



IRAQ INVASION

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First prison for looters

AFP, Baghdad

The courtyard of Baghdad's town hall is filling up with some of the city's looters, on their knees, heads covered with cloth sacking and hands tied behind their backs.

What was once a symbol of Saddam Hussein's quarter century rule of terror has been converted by US forces into a prison for those Baghdadis who were caught indiscriminately ransacking their city in the days after the Iraqi strongman's regime collapsed.

US marines have deployed tanks, Humvees and jeeps around the courtyard between two town hall buildings.

Some heavily armed soldiers stretch out on the grass while others take aim at nine sweating looters, barefoot and in rags, trussed and with heads lowered.

One prisoner is pushed roughly to the floor. A marine pulls the detainee's shirt up over his head so he can't see what's going on in the complex. He is made to lie out in the dust, as his fellow looters are.

One of them cries out "Please!", but soldiers shout "Shut your mouth! I am not your friend!"

Several marines keep guard over the prisoners.

A jeep pulls up with a man face down on the front. His hands are bound behind his back and feet tied tight with the strong, thin tape shopkeepers use to gift wrap presents.

"He robbed a bank," the driver says. In the back of the jeep are four Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles.

"They belong to these nine looters.

They attacked shops and passers-by while threatening them with their weapons," the soldier explained.

"From now we are banning looting and carrying arms in the streets. Order must come back to the city."

The nine looters were arrested in the main shopping precinct in the Baghdad district of Sorja by a squad of marines to the applause of passers-by exasperated by widespread looting.

"Bush, Bush!" cried the people, but the soldiers were so nervous they shouted at them to back off.

"We want security. We want to be able to open our shops. We don't want to see these bandits. The Americans must act. What they've done is good but it's not enough," said trader Kazem Ali.

In a Humvee transporting them to the townhall, the soldiers mete out tough treatment to the prisoners. If one raises his head in an effort to breathe, he is screamed at to lower his head at gunpoint.

US troops on Monday started joint patrols with Iraqi security forces in a bid to restore order to the capital hit by looting and violence after the fall of the Baghdad regime.

The decision to institute the joint patrols was taken at a meeting of US military officials, Iraqi civilian leaders and officials of humanitarian groups operating in Iraq.

Iraqi anger had been growing over continued lawlessness in the country, with a spate of looting breaking out in the capital and other cities after Saddam's regime fell on Wednesday.

US troops hit streets of Baghdad with Iraqi police

REUTERS, Baghdad

He drives a hotwired yellow truck, carries a stolen AK-47 rifle and goes on patrol with heavily armed American invaders. Thamer Mahmoud is the new face of Baghdad justice.

The Iraqi policeman was one of several officers who joined US Marines in their first joint patrol -- aimed at convincing a sceptical public they are working together to stop looting.

It was a unique, if chaotic, experiment in law and order in a city where the overthrow of Saddam Hussein has created something close to a thieves' paradise.

Within minutes of rolling out of a Baghdad police college, the convoy of three US Marine "Humvee" off-roaders and a white Iraqi patrol car screeched to a halt outside the Rasheed bank.

Marines with M-16 rifles stormed in. Three young men rushed out with their hands up, open-mouthed with fear.

Much to the disappointment of a pair of anxious depositors, the Marines and police let the looters go. With Baghdad's prisons in disarray, there was no way to detain them.

"You can see with your own eyes, they are the thieves," said Maged Mohammed, 40, pointing to men

loitering under a motorway bridge. "If you go away, they will come back and steal."

Moving again, the patrol swung onto a main road through the city. It halted immediately. Mahmoud had spotted looters -- lots of them -- making off in a stream of cars crammed with goods.

The policeman flagged down a blue saloon, piled with three mattresses on the roof and with a trunk full of light fittings and a gold-painted coat stand. The driver was indignant.

"I can't prove that these things are mine because I don't have my name written on them. My flat was bombed and I'm moving my furniture to my brother's house," said Razzaq Said, a contractor, spreading his palms in a gesture of innocence.

Before long, as more vehicles were stopped, arguments were raging and the patrol was hearing excuses to explain why one might possess three air-conditioning units or where the new Renault lorry came from.

It was about then that Mahmoud, 34, commandeered the yellow flat-bed truck -- saying it was a looted government vehicle.

Tempers flared and a small boy in one van wailed, but despite the pandemonium, the sight of Marines working

with police was something that would have been unthinkable just a few days ago.

Marines had considered the police a potentially hostile force, but said they planned more patrols on Tuesday with rank-and-file officers whose senior commanders have fled.

The plan was for the police to carry handguns at most, but when Mahmoud found an AK-47 in one vehicle, nobody objected. A 24-year-old Iraqi named Ahmed working for the Marines as an interpreter saw fit to grab a Russian SKS 7.62mm rifle.

Any Iraqi with a gun in Baghdad is liable to be shot by US troops, but Marines said the patrol aimed partly to familiarise them with the green police uniforms to avoid mistakes.

The convoy rumbled on -- the next target a man rolling a wooden drum of stolen wire cable down the road. After giving him a ticking off, the patrol hit the Zauna City suburbs.

Crowds swarmed the vehicles. One boy led them to a stack of rocket-propelled grenades left in crates in a military compound.

Mahmoud, revving his lorry -- started by touching red and blue wires -- offered to drive the ammunition away.



PHOTO: AFP

A woman patient at the Rashid mental hospital in Baghdad is reflected in a pool of water at their empty dormitory. The hospital was looted for most of its essentials injuring several patients in the process.



PHOTO: AFP

Injured Iraqis sitting in a car pass a joint US-Iraqi roadblock in Baghdad on Monday, after being wounded by looters who stole their car.

Prized Iraqi annals 'lost in blaze'

BBC NEWS ONLINE

Almost all of the contents of Iraq's national library and archives are reported to have been destroyed by fire, meaning the loss of priceless records of the country's history.

The library, in central Baghdad, housed several rare volumes, including entire royal court records and files from the period when Iraq was part of the Ottoman Empire.

It is unclear who started the fires -- though widespread looting has taken place in the Iraqi capital, with the city's museum also ransacked and many rare artefacts damaged, destroyed or stolen.

The US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, has pledged to recover and repair the antiquities looted from the city museum, amid criticism from heritage bodies that the damage should have been prevented.

A Western journalist - Robert Fisk of the Independent - reporting from the site of the library told the BBC that the whole building had been gutted, with handwritten documents from as far back as the 16th century - when Iraq was part of the Ottoman Empire - strewn on the ground.

A nearby Islamic library has also gone in up in flames, he said, destroying valuable literature including one of the oldest surviving copies of the Koran.

Several Shia religious leaders have appealed to the local population to return looted items, and say that some

items had been returned and stashed in mosques for safekeeping.

"We will return them when we will have a democratic government," Shia cleric Sayyad Ali al-Shawki told the Associated Press news agency.

Leading experts on Iraqi heritage will gather for an emergency meeting on Thursday to count the cost of the looting of the country's cultural sites.

Mr Powell said the US would secure the museum and would work with organisations such as the European Union and the cultural arm of the United Nations, Unesco, in restoring it.

But the loss and destruction already suffered has been described as "a disaster" by Unesco.

The national museum was home to artefacts that dated back 10,000 years, from one of the world's earliest civilisations.

The development of writing, abstract counting, the wheel and agriculture were all charted in its exhibitions.

Despite Mr Powell's assurances, there are fears that many objects may have been lost forever.

Donny George, archaeologist at the museum, said: "It was the leading collection of a... continuous history of mankind."

"And it's gone, and it's lost. If marines had started before, none of this would have happened."

"It's too late, it's no use, it's no use."

US, British lawyers to investigate war crimes

AFP, United Nations

Lawyers from British and US organisations said Monday that they were looking at the possibility of an international inquiry into war crimes that their governments might have committed in Iraq.

"We want to establish regular and impartial procedures to establish whether war crimes have been committed" during the 26-day-old military campaign, said Phil Shiner of the British group Public Interest Lawyers.

Shiner spoke at a news conference where Michael Ratner, president of the US Center for Constitutional Rights, warned that the principle of "victim's justice" was legally unacceptable.

"It is not only Saddam's crimes that have to be examined," Ratner said.

But he added: "We should examine why so many people could have been killed on one side."

US forces hamper media coverage of protests

AFP, Baghdad

US forces Tuesday tried to hamper the media from covering a third day of anti-American protests by Iraqis outside a hotel housing a US operations base here, an AFP correspondent said.

Some 200-300 Iraqis gathered outside the Palestine Hotel to express their rage at what they said was the US failure to restore order after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime last Wednesday.

For the first time, visibly-angered US military officials sought to distance the media from the protest, moving reporters and cameras about 30 meters (yards) from the barbed-wired entrance to the hotel.

"We want you to pull back to the back of the hotel because they (the Iraqis) are only performing because the media are here," said a marine colonel who wore the name Zarcone but would not give his first name or title.

The crowd later moved to the nearby square where a statue of Saddam was toppled last Wednesday, signalling the end of the regime. As three of the marines' armored amphibious vehicles passed by, the Iraqis chanted: "No, no, USA."

Tensions have been rising in front of the hotel, where Iraqis have flocked to protest a lack of police protection, water, electricity and other basic services, and also to seek jobs in the post-Saddam administration.

As the Iraqi protest grew more vocal outside the hotel, a marine corporal held an impromptu briefing for a few reporters on progress in bringing Iraq back to normal.

Corporal John Hoellwarth said the US forces planned to boost joint police patrols, bring more hospitals back into service and have power restored to parts of Baghdad within 72 hours.

Annan worried at threats to Syria

AFP, United Nations

In a veiled warning to the United States, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said Monday that statements directed at Syria could destabilize the Middle East.

"The secretary general is concerned that recent statements directed at Syria should not contribute to a wider destabilisation in a region already heavily affected by the war in Iraq," Annan's spokesman said in a statement.

Earlier, top aides to US President George W. Bush accused Syria of testing chemical weapons and harbouring terrorists and warned that it faced economic and diplomatic sanctions if it allowed fleeing Iraqis to cross its border.

"Syria is a terrorist state," White House spokesman Ari Fleischer told reporters. But he added that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad "has a chance

to be a leader who makes the right decisions."

Secretary of State Colin Powell said the Bush administration "will examine possible measures of a diplomatic, economic or other nature as we move forward."

In his statement, spokesman Fred Eckhard reiterated Annan's "strongly held view that any claim of threats to international peace and security should be addressed in conformity with the provisions of the (UN) Charter."

Annan "welcomes recent clarifications," the statement said, but it did not elaborate.

Annan's special adviser on Iraq, Rafeeuddin Ahmed, was in Washington on Monday for briefings with officials at the US State Department, Defense Department and National Security Council.

UN delays return to north Iraq for security reasons

REUTERS, Amman

The United Nations delayed the postwar return to northern Iraq of its international staff on Monday after the US military said they could not guarantee the safety of the flight taking them in.

David Wimhurst, spokesman for the United Nations Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, said the team was now waiting for US military authorities to give clearance to land at Harir airport in northern Iraq.

"The military authorities have to guarantee security and they could not guarantee security and they could not guarantee security and we need a minimum degree of security," Wimhurst told Reuters, adding that it was a question of security in the air corridor.

Other humanitarian agencies traditionally take a security lead from the world body, which has already sent one humanitarian team in from Iran to the east and is operating daylight humanitarian missions in some southern border towns.

UN officials say security is the reason they most UN international staff, who evacuated two days before the war began on March 20, had still not returned.

The United Nations said on Saturday 13 staff would return to the northern cities of Dohuk, Sulaimaniya and Arbil on Monday. Wimhurst said he hoped clearance would come soon.

The top British official in the effort to run postwar Iraq acknowledged on Monday that there were a lot of needy people in Iraq, but he played down talk of a crisis.

"This is not a disaster on the scale of previous humanitarian disasters around the world," Brigadier General Tim Cross said, adding that food was not a problem at present.

In Paris, French aid agency Medecins du Monde said it had teams in the southern city of Basra and the northern city of Kirkuk, conducting the first independent medical evaluations in hospitals there.

The Basra team crossed from neighbouring Iran on Saturday, it added in a statement.

Wimhurst said UN humanitarian team had also crossed from the Iranian border town of Mehran to Badrah, nearly 16 km (10 miles) inside Iraq after getting clearance from Iran.

The team would assess the needs of almost 30,000 internally displaced people along the Iranian border, he said.

Daylight UN humanitarian missions have also commenced to the southern border towns of Safwan, Umm Kayaal and al-Zubair.

"Initial oral reports indicate water as the key issue in Safwan and Zubair," Wimhurst said, adding that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had warned water and power cuts in Baghdad remained a serious threat to public health.

Khaled Mansour, spokesman for the Rome-based World Food Programme (WFP), said food shipments into northern Iraq through Turkey, currently the world body's only operating route, increased markedly on Monday.



PHOTO: AFP

A red flag flutters over scores of Iraqi Shites demonstrating in Najaf, some 180 km (300 miles) south of Baghdad on Monday. Thousands gathered to show unity of the Shiite community following the hacking to death of prominent pro-Western Shiite cleric Sayyed Abdul Majid al-Khoei in Najaf April 10 and the threats to Ayatollah Ali Sistani since April 12.