



IRAQ INVASION

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In Kirkuk, four year old Sumaya Majeed Hamas, held her father's hand in the city's hospital. She was shot in the head during fighting yesterday.

PHOTO: AP

Are US and Britain ready for the consequences?

THE INDEPENDENT

The morning after the euphoria of the statue-felling should have brought even the most "told you so" of warmongers sharply up against the reality of what the Americans and British have embarked on in Iraq.

The looting and early signs of the fracturing of Iraq on ethnic and religious lines do not in themselves negate the case for war. It may not be possible to assess that for another 10 years. But they do emphasise the costs and difficulties of turning Iraq from dictatorship to democracy by force of which the war itself was only a part.

The response yesterday of the Turkish government to the fall of Kirkuk is depressing. Turkey's suspicion of any expression of Kurdish identity has been an undercurrent of this war, and has as much to do with the Turkish parliament's refusal to allow US forces free run of the country as any fellow-feeling with Iraqi Muslims. Turkey did not want Baghdad to be taken, with Kurdish help, from the north, and it

does not want Kurdish fighters heading south, expanding Kurdish territory.

Yet Turkey will not be able to suppress the Kurdish issue. One obvious requirement of turning Iraq into a democracy is some kind of federal structure in order to protect the rights of the Kurdish minority in the north and of the Sunni Muslim minority in the rest of the country. That in turn means a greater international recognition of the Kurdish right to self-determination than the existence of the northern "safe haven" for the past 12 years.

The collapse of civil order in Iraq poses a more immediate problem. A period of lawlessness and looting in the gap between Saddam Hussein's tyranny and benevolent military rule by the Americans and British may be inevitable, but that does not make it any more comfortable for the families covering in their homes as gangs of thugs roam the streets.

It should go without saying that establishing order is urgent so urgent that risks have to be taken by soldiers who are still trying to fight the remnants of Saddam's forces.

Aid cannot be distributed unless it is effectively policed; hospitals cannot function unless Iraqi doctors feel able to leave their homes. It is no use army officers saying, as the British have in Basra, that they cannot stop the looting until they have finished fighting the war. There can be no such clear boundaries.

This matters, and not only in the short term; there is a medium-term cost in allowing gangsterism to take hold. The problems in Bosnia and Kosovo show how difficult it is to root out organised crime once it gains a hold. The situation in Kosovo, four years on from the war, has been stabilised, but the local population is culturally homogeneous and had a network of its own institutions even under Milosevic.

As was shown by the murder of a Shia leader in Najaf yesterday, Iraqi society is less cohesive to begin with.

None of these problems will ensure the failure of US or British good intentions, or mean that life for most Iraqis will not eventually be better than before. But, please, no triumphalism.

US renews call for closure of Iraqi embassies

AFP, Washington

The United States has renewed its call to more than 60 countries to shut down Iraqi embassies, seize their assets and expel senior diplomats following the fall of Baghdad to US forces, the State Department said Thursday.

US diplomats in the 62 countries where Iraq had diplomatic missions have been told to again take the request to their host governments, many of which refused when it was first made shortly after the conflict began last month, it said.

"It is time to expel senior representatives of Iraqi missions overseas," spokesman Richard Boucher said. "The leaders of these missions no longer should be allowed to pretend to represent the people of Iraq."

"Therefore, the missions should be closed, the assets should be frozen so that they can't abscond with the assets that rightfully belong to their Iraqi

people," he said.

Boucher allowed that only "a few" of the countries approached had thus far acted on the request, but said Washington was hopeful that more would do so in the coming days.

"As the facts on the ground become increasingly clear that the government of Saddam Hussein does not operate in Baghdad, is no longer qualified to represent the Iraqi people... we would expect to get additional responses," he said.

A second official said there were two parts to the request.

The first part seeks the expulsion of members of the Iraqi Intelligence Service masquerading as diplomats, who Washington believes pose a threat to US interests abroad, the official said.

"This is still a concern to us," the official said, noting that only about 20 nations had thus far expelled 100 out of 600 such agents the United States believes to be dangerous.

The second part of the request deals with the closure of Iraqi embassies and consulates, the confiscation of their assets and the expulsion of legitimate senior Iraqi diplomats who no longer represent an existing government, the official said.

"We believe these facilities and these positions should be vacant until they can be filled by representatives of a new, legitimate Iraqi government," the official said.

Despite the new US request, officials at Iraqi embassies in at least 16 countries said the missions were operating normally even though they had not gotten any instructions from Baghdad in days, according to an informal AFP survey.

Embassies in Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, China, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Jordan, Malaysia, Russia, Serbia and Thailand were all open for business, the officials said.

Anarchy, hatred, revenge and a suicide bombing

ROBERT FISK, Baghdad

It was the day of the looter. They trashed the German embassy and hurled the ambassador's desk into the yard. I rescued the European Union flag flung into a puddle of water outside the visa section as a mob of middle-aged men, women in chadors and screaming children rifled through the consul's office and hurled Mozart records and German history books from an upper window. The Slovakian embassy was broken into a few hours later.

At the headquarters of Unicef, which has been trying to save and improve the lives of millions of Iraqi children since the 1980s, an army of thieves stormed the building, throwing brand new photocopiers on top of each other and sending cascades of UN files on child diseases, pregnancy death rates and nutrition across the floors.

The Americans may think they have "liberated" Baghdad but the tens of thousands of thieves they came in families and cruised the city in trucks

and cars searching for booty seem to have a different idea what liberation means.

American control of the city is, at best, tenuous a fact underlined after several marines were killed last night by a suicide bomber close to the square where a statue of Saddam Hussein was pulled down on Wednesday, in the most staged photo-opportunity since Iwo Jima.

Throughout the day, American forces had fought gun battles with Saddam loyalists, said to be fighters from other Arab countries. And, for more than four hours, marines were in firefights at the Imam al-Adham mosque in the Aadhamiya district of central Baghdad after rumours, later proved untrue, that Saddam Hussein and senior members of his regime had taken flight there.

As the occupying power, America is responsible for protecting embassies and UN offices in their area of control but, yesterday, its troops were driving past the German embassy even as

looters carted desks and chairs out of the front gate.

It is a scandal, a kind of disease, a mass form of kleptomania that American troops are blithely ignoring. At one intersection of the city, I saw US Marine snipers on the rooftops of high-rise buildings, scanning the streets for possible suicide bombers while a traffic jam of looters two of them driving stolen double-decker buses crammed with refrigerators blocked the highway beneath.

Outside the UN offices, a car slowed down beside me and one of the unshaven, sweating men inside told me in Arabic that it wasn't worth visiting because "we've already taken everything". Understandably, the poor and the oppressed took their revenge on the homes of the men of Saddam's regime who have impoverished and destroyed their lives, sometimes quite literally, for more than two decades.

I watched whole families search through the Tigris-bank home of Ibrahim al-Hassan, Saddam's half-

brother and a former minister of interior, of a former defence minister, of Saadun Shakr, one of Saddam's closest security advisers, of Ali Hussein Majid "Chemical" Ali who gassed the Kurds and was killed last week in Basra and of Abed Moud, Saddam's private secretary. They came with lorries, container trucks, buses and carts pulled by ill-fed donkeys to make off with the contents of these massive villas.

But there seemed to be a kind of looter's law. The dozens of thieves in the German embassy worked in silence, assisted by an army of small children. Wives pointed out the furnishings they wanted, husbands carried them down the stairs while children were used to unscrew door hinges and in the UN offices to remove light fittings. One even stood on the ambassador's desk to take a light bulb from its socket in the ceiling.

On the other side of the Saddam bridge, an even more surreal sight could be observed. A truck loaded down with chairs also had the two white hunting

dogs that belonged to Saddam's son Qusay tethered by two white ropes, galloping along beside the vehicle.

One can hardly be moralistic about the spoils of Saddam's henchmen but how is the government of America's so-called "New Iraq" supposed to operate now that the state's property has been so comprehensively looted?

And already America's army of "liberation" is beginning to seem an army of occupation. I watched hundreds of Iraqi civilians queuing to cross a motorway bridge at Daura yesterday morning, each man ordered by US soldiers to raise his shirt and lower his trousers in front of other civilians, including women to prove they were not suicide bombers.

Meanwhile, in the suburb of Daura, bodies of Iraqi civilians many of them killed by US troops in battle earlier in the week lay rotting in their still-smouldering cars. And yesterday was just Day Two of the "liberation" of Baghdad.

Widespread anarchy raises concern

THE GUARDIAN

Iraq's slide into violent anarchy will trigger a humanitarian disaster if US and British troops are unable to fill the power vacuum and reassert order quickly, UN and other aid officials warned yesterday.

The warning came as looting in Baghdad spread from government buildings to hospitals, embassies and private businesses, and the growing lawlessness in the capital prevented the few remaining aid workers there from delivering badly needed medical supplies and water to hospitals.

Adding to the sense of chaos, a suicide bomber blew himself up on the east bank of the river Tigris, killing one marine and severely injuring three others who were manning a checkpoint.

A wave of lawlessness across the country illustrated the potential for the unravelling situation to turn a successful military campaign into postwar disaster in a matter of days as a result of the total collapse of government services.

"From what we have seen in the reports, it appears there is no functioning government in Iraq at the moment," the United Nations secretary general,

Kofi Annan, said. "We have also seen scenes of looting, and obviously law and order must be a major concern."

In the central Iraqi town of Najaf, a Shia cleric recently returned from exile in London was murdered by a mob in an attack possibly instigated by Saddam supporters among the population.

With US forces focused on taking on remaining pro-Saddam strongholds in the northern cities of Tikrit and Mosul, Kurdish militiamen took the lead in storming a third, Kirkuk, with support from a few score US special forces troops.

Looting was reported to have eased in Basra yesterday, but that may have been because there was little of value left to steal from former government buildings. Residents complained to journalists that armed gangs were getting the upper hand in the southern city and that British troops were doing little to control the situation.

In Baghdad two humanitarian organisations that had operated throughout the war, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins sans Frontières, said their work had been hobbled by the general lawlessness.

MSF halted its work in Baghdad after two of its workers went missing. Amanda Williamson, a Red Cross spokeswoman, said the organisation had suspended its work in the capital after a Canadian employee was killed.

"It's not possible to distribute medical and surgical supplies or drinking water to the hospitals as we had wanted to. The situation is chaotic and very insecure," Ms Williamson said, arguing that US troops in the city could do more to help.

"At this stage they could at least do everything possible to protect vital civilian infrastructure, like hospitals and the water supply."

At the Pentagon, an official said he knew of no plans to move civilian or military police to Baghdad in the immediate future. He said the US troops would become a "stabilisation force", not a police force.

Alex Renton, an Oxfam spokesman, said: "We're waiting on four borders in order to get in there... what we need now is a serious effort made to bring this breakdown in law and order under control." There is a duty under international law to provide security and law and order to civilians.

EU will investigate US contracts

FINANCIAL TIMES, Brussels

The European Commission is examining contracts awarded by the US for reconstruction work in Iraq to find out whether they breach World Trade Organisation rules and discriminate unfairly against European companies.

The move could throw up a new irritant at a time when relations between Washington and Brussels are already severely strained by the highly critical stance adopted by many European Union members towards the war in Iraq.

It also comes as trade negotiators on both sides of the Atlantic struggle to overcome their differences over further trade liberalisation in the current WTO round as well as a growing number of bilateral trade disputes.

The EU insists that the US abide by the WTO Agreement on Government Procurement, which states that, in principle, contracts awarded by national governments or their agencies must be open to businesses from abroad.

However, a spokeswoman for Pascal Lamy, the EU trade commissioner, conceded that this rule did not apply to vast bulk of contracts

signed by the US Agency for International Development, the State Department organisation that oversees US humanitarian aid projects, and which so far has been largely responsible for reconstruction contracts in Iraq. Contracts that touch upon issues related to "national security" or "national defence" are also not covered by the agreement.

This is because WTO members were given significant leeway in deciding what sectors and government agencies they would open to foreign competition.

"We will be examining [the contracts] on a case-by-case basis. We have to examine whether each of them falls under the exceptions the WTO rules provide for," the spokeswoman said.

However, the Commission stressed that it was keen to avoid formal proceedings against the US in front of the WTO: "The last thing we need now is a row at the WTO," she added.

Officials also said that they were not aware of any complaints from European companies regarding the current tenders for reconstruction work.



US marines blew up the ministry of defence building in Baghdad on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP