

Occupying Iraq



Iraqi men walk past the destroyed U.N. headquarters building in Baghdad, Iraq, Tuesday, January 27, 2004.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KRT CAMPUS

6 U.S. soldiers killed in separate roadside attacks

BY HAMZA HENDAWI
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, IRAQ — The United Nations agreed to send a team to Iraq to help break the impasse over choosing a new government, if the Americans — who lost six more soldiers Tuesday in roadside bombings — can provide adequate security.

A bomb that exploded south of Baghdad killed three U.S. soldiers and wounded three others Tuesday night, hours after a separate bombing west of the capital killed three U.S. paratroopers and wounded one, the military said. In addition, two employees of Cable News Network died in a shooting south of Baghdad.

Elsewhere, U.S. troops killed three suspected members of a guerrilla cell during raids Tuesday in the central Iraqi town of Beiji, the Army said. And a suspected car bomb was discovered

near coalition and Iraqi Governing Council offices.

The United States has cited the ongoing violence in arguing against demands by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani for the direct election of a provisional legislature, which in turn will select a government to take power by July 1.

Instead, Washington wants the lawmakers chosen in 18 regional caucuses. The Americans and the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council asked U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to send a team to determine whether an early election would be feasible.

In Paris, Annan said he believes the United Nations can play "a constructive role" in helping to break the impasse, and would send such a team to Iraq "once I am satisfied that the (coalition) will provide adequate security arrangements."

Annan said the mission will solicit the views of Iraqis to find alternative ways to choose a provisional government. Shiite Muslim leaders have said al-Sistani wants to hear alternatives to the caucus plan if the U.N. team says it's not feasible to hold elections by the end of June.

The U.N. chief also said sending in "blue helmet" peacekeepers was not on the agenda, although he favored a multinational force for Iraq sometime in the future.

"I believe what we can anticipate would be a multinational force authorized by the Security Council, which could help and work with Iraqis to stabilize Iraq and make it safer," Annan said. "This would be a multinational force, with the support of the Security Council, and not 'blue helmets' per se."

The decision to seek U.N. help marked a major policy reversal

by the Bush administration, which had sought to minimize the U.N. role since U.S.-led forces invaded the country on March 20. The latest U.S. blueprint for Iraq, announced Nov. 15, made no mention of the United Nations.

Annan withdrew international staff from Iraq last year after two attacks on the U.N. headquarters.

U.N. officials had said Annan insisted on a clear, significant role in Iraq before he would consider returning international staff.

In New York, U.N. spokeswoman Marie Okabe said a two-member U.N. security team arrived in Baghdad on Tuesday to begin assessing the security situation ahead of the U.N. elections team.

Iraqi leaders have urged the United Nations to return to provide legitimacy to the new government and avoid the stigma of association with the U.S.-led occupation.

Bush reasserts confidence in war decision

BY TERENCE HUNT
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Bush on Tuesday vigorously defended his decision to go to war against Iraq despite chief inspector David Kay's conclusion that Saddam Hussein did not have weapons of mass destruction, as the United States had believed.

Bush said he had "great confidence" in the intelligence community, which had provided pre-war estimates about what Saddam had in his arsenal. Bush refrained from saying that weapons of mass destruction would be discovered eventually. Bush had cited Saddam's alleged weapons as justification for the war.

"There is no doubt in my mind that Saddam Hussein was a gathering threat to America and others. That's what we know," Bush said.

The issue was injected into the presidential campaign when retired chief U.S. weapons inspector David Kay said he had concluded, after nine months of searching, that deposed Saddam did not have stockpiles of forbidden weapons. Confronted with Kay's statement, administration officials declined to repeat their once-ironclad assertions that Saddam had them.

"There is no doubt in my mind the world is a better place without Saddam Hussein," Bush said Tuesday. "America is more secure. The world is safer and the people of Iraq are free."

Bush spoke with reporters in the Oval Office during a meeting with Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski.

The Polish leader defended Bush.

"It's very difficult today to judge how it was — when he had (weapons), when he decided to

continue these projects of mass destruction weapons," Kwasniewski said.

Kwasniewski said a top U.N. weapons inspector had told him that "absolutely, Iraq is ready to produce (weapons) if it is necessary to keep the power of the dictatorship of Saddam and to play such an important role in the region."

A year ago, the president appeared certain about Iraq's arsenal. "The dictator of Iraq has got weapons of mass destruction," Bush said on Jan. 22, 2003. On Tuesday, Bush said, "It's very important for us to let the Iraq survey group do its work so we can find out the facts and compare the facts to what was thought."

Democrats pounced on Kay's conclusion as evidence that President Bush duped the nation about a principle reason for going to war.

Campaigning in New Hampshire, Sen. John Kerry, seeking the Democratic presidential nomination, said Bush had misled the people. "When the president of the United States looks at you and tells you something, there should be some trust. He's broken every one of those promises," the Massachusetts senator said.

Howard Dean, another Democratic candidate, said, "The White House has not been candid with the American people about virtually anything with the Iraq war."

Sen. Joe Lieberman, another Democratic candidate campaigning in New Hampshire, urged an investigation or congressional hearings "on the intelligence that some of us saw directly, and the statements that the administration was making and the emphasis the administration was putting on weapons of mass destruction."

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