republican, and senior Democrat Sen. John Rockefeller (news, bio, voting record) of West Virginia.

"We expect to receive all documents and schedule all interviews by 12 p.m. (1700 GMT) Oct. 31, 2003," the letter to CIA Director George Tenet said. It did not say what would happen if the deadline was not met.



PHOTO: AFP

An Iraqi man suspected of planning and carrying out attacks against coalition forces sits handcuffed and with a bag over his head after he and others were detained by soldiers from 1-22, 4 ID during a pre-dawn raid in downtown Tikrit yesterday.

## US mulls shifting WMD experts to look into Iraq insurgency

REUTERS, Washington

The Pentagon is considering shifting intelligence personnel in Iraq from the so-far fruitless search for weapons of mass destruction to strengthen efforts to combat the intensifying resistance, officials said on Wednesday.

"What's more important right now and what's more destabilising: the insurgency or knowing about the WMD?" asked a defense official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Officials said Pentagon leaders are considering reassigning a number of intelligence officers, interrogators, translators, linguists and others from the 1,400-member Iraq Survey Group, which is conducting the hunt for weapons of mass destruction.

President Bush cited what he said were Iraq's stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons to help justify the war that toppled President Saddam Hussein, but such arms have not yet been uncovered.

Any shifted staff would augment

efforts to prevent further attacks like those that have killed dozens in Baghdad this week and better identify who is involved with the resistance, the officials said. For example, US officials say they are uncertain about the level of activity inside Iraq of foreign Islamic radicals.

More US troops -- 117 -- have been killed since Bush declared major combat over on May 1, surpassing the 115 killed during the actual war that toppled Saddam.

Lawrence Di Rita, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's chief of staff, said the United States was not diluting the effort to find the weapons of mass destruction.

"The ISG has a principal mission of WMD and that remains unchanged. And the emphasis remains unchanged," Di Rita said.

Di Rita said no decision has been reached on the reallocation of intelligence personnel, but other officials said it was very likely such a move soon would be made.

Gen. John Abizaid, who as head

of US Central Command leads the military effort in Iraq, "feels strongly that he needs more counter-terrorism resources and he's going to get them," Di Rita said.

"And as the commander there he has an awful lot of authority to determine how resources are balanced."

Abizaid and Paul Bremer, the US civil administrator for Iraq, have been in Washington meeting with Pentagon leaders this week.

"There is a finite number of linguists, translators, area experts, intelligence officers. And there are a lot of problems -- problems in dealing with the insurgency and problems dealing with other stuff. And so tough decisions have to be made," a US official said on condition of anonymity.

Another option would be to add new intelligence personnel, including contractors, to the counter-insurgency effort without drawing from the Iraq Survey Group, officials said.

A CIA spokesman declined to comment on what CIA Director George Tenet's views were on the proposal to take people away from the weapons hunt. CIA adviser David Kay, who heads the Iraq Survey Group, reports to Tenet.

Kay's group began its work in June, taking over from another unit. In an interim report this month, Kay said no actual weapons have been found, but told reporters that "does not mean we've concluded there are no actual weapons."

The defense official said Kay's group has provided staff to counter-insurgency intelligence efforts "on a case-by-case basis" but the current proposal would be a broader siphoning of personnel away from the Iraq Survey Group.

"Since the weapons search is now down the road here going on six months or so, is the pace and workload for them easing up where you can do that or not? It's all a management of resources," the official said.

## 2nd satellite lost to solar flare woes

AP, Tokyo

Japanese space agency officials, already forced to temporarily shut down one satellite, said yesterday they had lost contact with a second satellite that may have been affected by an electromagnetic storm caused by the largest solar flare observed in decades.

"We have completely lost touch with the Midori 2, and don't know what's going on with it," said Junichi Moriyama, a spokesman for the agency, known as JAXA. He said the agency is trying to restore communications.

"At this point, we don't know if there is a relation between this accident and the solar flare," he said. "We are still in the process of figuring out what caused the problems."

Midori 2 was launched in December 2002 and served as an environmental observation satellite.

Moriyama said communications with the satellite were lost on Saturday, amid the heightened solar flare activity. He said the solar flare is believed to be the second biggest ever observed and happens only once every couple of decades.

## Halliburton overcharging on Iraq contract: Democrats

AFP, Washington

Two Democratic lawmakers Wednesday accused oil services giant Halliburton -- once led by now Vice President Dick Cheney -- of vastly overcharging for gasoline imports into Iraq.

The US government paid Halliburton 162.5 million dollars for 61.3 million gallons of gasoline it imported from Kuwait, Democratic representatives Henry Waxman and John Dingell said.

That was equivalent to an average price of 2.65 dollars a gallon, even higher than they had earlier been told, the lawmakers complained in letter to White House national security advisor Condoleezza Rice.

Waxman and Dingell said they had been assured by industry experts the total price for the gasoline should be less than 1.00 dollar a gallon -- 71 cents for the purchase and a maximum 25 cents for transport.

"The US government is paying nearly three times more for gasoline from Kuwait than it should and then it is reselling this gasoline at a huge loss inside Iraq," they said in the letter.

"Whether this is due to incompetence, malfeasance or some other reason, the waste of taxpayer dollars must be stopped."

The two lawmakers had made a similar complaint about two weeks ago when they alleged the government was paying between 1.62 and

1.70 dollars for the gasoline.

Waxman and Dingell said they were still awaiting answers.

Halliburton chief executive David Lesar rejected the allegations in the past, arguing that Halliburton had become a "political target" because of Cheney's past involvement with the company.

Cheney has denied any role in Halliburton's Iraq contracts.

The latest letter was issued as Halliburton reported that its KBR unit's operating profits rose four-fold to 49 million dollars and sales leapt 80 percent to 2.3 billion dollars in the three months to September 30, boosted by work in Iraq.

## 'Former Iraqi general coordinating attacks'

AFP, Washington

A former Iraqi general, Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, is reported to be coordinating attacks in Iraq by foreign fighters and Iraqi regime loyalists, a US defense official said Wednesday.

"There are reports that the al-Douri is coordinating the attacks," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The reports in military channels fingering al-Douri as the coordinator of the attacks probably came from the recent capture in Mosul of a former secretary of al-Douri and two senior members of Ansar al-Islam who were close to the general, the official said.

Number six on the US list of 55 most wanted Iraqis, Al-Douri is the

highest ranking former Iraqi leader still at large other than Saddam Hussein.

He was vice chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, commander of Iraq's northern region and deputy commander of the armed forces.

He has tribal connections in Mosul through his daughter-in-law's family. Kurdish officials also have said he has an extensive network of contacts with former Iraqi military officers, many of whom were from the Mosul region, and the Saddam Fedayeen paramilitary group.

It was unclear whether al-Douri directed the wave of suicide car bombings Monday in Baghdad, which killed 43 people.



PHOTO: AFP

Conservative party leader Iain Duncan Smith looks to his wife Betsy as she speaks to reporters in front of Conservative party headquarters in London Wednesday after he lost a vote of confidence by his fellow Tories on whether he should continue to lead the party.



PHOTO: AFP

Fire evacuee Eric Paes, 3, hugs his teddy bear on his cot in the hangar at the old San Bernardino military airport, which has been transformed into an evacuation center on Wednesday in San Bernardino, California. Eric is at the center with his parents and three brothers from their home in Cedar Glen in the mountains above San Bernardino.

## US lawmakers near deal on \$87b aid for Iraq

AP, Washington

Despite rising criticism about President Bush's handling of Iraq, Congress is on the verge of approving an \$87 billion package for military and reconstruction costs in Iraq and Afghanistan that largely follows the White House's request.

House-Senate negotiators worked out final details late Wednesday, meeting Bush's demand that none of the Iraqi reconstruction money be provided as loans. The House could vote on the bill as soon as Thursday and the Senate is likely to follow shortly afterward. It then would go to Bush for his signature.

Lawmakers have been increasingly uneasy about the rising human toll and financial

costs of US involvement in Iraq. They have questioned whether the Bush administration has done enough to win international assistance and how long US troops will have to remain there.

But there was little debate about the bulk of Bush's proposal, \$65.1 billion for US military expenses. The House-Senate conferees ended up supporting almost all of it, \$64.7 billion.

Bush's \$20.3 billion request for Iraqi reconstruction and its security forces received greater scrutiny. That total had been cut by both the House and the Senate, and the conferees ended up approving \$18.4 billion. They also approved \$1.2 billion for Afghanistan reconstruction, compared with the \$800 million sought by Bush.

## British Conservative MPs ditch Duncan Smith

Michael Howard set to be crowned Tory chief

AFP, London

Right-wing former interior minister Michael Howard is set to become head of Britain's opposition Conservatives, newspapers unanimously predicted yesterday, a day after the fractured party ousted its leader.

The press verdict followed a vote of no-confidence by Tory members of parliament in Iain Duncan Smith, who was accused of lacklustre leadership and of failing to profit from the troubles haunting Prime Minister Tony Blair.

"Mister Right" was the verdict on Howard from the Sun tabloid, Britain's biggest-selling daily.

The paper said the 62-year-old eurosceptic and hardline interior minister from 1993 to 1997, currently the Conservatives' finance spokesman, had been "handed the party crown on a plate".

The Sun added: "It was the first sign in 13 years the Tories were ready to bury their feuds and face up to their role as official opposition."

Hours after Conservative MPs decided to ditch Duncan Smith, a number of high-profile potential contenders announced they would not be in the running for the leadership, uniting instead behind Howard.

But the right-of-centre Times said that there was now the possibil-

ity of Howard becoming leader in a swift and bloodless "coronation" without a protracted leadership contest.

Meanwhile, the left-wing Daily Mirror tabloid sneered: "Dracula stakes his claim" -- a reference to a remark by a former ministerial colleague of Howard in which he said the former minister had "something of the night" about him.

For good measure, the Mirror printed a front-page photograph of Howard, doctored to give him fangs and a cloak, and illustrating the point that the Tories' potential new leader has work ahead of him in improving his public image.