



Volunteers uncover a buried body from the banks of the Tigris river in Baghdad, April 29. The body believed to be a victim of the past regime will be taken to a cemetery for a proper burial.

Iran rejects US accusations of seeking nuclear programs

Iran yesterday rejected a new US accusation that it is seeking to develop atomic weapons, saying that its nuclear programs are for civilian purposes, state radio reported.

"These repeated accusations are to distract public opinion from the US intention of building small size atomic bombs," Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Hamid-Reza Asefi was quoted as saying. US Assistant Secretary of State for Non-Proliferation John Wolf charged in Geneva on Monday that "Despite professions of transparency and peaceful intent, Iran is going down the same path of denial and deception that handicapped international inspections in North Korea and Iraq."

"Iran provides perhaps the most fundamental challenge ever faced" by the international Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), he said at arms control talks preparing for a 2005 review of the accord controlling the spread of nuclear weapons.

Tight security receives Rumsfeld in Iraq

Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld arrived in Iraq on Wednesday, 40 days after the United States launched the war that overthrew Saddam Hussein. He was accompanied on his trip to Iraq by land forces commander, US Army Lieutenant General David McKiernan. Rumsfeld flew into Iraq from Kuwait aboard a four-engined turbo-prop MC-130 "Combat Talon" cargo and troop aircraft used for special forces attack and reconnaissance missions. He was protected by black-clad special operations troops in a very tight security environment.

Putin publicly rebuffs Blair

'We are not with you and we don't believe you'

THE GUARDIAN, Moscow

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's first public attempt to heal the diplomatic wounds of the Iraq war suffered a humiliating rebuff yesterday when Vladimir Putin, the Russian president, refused to lift UN sanctions and mocked the possibility that weapons of mass destruction existed in Iraq.

Mr Putin also clashed with Mr Blair by demanding UN weapons inspectors be allowed back into Iraq and challenged Mr Blair's vision of a new world strategic partnership, arguing it would be unacceptable for the US to dominate the international community.

The public dressing down for Mr Blair came during a 63-minute press conference staged by the two men at Mr Putin's private residence outside Moscow. The two men had a fabled special relationship and Mr Blair had high hopes he would be able to wean Mr Putin away from his new anti-war alliance with France and Germany.

Mr Blair started with the full diplomatic niceties but became increasingly animated until he issued a dire warning of a new world order in which two different poles of power act as rivals to one another. The world faced a choice between a partnership between the US and the main countries of the world or a continued "diplomatic stand off", he said.

Mr Blair had been hoping to use his influence to persuade Russia to agree to the Anglo-US demand to lift sanctions on Iraq in return for giving the UN an as yet unspecified "vital role" in the reconstruction of Iraq and its new government.

But Mr Putin said Russia and its partners "believe until clarity is achieved over whether weapons of mass destruction exist in Iraq, sanctions should be kept in place". Almost mocking Mr Blair, he went on: "Where is Saddam? Where are those arsenals of weapons of mass destruction, if indeed they ever existed? Perhaps Saddam is still hiding somewhere in a bunker underground, sitting on cases of weapons of mass destruction and is preparing to blow the whole thing up and bring down the lives of thousands of Iraqi people."

He added that sanctions could not be lifted since they had been introduced because Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. "It is only the security council that is in a position to lift those sanctions, after all they introduced them."

He also derided Mr Blair's talk of a new world order, saying: "If the decision-making process in such a framework is democratic then that is something we could agree with, but if decisions are being made by just one member of the international community and all the others are required to support them that is something we could not find acceptable."

Mr Putin insisted that the weapons inspectors could return now so that they could be summoned to any site in Iraq to make a "professional conclusion" on whether the weapons existed. The inspectors could be protected by UN or blue-helmeted soldiers along the line of the settlement reached in Afghanistan. He added that Russia was in a position to take immediate steps.

The tone and content of Mr Putin's rebuff will cause deep anxiety inside Downing Street which has been increasingly concerned that, following the war in Iraq, a new bi-polar world order is established with the US on one side and France and Germany on the other.

Although Mr Blair said he was not disappointed by the Russian response, No 10 had hoped for a more flexible position - especially since Iraq's \$8bn outstanding debts to Russia will be examined by the so-called Paris club, the bankers of the leading industrialised countries.

Downing Street was concerned

last night over the implications of the mini-EU defence summit in Brussels yesterday. Mr Blair said he could not support such a new European defence institution if it became a threat to Nato or sought to duplicate its activities.

Mr Blair also revealed a reluctance to become involved in another bout of diplomatic wrangling primarily with France and Germany over the UN's involvement in Iraq.

He said, "Getting agreement with the UN is important, and it is important we get a vital role for the UN, but we are not going back into

the rigmarole we had the last time over the second UN resolution."

He underlined the point at his press conference saying the role of the UN in post-war Iraq would be "the first test" of his proposed new strategic partnership.

He asked, "Are coalition forces prepared to accept a vital role for the UN, but are our colleagues on the security council prepared to accept that our soldiers having fought and died in respect of this war cannot simply hand Iraq to the sole charge of the UN while the coalition forces are there on the ground stabilising the situation."



British Prime Minister Tony Blair (L) and Russian President Vladimir Putin give a joint press-conference at the Novo-Ogaryovo residence outside Moscow, on Tuesday.

Iraqi oil experts fear discrimination

AFP, Baghdad

As the United States prepares to reorganise Baghdad's vital oil sector, some Iraqi officials worry they will fall out of favour after the expected return of other experts from years of exile.

"Most Iraqis think those who preferred to stay in the country all these years deserve to serve the country more than those who left," said senior deputy oil minister Mazen Jumaa.

"We were under pressure, we deserve to take the positions instead of the others. Many of the people who have stayed are not top-ranking officials of the regime," he said.

The oil advisor to the US administration in Iraq, Gary Vogler, on Tuesday gave the ministry an official letter asking staffers to stay at their posts "until told otherwise," which many took as a sign of a pending reshuffle.

The letter told the ministry "not to substitute any official or employee without specific approval of the (US-led) coalition" and not "to accept directives from anyone other than the coalition."

According to US press reports, Washington has appointed a former Iraqi oil official in exile, Muhammad Ali Zainy, to head the ministry for the transitional period.

Jumaa, the highest ranking ministry official here after the arrest of former oil minister Amer Rashid on Tuesday, said those who stayed behind under Saddam lived a difficult life and would not now accept being demoted.

"Many of the people who stayed in Iraq were an internal opposition" voicing dissent "in the pri-

vacy their homes," he said.

"They stayed because it's their country. They have their homes, their way of life. They should not be considered second-class citizens. I myself would not accept that," he said.

The debate over the role of exiles in the new Iraq erupted at a meeting Monday, when many who suffered under Saddam Hussein's brutal 24-year reign said they preferred a longer US presence in the country to bring stability.

Many exiles however came out in favour of a quicker US handover of power.

In addition to Zainy, specialist publications have also speculated on the return of another exile, Fadhil Othman, an old hand at the State Oil Marketing Organisation (SOMO) who has lived in Turkey since retiring in the 1990s.

Under a proposal made by Washington to Warsaw, Polish companies would also take part in the reconstruction of Iraq, the conservative newspaper, one of Poland's two biggest dailies, said.

It said the United States "are ready to fully finance the participation of the Polish contingent in the stabilisation force" in Iraq and has asked Warsaw to send between 2,000 and 4,000 soldiers, while the Polish defence ministry "has in mind a figure of 1,500."

It said Polish general Andrzej Tyszkiewicz, who was a senior Polish representative in NATO and the current number two in the Polish army, "was one of the serious candidates" to command the international units in Iraq.

On Tuesday Polish Defence Minister Jerzy Szmajdzinski said the United States had indicated that it may be prepared to fund Poland sending troops to help secure peace in Iraq.

"We have received an initial positive response, but we are waiting for a definitive answer which will allow us to define the number of soldiers or members of the other peacekeeping services," he was quoted as saying by Polish public radio.



Palestinian new Internal Security chief, Mohammed Dahlan, assigned by new Palestinian prime minister Mahmud Abbas talks with Palestinian mothers showing the pictures of their sons held in Israeli jails April 29.

'US wants to divide Iraq into five zones'

AFP, Warsaw

The United States plan to divide Iraq into five administrative zones, one of which could be managed by Poland, the daily Rzeczpospolita said on Wednesday quoting a NATO source.

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Iraqis to sue Franks for war crimes

AGENCIES, Washington

Suffering from indelible psychological scars for losing their loved ones to the US-led war on their country, Iraqi civilians are preparing to lodge a complaint with a Belgian court against Chief of the US Central Command Gen. Tommy Franks and other US military officials for committing unspeakable war crimes in Iraq, a leading US newspaper reported Monday.

Representing 10 Iraqis who say they were victims of or eyewitnesses to atrocities perpetrated during the US-led war, Jan Fermon, the Brussels-based lawyer, said the complaint will ask an investigative magistrate to look into whether indictments should be issued against Gen. Franks, the Washington Times wrote.

"The complaint will state that coalition forces are responsible for the indiscriminate killing of Iraqi civilians in Hilla, the bombing of a marketplace in Baghdad, the shooting of an ambulance, and failure to prevent the mass looting of hospitals," Fermon told the Times.

If an indictment is filed against the general and other US officials, they could be convicted and sentenced by a Belgian court on entering Belgium.

"Belgium could issue international arrest warrants, but I don't

think we will get to that point," Fermon said.

"US military officials had the authority but did nothing to stop these war crimes from occurring. A military commander is responsible for war crimes even if he did not commit or order them, but also if he fails to take all the necessary steps to prevent the atrocities from happening," averred the lawyer.

The complaint against US officials is based on a 1993 Belgian law that gives a Belgian court authority to judge war crimes committed by non-citizens anywhere in the world.

"If they do not show up in court, then a court case can proceed with them being absent. If the court finds them guilty, they will be convicted and sentenced," said Fermon.

The Bush administration, for its part, has reacted angrily to the complaint.

A senior administration official warned that "there will be diplomatic consequences for Belgium" if the complaint is taken up by a court there and Belgian authorities issue indictments against Gen. Franks and other US officials.

The administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the complaint highlights US concerns that laws regarding war crimes and institutions such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) can be used

to initiate politically motivated prosecutions against American officials.

"There are serious problems with the principle of command responsibility being used in international law as the basis for indictments," the official said. "It goes well beyond what we could reasonably call criminal behaviour."

But Fermon said that the principle of "command responsibility" has been established in international law by the war-crimes tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia at The Hague.

He stressed that the principle has been used especially effectively in indictments against generals in the former Yugoslavia, who have been charged not "for crimes that were committed or ordered, but for command responsibility."

The complaint, which Fermon said will be officially filed in about two weeks, will accuse the US-led forces in Iraq of numerous atrocities including failure to prevent the mass looting of hospitals in Baghdad after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime; firing, according to eyewitness testimony, upon an ambulance; the indiscriminate shooting and wounding of Iraqi civilians; the bombing of a marketplace in Baghdad that killed scores of civilians; the attack on a civilian bus with an "energy weapon" in the town of al-Hillah, killing at least 10 passengers.

US accused of failing to halt smuggling

FINANCIAL TIMES, Baghdad

Looted Iraqi antiquities are being smuggled out of the country because of inadequate border controls by US forces, it was alleged on Tuesday.

Donny George, director of research at the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad, which has lost priceless antiquities in the looting that followed the US entry into the city, said Jordanian border guards had intercepted 12 cases of objects and documents, including some seized from journalists leaving Iraq.

"But the US border controls are almost zero. They should be searching and checking to prevent the bleeding of antiquities which is still going on," said Dr George, speaking after an international conference of archaeologists at the British Museum. He also accused US forces of having failed to react quickly enough after the looting had started.

"One of the museum's employees went to one of the tanks and begged [the soldiers] to come and stand in front of the museum. They told him they did not have orders

for that. They did not have orders to move a tank 50 or 60 metres, which would have saved part of the heritage of mankind."

It was too early to say how many items had been taken from the National Museum, but among the missing masterpieces are the "Warka Vase" from Uruk, a limestone vase from 3100 BC, and a copper statue base of a seated figure from Basetki from 2250 BC.

Dr George said there was clear evidence that some of the looting had been by organised gangs. "We found glass cutters and sets of keys. There were some gypsum copies which were not touched," Dr George added.

"There was a fake statue in a corridor - they [the looters] never touched it. They knew about the objects they wanted, and they were prepared."

Tessa Jowell, UK culture secretary, said that although there had been a clear recognition of the risk to archaeological sites in the build-up to military action, the extent and organised nature of the looting had exceeded expectations.