

Did Libby Lie?

How a smart and loyal aide to Vice President Dick Cheney got indicted for allegedly lying about his role in defending the Iraq war

By **JEFF CHU**

THE CHIEF OF STAFF TO VICE PRESIDENT DICK Cheney, I. Lewis Libby, has been indicted on charges of obstruction of justice, perjury and making false statements. The indictment was handed down by a federal grand jury investigating the leak of the identity of a covert CIA operative. Special counsel Patrick Fitzgerald, who heads the two-year-old investigation, believes that Libby lied about how he learned—then shared with reporters—the identity of Valerie Plame, a covert CIA operative who is married to Joseph Wilson, a former diplomat who has been fiercely critical of the Bush Administration’s claims about weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq. “Mr. Libby gave the FBI a compelling story,” Fitzgerald said in a press conference. But that story “was not true. It was false ... and he lied about it afterwards, under oath and repeatedly.”

Karl Rove, President George W. Bush’s senior advisor and deputy chief of staff, was not indicted, but in a sign that Fitzgerald’s two-year investigation is not yet over, Rove remains under investigation. Libby submitted his resignation shortly after the indictment was announced but denies any wrongdoing; the case is expected to go to trial in 2007.

The indictment contains five counts against Libby—two for perjury, for allegedly lying to the grand jury; two for making false statements to FBI investigators; and one for obstruction of justice, for allegedly impeding the grand jury’s investigation. If found guilty, Libby could face 30 years in prison and a fine of \$1.25 million.

The indictment alleges that Libby made a “false, fictitious and fraudulent statement” when he was questioned by the FBI. It also says that he lied in his

testimony to the grand jury. Specifically, he misrepresented his conversations with NBC’s Tim Russert, TIME’s Matt Cooper, and Judith Miller of the *New York Times*. He told the grand jury that Russert had asked him whether he knew Wilson’s wife worked for the CIA and that he was surprised to learn this from Russert. But according to the indictment, Libby did not in fact discuss this with Russert, and he already knew about the identity of Wilson’s wife. The indictment also alleges that Libby lied in testifying that he told both Cooper and Miller that he had learned about Wilson’s wife from other reporters. Miller served 85 days in jail for refusing to reveal her source, and, earlier this month, testified to the grand jury about her conversations with Libby only after he granted her a personal waiver. Plame’s identity was first revealed to the public in July 2003, by Robert Novak, a syndicated columnist who referred to her as “an Agency operative on weapons of mass destruction.”

Tensions between the Administration and the CIA grew in mid-2003 along with doubts over the Administration’s claims that Iraq was seeking nuclear weapons.

Wilson went public with the news that, more than a year earlier, he had privately refuted, on behalf of the CIA, claims about an African connection to Saddam Hussein’s alleged WMD arsenal. Wilson suggested that Cheney knew before the war that the claims were bogus. People who worked with Libby tell TIME that he regarded Wilson’s criticisms as part of a wider effort by the CIA to shift blame to the White House for the faulty pre-war claims about Iraq’s WMD.

Libby served as the right-hand man to one of the most powerful Vice Presidents in U.S. history. For the moment, Libby has been thrust into the spotlight. In that glare, prosecutors hope to find answers. “As soon as we can get it done, we will,” said Fitzgerald. “We need to know the truth.” ■

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Questions

1. Who is Valerie Plame?
2. On what grounds was Libby indicted?