

## Powell under scrutiny

AFP, Washington

US Secretary of State Colin Powell's role in government came under new scrutiny Wednesday after close aides and confidants revealed to a national men's magazine his frustration with and isolation within President George W. Bush's administration.

Powell is exhausted by policy debates, unlikely to stay in his post should Bush win reelection and ask him to and increasingly uncomfortable with the conservative bent of the president and his other top advisers, GQ reported in a lengthy article titled "Casualty of War."

Although similar assessments of Powell -- well-known as the most moderate member of the Bush cabinet -- have appeared in the US and foreign press for at least two years, the 6,000-word GQ piece was unusual because it did not rely on anonymous sources.

Instead, it quoted by name Powell himself, his deputy and close friend, Richard Armitage, his low-profile chief of staff and confidant, Larry Wilkerson, and his mentor from the National War College, Harlan Ullman, all of whom appeared to speak candidly about the secretary's dissatisfaction, particularly in the period following the decision to invade Iraq.

## IRAQI PRISONERS' ABUSE

## US fails to calm world dismay, disgust

AFP, Paris

As US President George W. Bush sought Wednesday to limit the damage caused by images of Iraqi prisoners suffering abuse at the hands of US soldiers, world leaders and the international media expressed dismay, disgust and fury.

Bush told the US-sponsored al-Hurra television network the abuse was "abhorrent" in the first of two interviews with Arabic language television stations planned Wednesday in a bid to limit the damage to the United States' reputation around the region.

He was also to speak to Dubai-based Al-Arabiya TV later in the day.

Even in pro-Western states such as Egypt, the government-owned press mocked the gap between the wartime US rhetoric of liberating Iraq and the reality of the abuse in an Iraqi jail already notorious from Saddam Hussein's rule.

But in radical states such as Syria, the official media seized on the maltreatment of the Abu Ghraib prisoners as evidence of the bankruptcy of Bush's democratising

mission for the region.

Meanwhile Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, on a visit to Paris, said the images were "terrible" but did not in any way alter the mission of Italian troops deployed in Iraq as part of the international coalition.

France condemned the incidents, calling them "unacceptable" and in violation of international conventions.

"As the authorities of the coalition member states said themselves, the treatment of some Iraqi detainees, as it appears in the images released in the media in recent days, is totally unacceptable," said foreign ministry spokesman Herve Ladsous.

"We understand the great range of emotion sparked by such behavior which, if proven to be true, is disgraceful and constitutes clear and inadmissible violations of international conventions," Ladsous said.

In Geneva, a UN human rights expert called on the US-led occupation forces in Iraq to clarify the legal status of people detained during security operations in the country,

warning that detainees had no access to courts.

The expert, Leila Zerrougui, "is seriously disturbed by the fact that these persons have not been granted access to a court to be able to challenge the lawfulness of their detention", a UN statement added.

In Russia's first public comment, a top foreign ministry official said Moscow was deeply concerned by the images and suggested the United Nations should formally look into the incidents.

"The news of torture in Iraq is deeply troubling," Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Yury Fedotov was quoted as saying by Interfax.

Austrian Foreign Minister Benita Ferrer-Waldner said she was "worried and distressed" by the affair and called for punishment of the guilty to prevent further damage in the region.

Bangladesh and Pakistan joined condemnation of the alleged abuse, describing it as "appalling" and "regrettable."



A general view of the site of a car bomb explosion that killed six Iraqis and one US soldier yesterday at a checkpoint on a bridge at the entrance of the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) headquarters in Baghdad. The blast occurred just after 7:28 am (0328GMT) as civilians were queuing in their cars to enter the 14th of July Bridge, used only by the military and employees of the CPA.

## Bush interviews are too little, too late: Arabs

REUTERS, Cairo

President Bush did too little too late when he told two Arabic-language television stations that he condemned the mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners, Arab commentators and pundits said yesterday.

While the White House portrayed the interviews with al-Hurra and Al Arabiya on Wednesday as a special effort to address Arab public opinion, the commentators said Arabs saw Bush on television often and were unlikely to change their minds about him on the basis of a single appearance.

Some said that Bush was more worried about looking good to Americans in advance of presidential elections in November than in improving relations with the Arab world, which would require painful changes in US policy toward Iraq and Israel.

US government-financed channel Alhurra, which appears to be little watched in the Arab world, ran its interview with Bush without a

translation into Arabic, much reducing the impact.

In the interview with Dubai-based Al Arabiya, which is much more popular, Bush said the abuse of Iraqi prisoners was abhorrent and justice would be done after a full investigation.

But he did not apologize for the abuses or suggest any second thoughts about the policies which Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak says have helped make the United States more hated than ever in the Middle East.

"It's not enough for the American president to punish the troops who committed the odious practices and it's not enough that the national security adviser (Condoleezza Rice) apologises," commentator Ghassan Sharbatl wrote in the London-based pan-Arab newspaper al-Hayat.

Egyptian columnist Ahmed el-Birni wrote in Egypt's al-Ahram: "It's not enough for Bush to be indignant... What they need to do is take an immediate decision to

withdraw their forces from Iraq, confess the terrible injustice they have done to Iraq and apologize in public for what their troops have done."

"In the end we say to them (Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair): 'Enough of your illusions. The time of empires has passed and will never return.'"

Bush's reputation in the Arab world had already suffered badly this year from his concessions to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Washington's refusal to condemn Israel's assassination of two leaders of the Palestinian group Hamas.

When the scandal broke over photographs of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad, the pictures reinforced Arab skepticism about Bush's argument that the aim of invading Iraq was to end human rights abuses and bring about a new era of freedom and democracy for Iraqis.

## Kerry calls on Bush to take responsibility for Iraqi prisoners' abuse

AFP, Los Angeles

Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry on Wednesday called on President George W. Bush to take "appropriate responsibility" for the abuse of prisoners in Iraq and issue a personal apology if warranted.

At a news conference while campaigning in Los Angeles, the Massachusetts senator urged a speedy investigation of the incidents he said had undermined the US mission in Iraq and put American troops in further danger.

Kerry spoke after Bush went on two Arabic television channels to denounce the abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad, without making a direct apology. His spokesman later said the president was "deeply sorry."

But Kerry, who is running neck and neck with Bush in polls ahead of the November 2 election, suggested the Republican had not gone far enough.

"The president of the United States needs to offer the world an explanation and needs to take appropriate responsibility, and if that includes apologizing for the behavior of those soldiers and what happened, we ought to do that," he said. "We have to show the world that we're willing to correct our own mistakes, that we're willing to be

responsible for things that don't live up to our values," said Kerry, a decorated Vietnam war veteran.

The Democrat had previously kept a low profile on the scandal that broke last week with the release of photographs of hooded and naked Iraqi prisoners humiliated by smiling US soldiers at Abu Ghraib.

With congressional leaders and others raising questions about the Pentagon's handling of the matter, Kerry urged a quick investigation into what an army report called "systemic" abuses of prisoners.

He said the scandal "undermines America's own efforts in the region. It has the potential of putting our troops, the rest of them, in further jeopardy. It can increase acts of terror against America and Americans."

Kerry has in the past called on Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to resign over what the Democrat branded a botched occupation of Iraq. But he stopped short of renewing the demand Wednesday over the prisoner scandal.

"We've got to have the facts," he said. "I want to know, as I think Americans do, is this isolated? Does it go up the chain of command? Who knew what, when?"

## Canadian sues US Army, claiming torture in Iraqi jail

AFP, Los Angeles

With the White House Wednesday under heavy fire over the Iraqi prisoner abuse scandal, a Canadian businessman is claiming he endured daily torture by American soldiers after being seized in Baghdad.

Hossam Shalout, 57, an Egyptian-born Canadian who lives in Los Angeles, is demanding damages of 350,000 dollars, in a complaint filed with the US Army.

He says his five-week ordeal which ended when he was deported to Egypt, left him suffering from depression, flashbacks, and an obsessive desire for death.

Shalout says he was arrested by US soldiers outside his hotel in Baghdad during a riot in April 2003, and taken to the Bucca detention facility in Umm Qasr, southern Iraq.

He had travelled to Iraq on behalf of his peace group "Rights and Freedom International" in a bid to convince Iraqi leaders to step down to avoid a war with the United States.

After he was taken to Bucca in an armoured personnel carrier, Shalout claims he was subjected to a daily diet of interrogation and torture.

"Shalout was accused of being both a speechwriter for Saddam Hussein as well as his 'right-hand man,'" said Shalout's Portland, Oregon-based lawyer Thomas Nelson in the complaint lodged with the US Army last week.

## Georgia's president takes control in Adjara after renegade leader flees

AFP, Tbilisi

Georgia's President Mikhail Saakashvili made a triumphant arrival in the Black Sea region of Adjara yesterday after the province's renegade leader resigned and fled into exile in dramatic scenes overnight.

Georgian officials announced fresh elections, to choose a replacement for ousted local chieftain Aslan Abashidze and appointed an interim administration to run Adjara -- site of the region's biggest oil terminal -- until a new leader is chosen.

"I congratulate you all," a jubilant Saakashvili, the 36-year-old who came to power in last year's "rose revolution" in the Georgian capital, said as he arrived in Adjara to chair a meeting of his ministers.

"We have shown the world that we are a great people. Only we could have staged two bloodless revolutions in six months," he said. Abashidze's departure in the early hours of Thursday morning was the final act of last year's revolution, in which Saakashvili led weeks of protests which forced then president Eduard Shevardnadze to go into retirement.

But the Adjara chief, a member of Shevardnadze's old guard, stayed on and until Thursday had defied the authority of the capital, Tbilisi, and shown growing separat-

ist tendencies.

Russian news agencies reported that Abashidze had landed in Moscow, accompanied by Russia's Security Council Secretary Igor Ivanov, who had earlier flown to Adjara to help mediate the conflict.

His departure avoided what many feared would be a bloody separatist war, causing turmoil in Georgia just as Western oil companies are building a multi-billion-dollar pipeline through the country to export oil from the Caspian Sea to world markets.

With Abashidze's 12-year rule over Adjara suddenly over and his feared paramilitaries handing in their weapons, Saakashvili's administration set about filling in the power vacuum.

Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania said on Adjara television that new elections would be called and announced the creation of a commission, made up of Saakashvili aides and local figures, to run the region in the interim.

But he said that Adjara's autonomous status within Georgia, enshrined in law since the start of the last century, would be respected.

"The new elections will be held with due account taken of Adjara's special status, which will now be finally clarified by a special constitutional law," Zhvania said.

## Democrats blast Bush for \$25b Iraq fund request

AP, Washington

Democrats are lambasting President Bush for his \$25 billion request for fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan next year, saying they will support the money but accusing him of low-balling the amount for political reasons.

The proposal marked an abrupt reversal for a White House that until recently had insisted it would not seek more money until next year. The reversal came amid intensified combat that is forcing the Pentagon to keep more troops in Iraq than they anticipated, and pressure from lawmakers saying the money must be approved before Congress adjourns in October for presidential and congressional elections.

Administration officials outlined the request to Republican congres-

sional leaders at a closed-door meeting on Wednesday. The money is for the first months of the federal budget year that begins Oct. 1, 2004, but is only half the \$50 billion the White House has said it could need for 2005.

Critics say more than that will be needed. With this year's federal deficit expected to exceed last year's record of \$374 billion, Democrats said the \$25 billion request was an attempt to hide the war's real costs before the fall elections.

"The track record of the Bush White House in accounting for funds for Iraq is a record of confusion, obfuscation, bumbling, denial, and deception," said Sen. Robert Byrd of West Virginia, top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee and a

frequent critic of the administration's Iraq policies.

Rep. Steny Hoyer of Maryland, the No. 2 House Democratic leader, called the request "the most recent episode in a pattern of secrecy by an administration that refuses to share information with the American people even when confronted with facts that stand in opposition to their policies."

Democratic presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry said it was too early to tell whether he would support the proposal. The Massachusetts senator said US troops "need to get what they need," but he faulted the administration for failing to provide them promptly with body armour and Humvee trucks.

## Britain to send Royal Marines back to Iraq

AFP, London

Britain is to send 800 Royal Marine commandos, among other troops, back to Iraq to replace Spanish forces being withdrawn from the country, the Sun newspaper reported yesterday.

It said 40 Commando, one of the British units that took part in the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, would spearhead reinforcements that will also include a unit of the elite Special Boat Service.

It added that the troops would be tasked with regaining control of the city of Najaf, south of Baghdad, where militia loyal to wanted Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr have clashed with coalition forces.

"We have been asked for more men. The Royal Marines will be the lead element," the Sun quoted an unnamed senior government minister as saying.

"It's highly sensitive, but the announcement is due next week."

Besides the Royal Marines and Special Boat Service, the Sun said "several thousand" additional troops, thought to include elements of the Parachute Regiment, would be sent to British-occupied southern Iraq.

The Sun said the extra British troops would replace the 1,300 Spanish soldiers who are being pulled out of Iraq following the election of a new Socialist government in Madrid two months ago.

## IRAQI PRISON ABUSE

## US officer tells of violence, death

REUTERS, San Francisco

A former US military commander in Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison described on Wednesday a chaotic atmosphere of disdain for Iraqi prisoners in which US guards killed at least four during two riots.

Army National Guard Lt. Michael Drayton commanded the 124-person 870th Military Police Company from November to March at the prison, which is the subject of intense focus after pictures of Iraqi prisoners being abused appeared last week.

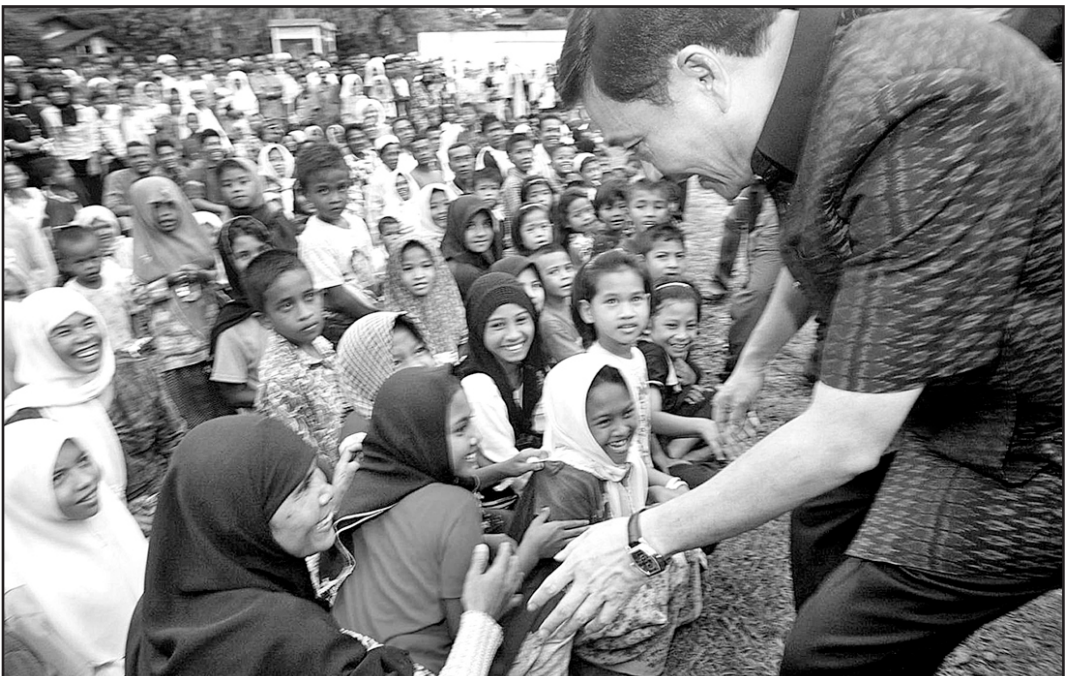
"You got to understand, although

it seems harsh, the Iraqis they only understand force," he told Reuters in an interview. "If you try to talk to them one on one as a normal person, they won't respect you, they won't do what you want, prisoner or just normal person on the street."

"So you've got to be forceful with them in some ways."

"There is a frustration factor dealing with the Iraqis. Everybody wants to choke them. I don't care who you are, (if) you spend enough time around Iraqis."

"But you knew what the lines were, you knew you couldn't do it," he said.



Thailand's Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra meets with relatives of the 18 young Muslim football players, who were killed in bloody clashes with the security forces, and other villagers at a public health center in southern Saba Yoi district yesterday. Thaksin arrived in Thailand's restive Muslim south under tight security, saying he made the trip despite warnings from officials.