

## US forces losing support in Iraq: CIA

REUTERS, Washington

A CIA report concludes that ordinary Iraqis increasingly are siding with the insurgency amid doubts about the US ability to stamp it out, officials said on Wednesday, while the US administrator in Iraq said it was hard to figure out where the Iraqi public stands.

Word of the report came as President Bush's national security team held urgent meetings at the White House with Paul Bremer, the US civil administrator in Iraq, aimed at accelerating the transfer of power to Iraqis.

The CIA's classified field assessment concluded that many Iraqis are losing faith in American efforts in Iraq amid the US failure to crush an increasingly bold resistance, said US officials, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The report, warning of possible failure for Bush's efforts to establish Iraq as a democracy if the situation is not fixed, said aggressive US counter-insurgency measures were leaving many Iraqis disillusioned and pushing them to support the insurgency, one US official said.

Amid continuing violence, at least 17 Italians and nine Iraqis died on Wednesday when a suicide bomber wrecked an Italian military base in the town of Nassiriya, while in Baghdad, US forces killed two people in a counter-insurgency strike called "Operation Iron Hammer."

The report, disclosed earlier by the Philadelphia Inquirer, noted that no member of the US-appointed Iraqi Governing Council nor any other Iraqi politician had shown an ability to lead the nation following the US-led invasion in March that chased President Saddam Hussein from power, the official said.

## Interpreter says Saddam alive, tapes genuine

REUTERS, Paris

Saddam Hussein's interpreter said Wednesday audio tapes of the ousted Iraqi ruler were genuine and proved the elusive former leader was still alive.

"Yes, I think he is still alive, if only because of the tapes that he has sent in which he calls on the Iraqi people to resist. I recognize his voice well, his phrases, his style," Sama Abdul Majid, who said he spent almost 16 years as Saddam's official interpreter, told LCI television in France.

"He was a very unpredictable person and he had a very pronounced survival instinct, so I think he'll turn up where he's least expected."

Majid, who has published a book in France on his career with Saddam translating French and English into Arabic, also said the deposed Iraqi leader had asked him to find a book on urban guerrilla warfare just weeks before the US invasion of Iraq started.

Despite a massive manhunt and the detention of a raft of senior aides, US forces have failed to hunt down Saddam. Washington is offering a \$25 million reward for information leading to his capture or proof of his death.

Majid said Saddam had asked him shortly before the war started in March to hunt down a 1960s book on urban guerrilla warfare written by the Vietnamese revolutionary Ho Chi Minh.

## US Senate holds nonstop debate on judges

REUTERS, Washington

US Senators moved toward waging the longest nonstop debate in their chamber in a decade yesterday as they exchanged yawns and angry words over President Bush's four blocked judicial nominees.

With cots and coffee, Democrats and Republicans began a scheduled 30-hour marathon at 6 p.m. EST Wednesday and were to wrap it up at midnight on Thursday.

"We hold this extraordinary session for truly extraordinary reasons," said Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, a Tennessee Republican. He accused Democrats of unprecedented obstructionism in confirming judicial nominees.

Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, a South Dakota Democrat, described the debate as "a colossal waste of time."

Daschle argued that the 30 hours could be better spent discussing the estimated 3 million Americans who have lost their jobs since Bush took office nearly three years ago.

The Senate debate was not expected to change the status of any stalled nominee unless Democrats fell asleep and failed to oppose possible procedural bids to confirm without objection.

Daschle promised that would not happen, saying he would have at least two members of his party on the floor at all times.

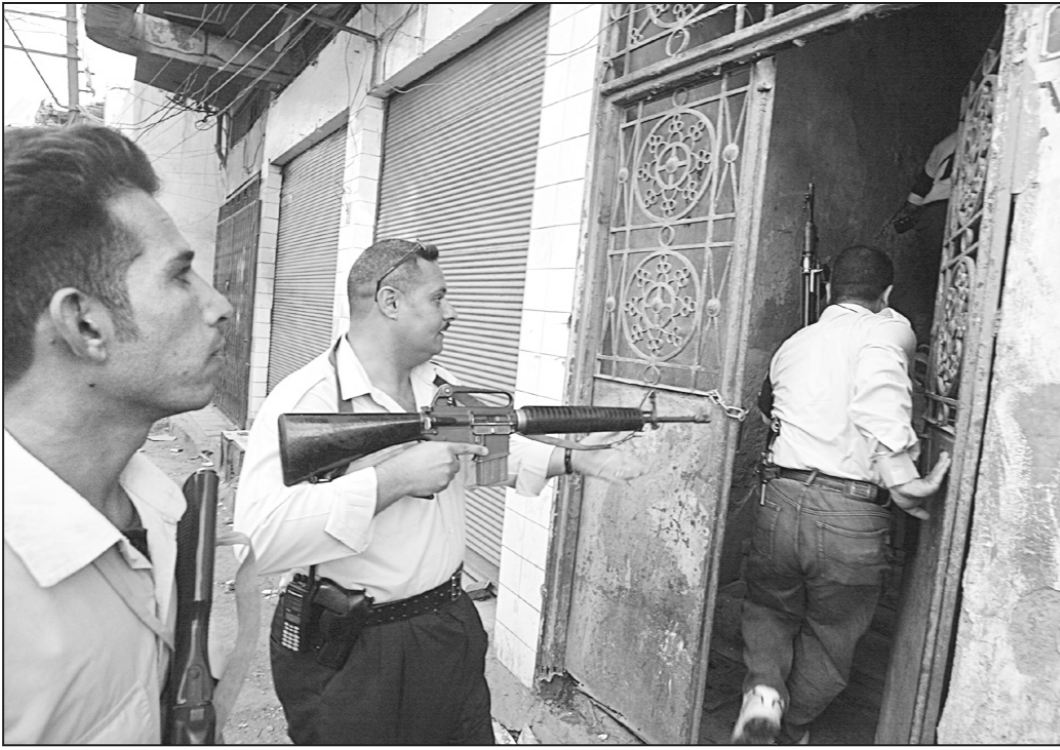


PHOTO: AFP  
Iraqi police officers raid a house in Baghdad as they search for gangsters' hideouts yesterday. Hundreds of Iraqi police backed by the US-led coalition's military police, launched the largest post-war raid on suspected gangster caches in central Baghdad, a senior Iraqi officer said.

## New Palestinian cabinet holds first meeting

Qorei-Sharon summit within 10-days

AFP, Ramallah

The Palestinian cabinet held its first meeting yesterday as Israel announced that talks between Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his new Palestinian counterpart Ahmed Qorei would take place in ten days.

Qorei was to chair the meeting of his 24-member cabinet in the West Bank town of Ramallah where ministers were expected to map out their strategy for the official resumption of talks with their Israeli opposite numbers for the

first time in nearly three months.

None of the ministers made any comment to waiting reporters as they filed into Qorei's offices.

Israel's Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said that the first summit between the two premiers would take place in ten days time but lower-level meetings would take place beforehand.

"This meeting between the prime minister (Sharon) and Abu Alaa (Qorei) will take place in ten days and will follow a series of meetings between other Israeli and Palestinian ministers,"

Shalom told military radio.

Israel froze official contacts with the Palestinians in mid-August after a massive suicide bomb in Jerusalem but Sharon's camp has indicated that it wants to give Qorei a chance to impose his authority.

Sharon has already issued orders to ease some of the restrictions on Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip while aides have said that the army will hold off large-scale operations in the territories for the time being.

## 'Iraqi insurgency is the war Saddam wanted'

AFP, Washington

Some US generals believe the well-organized attacks on US-led occupation forces in Iraq are part of pre-war planning by ex-Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and his generals, The Washington Post said yesterday.

"I believe Saddam Hussein always intended to fight an insurgency should Iraq fall," Major General Charles Swannack, commanding general of the 82nd Airborne Division, told the daily in an interview.

"That's why you see so many of these arms caches out there in significant numbers all over the country. They were planning to go ahead and fight an

insurgency, should Iraq fall," the man responsible for combat operations in Iraq's lower Sunni Triangle added.

Swannack said Saddam and his generals were probably surprised by the speed of the US-led invasion of Iraq in April and took several months to develop a response. That would explain the low anti-US violence in July and August, he added.

However, the US general believed Saddam was not personally orchestrating the attacks since he had enough to do avoiding being captured by US forces.

"He has to move so much that he can't do the day-to-day operational

planning or direction and resourcing of the effort," Swannack said.

An unnamed senior US military commander in Baghdad told the daily Iraq's resistance forces were likely organized on three levels, all with Saddam's Baathist loyalists at the core.

The first level, the officer said, dealt with sniper attacks army patrols probably carried out by eight or 10 neighborhood-based cells in Baghdad, each with about 25 members.

The next level was a citywide organization with links to criminal gangs specialising in improvised roadside bombs against US troops, the officer said.

# US forces repulse attack: 6 Iraqis killed

AFP, Washington

US troops killed six Iraqi militants and wounded four others as they fought off an attack on their base and a Jordanian hospital in the central Iraqi city of Fallujah, the military announced on Wednesday.

The Central Command said in a statement that Tuesday's battle began when attackers opened fire with automatic weapons on soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division near the hospital.

However, US military's version of the events starkly differed from that offered earlier in the day by Iraqi police, who said US soldiers had killed Iraqi civilians.

The Centcom said, "The soldiers returned fire forcing the attackers to flee. Another vehicle approached and the fleeing Iraqis attempted to get in, but were prevented from doing so by the paratroopers."

"There were four other detainees as a result of the action," the command said.

In Fallujah, police Major Assaad Abdul Karim said, "The US forces had erected a checkpoint at the entrance of Fallujah to catch thieves who have been stealing steel from a nearby factory."

"When the truck came near the American base at around 9:00 pm (1800 GMT) last night, they apparently thought they were steel thieves, so they opened fire and killed five of them and

injured four others," he said.

Meanwhile US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said yesterday countries contributing troops to the US-led mission in Iraq needed to do so with "with their eyes open."

Rumsfeld said his heart went out to the Italian troops who were killed in a car bombing in Nasiriya Tuesday. At least 18 Italians and nine Iraqis were killed in the blast outside the Carabinieri military police base.

"It's a dangerous country, it's a violent country," he said. "It's been a violent country for a long time and it very likely will be for a long time. Certainly people need to participate there with their eyes open."

He said remnants of the former

regime of Saddam Hussein were "purposefully targeting people in an attempt to get them to leave so they can take back that country."

"It's not going to happen," he said.

The latest attack, however, put a chill on Rumsfeld's campaign to raise more international troops for Iraq.

Japan said the circumstances were not right for it to send troops to Iraq, and South Korea announced it would send no more than 3,000 troops, less than a reported US request for 5,000 troops.

Rumsfeld, who spoke to reporters on a flight to Guam, is scheduled to visit Japan over the weekend and Seoul on Monday for security talks that were expected to include support for the US-led operation in Iraq.

## White House, Sept 11 panel okay deal on documents

AP, Washington

The independent commission on the Sept. 11 attacks announced an agreement Wednesday with the White House that would allow the review of classified intelligence documents previously withheld by the Bush administration.

The 10-member panel will designate a subcommittee that will examine the most sensitive documents and report back, commissioner Richard Ben-Veniste said. The four-person subcommittee will review some of the documents, but only two of those four commissioners will review others. The commission has not yet appointed the subcommittee.

## Shocked Italy in mourning Berlusconi says troops to stay in Iraq

AFP, Rome

The Italian cabinet met in crisis session yesterday amid calls to bring their troops home from Iraq, as newspapers set the tone on a day for the country's grief, describing the attack which killed 18 of its troops as "Italy's September 11".

The cabinet declared a national day of mourning to coincide with the funerals of the 16 servicemen and two civilians killed by a car bomb attack on the Carabinieri headquarters in southern Nasiriyah.

"The remains may be brought back from Iraq on Sunday and the ceremony held on Monday, but nothing has been decided yet," a spokesman at Carabinieri headquarters told AFP.

Meanwhile, President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, who would be expected to lead mourners in a state funeral, may cut short his visit to the United States, where he arrived on Wednesday, his office said.

Two prominent daily newspapers, La Stampa and the businessman's staple Il Sole 24 Ore, reached for the same phrase which has become shorthand for a nation's devastation.

"It's our September 11," they wrote on their front pages.

In Rome, the attack unleashed fury from opposition parties demanding that Italian troops be brought home, while world reaction showed deepening concern for a rapidly deteriorating security situation in Iraq.

But as Italy announced it was stepping up security at home in the wake of the attack, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi vowed that the 2,400-strong Italian force would remain in Iraq.

"No intimidation will change our determination to help this country get back on its feet, to create a government and ensure security and freedom," said Berlusconi, one of the top European allies in the US-led war on Iraq.

But the opposition said Italian forces should be immediately recalled. "The Italian mission is a mistake. It is not a peace mission, it has been grafted on to an ongoing war," said Fausto Bertinotti, leader of the communist PRC party.

## Annan repeats call for quick handover of power to Iraqis

PTI, United Nations

The spokesman for UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Wednesday repeated his call for a quick handover of power to Iraqis after the latest devastating bombing in the unsettled country.

"There's no change in our position," spokesman Fred Eckhard said. "A clear timeline for the transfer of authority to Iraqis, we think, would help reduce tensions somewhat."

Last month, amid a heated debate on the Security Council over US plans for Iraq's future, Annan went public with frustration at the limited role offered the world body in Iraq and urged a much faster handover of power to Iraqis.



PHOTO: AFP  
(L-R) Nane Annan, Peruvian First Lady Eliane Karp, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo participate in an Incaic ritual during their visit to the Inca citadel of Machu Picchu in Cuzco on Wednesday shortly before Annan's departure for Bolivia.



PHOTO: AFP  
Opposition supporter wears the mask of President Eduard Shevardnadze, wearing a placard reading -- "Help me! Georgian people do not love me!" during the rally outside the Georgian Parliament in Tbilisi early yesterday. Several hundred protesters camped outside Georgia's parliament for the fourth consecutive day as President Eduard Shevardnadze signalled a tougher line on demonstrators calling for his resignation.

## Syria still seeks talks with US in face of threats

AFP, Beirut

Faced with the threat of US diplomatic and economic sanctions and another Israeli airstrike, Syria is still insisting on its desire for "constructive dialogue" with Washington.

New US legislation, the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Act, was passed almost unanimously in the Senate on Tuesday, following a similar overwhelming vote in the House of Representatives.

After hanging over Syria for months like the sword of Damocles, it is now just waiting for President George W. Bush, who can still modify it, to sign it into law.

The measure alleges Syria has links to militant extremists and is seeking to obtain nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, which Damascus denies.

It provides for a range of retaliatory options for punishing Syria, from restricting US exports and business investment to downgrading Washington's diplomatic representation and imposing travel restrictions on Syrian diplomats in the United States.

The bill also bans the export of "dual-use" technology, allows the US government to freeze Syria's assets in the United States and restrict overflight rights for Syrian aircraft inside US airspace.

It also calls for Syria to withdraw its 20,000 troops deployed in neighbouring Lebanon, which is totally dominated by Damascus.

"Syria will not close the door on dialogue with the American administra-

tion, even if the hawks in that administration want to push for escalation in an unjustifiable way," Information Minister Ahmad al-Hassan said in a statement carried Thursday by the Syrian press.

"The threats against Syria are not new, but they have intensified recently," the minister said.

He accused Washington of wanting to "extend its influence to replace the United Nations".

To face the threats, "we will stand by our national unity (...) and are working so that the United Nations resumes its role to resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner," he said.

The ruling party newspaper Al-Baath said Wednesday that "Syria only understands dialogue (...) Whoever wants to work effectively with Syria must understand that only dialogue can bear fruit."

The line was echoed in Beirut where Lebanese President Emile Lahoud, a faithful Syrian ally, declared, "Only a sincere dialogue, without pressure, can bring a solution to the problem at hand" whether it be "Iraq or Palestine".

The Lebanese head of state directly linked the threats of sanctions and the upcoming US presidential election, saying that the vote depends on the "pressures of the (Jewish) lobby".

The US Senate vote took place just as Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz was in Washington, warning of a new strike by his air force on Syria, similar to the one on October 5, which Israel said hit a Palestinian militant training base.