

# US, UK urge states to help maintain security in Iraq

REUTERS, United Nations

The United States and Britain launch separate appeals yesterday to get countries to help with security in Iraq, hoping that the devastating bomb attack against the United Nations would draw wider support for US efforts in Baghdad.

Secretary of State Colin Powell meets UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on a new resolution that would encourage Arab nations as well as India and Turkey to contribute troops and police to the beleaguered US-British operation in Baghdad, diplomats and US officials said. All these nations have refused without some sort of authorisation from the 15-member UN Security Council.

But the Bush administration so far has made no move to cede any control over international forces, as demanded by France, Germany and Russia and others, who do not want to work under a US command.

All three countries opposed the US-led invasion and have seats on

the Security Council. But an opinion by Annan, who implied the United States had not supplied proper security around the perimeters of the bombed UN headquarters in Baghdad, would have a major impact on council members.

A truck bomb blew up UN headquarters in Baghdad on Tuesday, killing at least 20 people including the chief of mission, Sergio Vieira de Mello of Brazil, and his chief of staff, Nadia Younes of Egypt. Dozens are still missing.

"I think there's a lot of reflection and a lot of assessment going on as to what else might be done to deal with the many challenges faced in Iraq. And among the possibilities is the possibility of another Security Council resolution," US Ambassador John Negroponte said on Wednesday.

Separately, Annan sees British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who will come with similar suggestions but has revealed fewer details.

Britain, diplomats said, was more amenable to a wider UN political

role as well as giving international troops more control over certain areas of Iraq.

"The British see a sort of Afghanistan situation," said one diplomat. "The United States would still have overall control of military strategy in Iraq but other nations could have spheres of decision-making."

But the Bush administration has shown no signs of sharing command. While the administration insists it has pledged from dozens of countries for troops, it is startlingly short of foot soldiers in the increasingly chaotic occupation of Iraq. And so far there are no plans to send more US troops.

"If you're talking about major contributions, there would have to be some devolution of authority from the United States toward the United Nations, and I just don't see that happening," said Edward Walker, a former top State Department official now with the Middle East Institute think tank in Washington.

"The White House, and the Defense Department, are very dug in on that," said Walker.

On Wednesday, the Bush administration and the United Nations disagreed on who bore responsibility for protecting the UN compound in Iraq.

US defense officials in Baghdad had said the United Nations had rejected offers for US troops around the compound and had hired their own security firm, but UN officials said the United Nations took care of security inside the compound, not on the streets.

"I don't know if the United Nations did turn down an offer of protection, but if it did, it was not correct, and they should not have been allowed to turn it down," Annan told reporters on Wednesday.

"We all live in this city, and nobody tells you if you want police to patrol your neighborhood. They make the assessment that patrol and protection is needed, and it is done. And that's what should be done in Iraq," he said.



United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (C) stands with the Security Council during a moment of silence at UN headquarters on Wednesday in New York in honor of special representative Sergio Vieira de Mello and other UN workers who were killed when a car bomb exploded outside the UN compound in Baghdad on August 19. Others with Annan are Spain's UN ambassador Inocencio F. Arias (L) and Syrian Ambassador Mikhail Wehbe (R), current president of the Security Council.



A Palestinian man helps extinguishing a car attacked by Israeli forces in Gaza City yesterday. Hamas' political leader Ismail Abu Shanab and two of his companions were killed when Israeli forces launched an air strike on a car in Gaza City. An Israeli F-16 fired a volley of rockets at a white Volkswagen Golf sedan belonging to the Hamas leader. Hamas vowed to avenge the killing and called off the truce.

## PA backs Abbas move to crack down on militants

AFP, Jerusalem

The Palestinian leadership backed moves proposed by prime minister Mahmud Abbas to crack down on Islamic radicals early Thursday as Israel authorised its own series of military measures to neutralise the militant threat.

Both Israel and the Palestinians were separately engaged in hours of high-level talks to determine an appropriate response to a massive suicide bomb in Jerusalem on Tuesday which left 20 people dead and shattered a fragile seven-week-old truce.

Following talks in the West Bank town of Ramallah, the Palestinian leadership said it would back all decisions taken by the Palestinian Authority, but stopped short of referring specifically to a clampdown on Hamas and Islamic Jihad, both of whom claimed responsibility for the Jerusalem bombing.

"There must be support for all

government decisions... We call on Palestinian representatives of the PLO executive committee and Fatah to commit themselves completely to this order and to immediately support all measures taken by the Palestinian Authority," it said in a statement.

Earlier Wednesday, the Palestinian Authority vowed to capture militants behind Tuesday's suicide attack.

Although there was no specific mention of a clampdown on the two Islamic groups, the statement called for an immediate implementation of the Palestinian commitments under the roadmap, in what appeared to be a veiled allusion to the breakup of militant groups.

"Palestinian security forces, starting immediately, must implement the decisions of the Palestinian leadership and of the government concerning their commitments to the roadmap and to

stop any violation of law."

The Middle East peace roadmap, which was officially endorsed by the Israeli and Palestinian prime ministers at a summit in early June, calls on Palestinians to break up militant groups.

The statement also demanded support for such moves as "the confiscation of all weapons, the cancellation of all armed displays and a crackdown on illegal activity by any group."

Earlier, a senior Palestinian source told AFP Abbas would deliver Arafat an ultimatum to back an unprecedented clampdown on Hamas and Islamic Jihad or see his cabinet resign en masse.

"Abu Mazen (Abbas's nom-de-guerre) will present Arafat and the Palestinian leadership with four demands," the official said on condition of anonymity ahead of the late-night meeting here.

## US policy responsible for blast at UN HQ: Khatami

AFP, Tehran

Iranian President Mohammed Khatami said the bombing of United Nations headquarters in Baghdad that killed top UN envoy to Iraq Sergio Vieira de Mello was the result of misguided US policy.

"Sergio Vieira de Mello was the victim of misguided (US) behavior, which set the ground for violent actions," Khatami said late Wednesday, speaking to former Iranian prisoners of war from the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq conflict.

Khatami, whose country opposed the US-led war, said the occupation of Iraq had caused an increase in "terrorism," in remarks carried by the official IRNA news agency.

"Attacking Iraq triggered a spread of terrorism and violence in the world, carrying a hefty cost for the Iraqis and the Americans," he said.

## Malaysia urges UN to take over management of Iraq after blast

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has urged the United States to hand over governance of Iraq to the United Nations following the bomb blast at the UN office in Baghdad.

The veteran Southeast Asian leader, in remarks published Thursday, condemned the bomb attack which has killed at least 24 people and said he was puzzled at why it was aimed at the world body.

"I don't understand why such attacks are aimed at the UN. The world body has done nothing wrong," he was quoted as saying by the New Straits Times.

"The UN should be there. It should take over the management of Iraq from the Americans until Iraq is able to manage itself."

Asked if Malaysia would take extra measures during the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit here in October, Mahathir said rigorous steps taken by the government were sufficient.

## Top Saudi cleric urges unity, decries violence

AFP, Riyadh

The Saudi grand mufti yesterday urged Saudis to unite behind their leaders, saying disunity is against Islam and that reform cannot be achieved through violence.

"Disunity and factionalism are a calamity forbidden by God, who ordered Muslims to unite," Sheikh Abdulaziz al-Sheikh said in a statement carried by the official SPA agency addressed to "Muslims around the world".

The mufti warned that disunity could lead to enmity and fighting among Muslims.

The statement came amid a massive clampdown on suspected Islamic militants here following a May 12 triple suicide bombing that left 35 people dead.

More than 170 suspects have so far been arrested.

Al-Sheikh warned Muslims against disobeying their leaders and senior clerics, saying this amounted to disobedience of God.

## 3 more bodies pulled from UN Baghdad HQ rubble

### WB, IMF pull staff out of Iraq

REUTERS, Baghdad

Rescuers have pulled at least three more bodies from the ruins of the devastated United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, raising to at least 23 the number killed in a suspected suicide truck bombing.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Secretary of State Colin Powell will meet later in the day in New York to discuss a UN resolution that could provide greater security in Iraq. There are no plans for a mass UN evacuation from the country, a spokesman said on Thursday.

The top UN envoy in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello, was among those killed. De Mello's spokesman Salim Lone said the death toll among the world body's staff had risen to 20 after more corpses were found overnight.

At least three Iraqis were also killed and at least 100 people were wounded in the bombing.

"We hope until the bitter end to find someone, but it does not look good at this stage," Lone said.

"Yesterday evening I know they took some more bodies from the wreckage, bringing the total to at least 20."

No group has claimed responsibility for the bombing, the most devastating attack on a UN civilian complex in the world body's 58-year history. Iraq's US governor, Paul Bremer, says the prime suspects are Saddam Hussein loyalists and groups linked to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network.

Annan has vowed the UN will stay in Iraq and continue its work despite the bombing.

But the UN office in Jordan said a "partial evacuation" was under way. Planes carrying wounded UN staff and others who chose to leave have been arriving in Amman. Many more are expected over the coming days.

AFP adds: The World Bank and

IMF ordered their staff out of Iraq on Wednesday after a truck bomb blast killed more than 20 people at the UN complex in Baghdad, officials said.

But the international financial organizations said the move was a security precaution, not a permanent withdrawal.

Fourteen of the 15 World Bank workers in Iraq were being withdrawn - 12 going to Amman, Jordan and two already in hospital in Kuwait. One was missing in the explosion.

Four International Monetary Fund staff were removed to Amman. One IMF staff member and a consultant remained in hospital in Baghdad.

"We have started to move staff from Baghdad to Amman, Jordan, today in response to yesterday's attack," World Bank spokesman Damian Milverton told AFP.

## Attack on UN in Iraq disrupts aid work

AP, United Nations

A deadly attack on UN headquarters in Baghdad could disrupt humanitarian work as fears grow that aid workers have become targets in a guerrilla war against the US-led occupation. Relief organisations, however, pledged to keep up their fight to help Iraqis.

The death toll from Tuesday's truck bomb stood at 20, including UN chief envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello and many other UN officials remembered for their efforts in helping innocent civilians caught in international hot spots.

While extending condolences to the victims of the bombing, World Health Organisation Director-General Dr. Jong-wook Lee said "We must now ensure that the people of Iraq do not suffer more as a result."

A defiant UN Secretary General

Kofi Annan vowed that the blast would not drive the world body out of Iraq.

Aid agencies followed his lead. "I think that people will probably generally take heart from the determination of the UN humanitarian family to continue with their mission," said a UNICEF spokesman Gordon Weiss. "There's an enormous need and that need hasn't been reduced by this slaughter."

Care, an independent international organization that is restoring several clinics and providing nutritional supplements for children, said the blast underscored the need to quickly restore law and order.

The group's vice president, Pat Carey, said "the particular worry here is that this seems to represent a step up in terms of targeting of specific humanitarian workers."

Carey said the destruction to the UN compound was a setback to all aid groups, which usually work closely with the United Nations and each other, but he said they would persevere.

"We're continuing our operations in Iraq and we intend to carry on with the programs that we currently have, but we do want to step back and think through the security implications," he said.

He said some of the possible measures - such as reducing the number of foreign staff sent to Iraq - as well as the interruption to UN operations could reduce the group's ability to respond to crises.

UN operations in Iraq were suspended, Iraqi employees were told to stay home and the United Nations began a comprehensive reevaluation of its security situation.

## British probe hears from MP who grilled Kelly

AFP, London

The chairman of a parliamentary committee which publicly grilled an arms expert days before his presumed suicide was Thursday to appear before an inquiry into his death that has fuelled a British government crisis over the Iraq war.

Donald Anderson, a member of parliament (MP) for British Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labour party, chaired a foreign affairs select committee that questioned arms expert David Kelly after he was linked to an allegation that Britain "sexed up" its case for the US-led war.

Kelly's death in July came after the defence ministry named him as the likely source of a BBC report that alleged Blair's office embellished intelligence over Iraq's weapons potential.

The government has denied the allegation while its row with the BBC and Kelly's mysterious death have left Blair, who is faring badly in opinion polls, facing his gravest crisis since assuming power six years ago.

## Businessman picked up as new leader of Liberia

REUTERS, Accra

Liberia's warring factions named Gyude Bryant, a businessman-politician known as a consensus builder, on Tuesday to guide their broken West African state out of a generation of strife and toward elections.

Bryant, 54, had a lower profile than the other two candidates on a shortlist, but was seen as a more neutral figure to chair the interim government when caretaker President Moses Blah steps down in October.

The aim of the new administration, backed by West African countries and the United Nations, will be to end nearly 14 years of violence, disarm wild warrior bands and hold elections in 2005.

Liberia has been given fresh hope since last week's flight into exile of pariah leader Charles Taylor, who handed power to Blah. Two rebel factions holding at least three-quarters of Liberia and the government signed a peace deal this week.

## Talks with Moro rebels may start next week

REUTERS, Manila

Peace talks between the Philippine government and Moro rebels may restart as soon as next week, an official from the war-torn island of Mindanao said, but the guerrillas insisted on Thursday that troops must pull back first.

Ending the 31-year separatist conflict that has killed at least 120,000 people would go far in burnishing the image of the Philippines in the eyes of foreign investors and companies seeking to tap Mindanao's agricultural and mineral wealth.

Malaysia has again offered to act as host and broker of the talks between Manila and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the largest Muslim rebel group in the overwhelmingly Roman Catholic nation, that have been stalled since late 2001. A cease-fire is holding on Mindanao but Kuala Lumpur has yet to issue the formal invitation.

Philippine government officials had said the talks were expected to restart in mid-August.

## US warns of new al-Qaeda threats in Yemen

AFP, Washington

The United States on Wednesday warned US citizens of the potential for new terrorist threats in Yemen as Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network seeks to re-establish itself in the country and elsewhere.

"The security threat to all US citizens in Yemen remains high due to continuing efforts by al-Qaeda to re-constitute an effective operating base," the State Department said in a statement.

"This could lead to possible attacks by extremist individuals or groups against US citizens, facilities, businesses and perceived interests," it said in the alert which renewed an existing May 23 warning for Americans to avoid non-essential travel to Yemen.

That earlier warning had referred to "credible reports" that terrorists were planning anti-US attacks in Yemen but made no specific mention of al-Qaeda or its attempts to reconstitute itself as an organisation.

Wednesday's warning did not

elaborate on specific al-Qaeda threats but Yemen, bin Laden's ancestral home, has been the site of several anti-US attacks including the October 2000 suicide attack against the USS Cole destroyer in Aden harbor that killed 17 US sailors and wounded 38 others.

Al-Qaeda followers have been blamed for that attack and others such as a similar strike on the French supertanker Limburg that killed one and wounded 12 others nearly two years to the day after the Cole bombing.

Last month, the US embassy in Sanaa urged Americans in Yemen to boost security precautions fearing violent reaction to a German court's decision to authorize the extradition of two Yemeni al-Qaeda suspects to the United States.

That warning, in a notice US citizens in the country, was issued a day after the German ruling against Muslim cleric Mohammad Ali Hassan Sheikh al-Moayad, purported to be Osama bin Laden's finance chief, and his

assistant Yahya Zayed.

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation says that Moayad, the imam of the main mosque in the Yemeni capital Sanaa, is bin Laden's finance chief. Zayed is accused of providing logistical support to al-Qaeda.

Both men, who deny the charges, were arrested in Frankfurt in January 10. Their appeal of the court ruling is pending.

AP adds: A week after taking up his new post, the commander of NATO-led peacekeepers in Afghanistan's capital said Wednesday the city was relatively secure. But Lt. Gen. Gotz Gliemeroth of Germany warned that terrorist attacks were "always pending" in the troubled city.

"I cannot exclude that there will be an additional number of potential terrorists having infiltrated the city, preparing whatever attack," Gliemeroth said. "But our current estimate is that the situation is under control."



Former president Corazon Aquino (left) in her traditional yellow dress and President Gloria Arroyo (R) take questions from reporters during the 20th anniversary of the death of Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino yesterday. Ninoy Aquino, an opposition senator, was gunned down after returning from exile in the United States in 1983. His death galvanised opposition to dictator Ferdinand Marcos, who was later deposed and died in exile.

## Filipinos 'shamed' by profligate lifestyles of corrupt: Arroyo

AFP, Manila

Philippine President Gloria Arroyo on Thursday vowed to crack down on suspected grafters in government, saying that the majority of public workers were "shamed" by the lifestyles of their corrupt counterparts.

The government would pursue "lifestyle checks" into the assets and wealth of suspected grafters in government, she said, remarking that such probes, backed by due process, were "a good deterrent to corruption."

"The majority of dedicated public servants are shamed by the profligacy and extravagance of their co-workers," Arroyo said in a statement.

"Let us have an ethic of simple living in government. If one's family can't stand a life of relative sacrifice and frugality, he or she must leave the service," she added.