

## Gunmen kill 10 security guards in Iraq

AP, Baghdad

Police said gunmen killed at least 10 security guards and seized an African engineer in an ambush Wednesday in Baghdad. Iraqi authorities, meanwhile, held out hope that a kidnapped American reporter would be released.

The guards were killed when their convoy was attacked by heavily armed insurgents in Baghdad's dangerous western Jami'a district, said Capt. Qassim Hussein. He said another security worker and a civilian were also wounded.

An engineer from Malawi, who was working for the mobile telephone company Iraqna, was abducted during the attack, said a police official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not authorized to talk to media.

Earlier Wednesday, two Iraqi journalists were wounded in the same area by gunmen who fired shots at them from a passing car as they drove to work at the al-

Iraq newspaper, Hussein added. The reporters were hospitalized.

The bodies of three men, including a relative of Iraq's defense minister, were also found Wednesday with gunshot wounds to the head in a Baghdad apartment, a police official said.

Sadad al-Batah, a Sunni Arab tribal leader related to Defense Minister Saadoun al-Dulaimi, was killed along with his nephew and a third person, who was identified as an Iraqi army officer, said the official, who declined to be identified because of security reasons.



Iraqi boys check the remains of a car bomb that detonated in Baghdad yesterday. The attack which targeted an Iraqi police convoy caused no casualties.

## Human Rights Watch slams US 'torture' in annual report

AFP, New York

US counter-terrorism policies, with their deliberate use of "torture and mistreatment," put the global defense of human rights on the back foot in 2005, Human Rights Watch said in its annual report Wednesday.

The New York-based monitor said the US strategy, as well as fuelling terrorist recruitment, had hampered Washington's ability to

pressure other countries into respecting international law.

"Fighting terrorism is central to the human rights cause," said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch. "But using illegal tactics against alleged terrorists is both wrong and counterproductive."

The watchdog also criticised US allies in the war on terror for undermining critical international protections, citing Britain for

seeking to send suspects to governments likely to torture and Canada for moves to dilute a new treaty outlawing enforced disappearances.

The European Union was also taken to task for subordinating human rights in its relationships with others deemed useful in fighting terrorism, such as Russia, China and Saudi Arabia.

The annual report charged both Moscow and Beijing with exploiting the prevailing atmosphere to clamp down on political opponents by branding them "Islamic terrorists."

In its critique of US policy, Human Rights Watch dismissed the argument that cases of abusive interrogation could be put down to a small number of "bad apples" in the military when they were clearly "a conscious policy choice" by senior US government officials.

## Iran certain of escaping UNSC referral

AFP, Tehran, Vienna

Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said on Wednesday there was only a "weak" chance of his country being referred to the UN Security Council over its disputed nuclear programme.

"Taking into account the current context, the possibility of Iran's case being sent to the Security Council is weak," he was quoted as saying by the state news agency IRNA.

He nevertheless warned Britain, France and Germany -- which are pushing for Iran's case to be sent to New York -- not to take any "hasty steps".

"I hope the Europeans have understood Iran's very clear and direct message and do not make any hasty decision... Which would

complicate the situation for all sides," he said.

Iran's decision to resume sensitive nuclear fuel research has intensified fears that the clerical regime is seeking the bomb. The country insists it only wants to make reactor fuel to generate electricity.

Another official also repeated the threat that if Iran is referred to the Security Council, UN inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency would lose their current level of access to the Islamic republic's nuclear facilities and Iran would resume full-scale uranium enrichment work -- which remains frozen for the time being.

Enrichment makes reactor fuel, but can be extended to make the core of a nuclear weapon.

"If our case goes to the Security Council, whether as a simple warning, to reinforce the head of the IAEA or even to decide on sanctions, the government will be obliged to put an end to its suspension of activities," national security spokesman Hossein Entezami told the government newspaper Iran.

In the meantime, Europe and the United States sought to keep up pressure on Iran over its nuclear program, dismissing as "vacuous" a Tehran offer to resume talks and seeking to overcome Russian and Chinese opposition to UN action.

With signs of an international split over how to respond to the crisis, the United States said Iran's offer to resume negotiations was "diplomatic fog" and declined new talks without concrete action from Tehran's Islamic regime.

## "Hundreds" of suicide attackers ready

Say Taliban

REUTERS, Spin Boldak

A Taliban commander said on Tuesday hundreds of his guerrillas were ready to launch suicide attacks across Afghanistan to drive out foreign forces.

The threat of violence came as several thousand people gathered in the town of Spin Boldak, on the border with Pakistan, to denounce a suicide attack there on Monday that killed 23.

"Hundreds of Afghan Taliban mujahideen are ready for suicide attacks," said the Taliban commander, Mullah Dadullah.

"They only await orders from the Taliban leadership," he said by satellite telephone from an undisclosed location.

Afghanistan has seen a wave of 19 suicide attacks in the past year, including 13 in the past 10 weeks, the United Nations says.

Security analysts suspect the Taliban have stepped up suicide attacks after seeing al Qaeda's success in Iraq.

The attacks have come as the United States hopes to cut back its troop strength in Afghanistan from more than 18,000 to 16,500 in the next few months.

Members of NATO, who have an Afghan peacekeeping force of almost 10,000, are due to increase their numbers to 15,000 and take over responsibilities from US forces in the restive south.

## UN aid flights resume in quake-hit Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

United Nations helicopters resumed vital relief flights to quake-hit parts of Pakistan Wednesday after being suspended for three days by heavy rain and snow, officials said.

Up to 18 helicopters would be flying extra sorties to make up for lost time and get supplies to cold and hungry survivors of the October 8 disaster, which killed more than 73,000 people in Pakistan, UN spokesman Ben Malorsaid.

"All helicopter flights resumed this morning," Malor told AFP. "They are back and trying to catch up by deploying all available helicopters to cover all routes as quickly as possible."

Malor said some flights had been briefly halted early Wednesday as pilots waited for heavy fog to clear over Muzaffarabad, the devastated capital of Pakistani-administered Kashmir.

## Empty graves found at Pak airstrike site

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani investigators say they found two empty graves at the site of a controversial US airstrike, a day after officials said up to five foreign militants died in the attack.

But there was no information about the identities of the insurgents who died in the raid on a remote tribal village, despite initial US intelligence reports that Al-Qaeda's Egyptian number two Ayman al-Zawahiri may be among them.

Officials said local militants may have shifted the bodies before burial to stop Pakistani or US authorities DNA testing the remains and finding out who was

killed in Friday's missile attack.

Residents of Damadola village in Bajur tribal agency, however, have reported that 18 civilians died in the attack, for whom as many graves were dug, and that no militants were in the area.

"The residents dug 18 graves but buried 16 people and two graves were left vacant before they covered them over," a senior security official told AFP, citing a report by intelligence officials in the region.

On Tuesday the regional administration chief of Bajur said the missile strike was aimed at foreign militants invited to a dinner and that four or five were killed -- the first such public confirmation by Pakistan.

## World pledges \$1.9 billion to fight bird flu

REUTERS, Beijing

International donors have pledged \$1.9 billion to support a global fund to combat bird flu, EU Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou said on Wednesday after a conference in Beijing, exceeding an initial target.

The World Bank had hoped the donors' conference would raise at least \$1.2 billion.

The United States responded with a pledge of about \$334 million, saying in a statement the money would be mainly in the form of grants and technical assistance. The total EU pledge is nearly \$250 million.

The Bank itself has estimated that a pandemic lasting a year could cost the global economy up to \$800 billion. Across the globe, millions could die if the H5N1 avian flu virus mutates just enough to pass easily among people. Economies would be crippled for weeks or months.

"The amount asked for is small compared to the cost of a pandemic we are not ready for," UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the conference in a video address.



British Prime Minister Tony Blair (R) holds his son Leo as he stands outside No.10 Downing Street in London in this picture taken on May 6, 2005. British police claimed on Tuesday that they had foiled a plan to kidnap Leo.