

THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM

America wants Iraq to try man

U.S. citizen accused of aiding insurgents

By MARK SHERMAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

The U.S. government wants an Iraqi court to prosecute an American citizen who is being held in Iraq on suspicion that he is a senior operative of insurgent leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

The man's lawyers said he is innocent and likely to be tortured if handed over.

The case is the first known instance in which the government has decided to allow an American to be tried in the new Iraqi legal system. At least four other U.S. citizens suspected of aiding the insurgency had been held in Iraq, the Pentagon has said.

Shawqi Omar, 44, who once served in the Minnesota National Guard, has been held since late 2004 in U.S.-run military prisons as an enemy combatant. He has not been charged with a crime or been given access to a lawyer, said Jonathan Hafetz, a lawyer representing Omar's family in the United States.

The government said Omar, who also holds Jordanian citizenship, was harboring an Iraqi insurgent and four Jordanian fighters at the time of his arrest and also had bomb-making materials. He is described in court papers as a relative of Zarqawi who was plotting to kidnap foreigners from Baghdad hotels.

Separately, Omar, Zarqawi and 11 others have been indicted by a Jordanian court on charges they plotted a chemical attack against Jordan's intelligence agency.

Omar's family said he is a businessman who was seeking reconstruction contracts in Iraq.

The family is asking a U.S. judge to step in and force the government to charge Omar with a crime and put him on trial in the United States, or release him. They also are seeking to prevent Omar's transfer to Iraqi custody, which they said would subject the Sunni Muslim to torture by Shiite-dominated authorities.

Afghans welcome debt relief

The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan

Afghanistan on Wednesday hailed decisions to cancel the impoverished country's debts to the United States, Russia and Germany, but the country likely will remain dependent on foreign aid as it recovers from decades of war.

Afghanistan owed \$108 million to the United States and \$44 million to Germany from loans before the 1979 Soviet invasion. Russia claimed it was owed about \$10 billion from loans to a puppet government in the early 1990s.

"After 30 years of devastation, we are starting from nothing and any move such as this helps the reconstruction of Afghanistan," said Khaleeq Ahmed, a spokesman for President Hamid Karzai.



Dutch troops salute during a ceremony to cede control of their base in Samawah, Iraq, to British forces March 7. Slowly but steadily,

America's allies in Iraq are drawing down or pulling out as Iraqi forces take more responsibility for securing the country.

AP PHOTO

Going, going, gone?

U.S.-led coalition to continue shrinking this year

By WILLIAM J. KOLE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VIENNA, Austria

The Ukrainians are long gone. So are the Norwegians. The Italians and South Koreans are getting ready to leave, and the Britons and Japanese could begin packing their bags later this year.

Slowly but steadily, America's allies in Iraq are drawing down or pulling out as Iraqi forces take more responsibility for securing the country. By year's end, officials say, the coalition — now 25 nations supporting a dwindling U.S. contingent of 138,000 — may shrink noticeably.

The withdrawals and reductions will test the Iraqis' ability to tamp down attacks and rebuild, said Anthony Cordesman of the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, warning in a new report: "It is too soon to predict the extent to which Iraqi forces can eventually replace coalition forces."

Britain, with about 8,000 troops in Iraq, is the United States' most important coalition ally. Officials repeatedly have said they hope to begin bringing home some of their troops this year, though Defense Secretary John Reid has played down recent reports that Britain has settled on a timetable for withdrawal.

"We are going to hand over to the Iraqi security forces ... whenever they are ready to defend their own democracy. We are there as long as we are needed and no longer," Reid told The Associated Press in a recent interview in London, stressing that any withdrawal would be done in stages.

On Tuesday, however, he also made clear that "if things in Iraq continue to progress as they are, there will be significantly fewer British forces there by next year."

Coalition partners

Poland announced this week that it would reduce its troop level in Iraq from nearly 1,500 to 900 by March. The U.S. force currently numbers 138,000 troops.

Britain	8,000
South Korea	3,270
Italy	2,600
Poland	900
Romania	863
Georgia	858
Japan	600
Australia	550
Denmark	530
El Salvador	380
Others*	1,153

* 15 countries with less than 200 troops; includes 120 Bulgarian troops to be deployed by mid-March

SOURCE: Defense Ministries AP

Poland's new president, Lech Kaczynski, said his country might keep its scaled-down contingent of 900 troops in Iraq into 2007.

But other countries have abandoned the coalition, shrinking the overall size of the force to 157,500, including the 138,000 U.S. troops. The Pentagon says the American contingent has been cut to its lowest level since last summer, when a buildup for election security expanded the U.S. force to about 160,000.

In the months after the March 2003 invasion, the multinational force peaked at about 300,000 soldiers from 38 nations

— 250,000 from the United States, about 40,000 from Britain, and the rest ranging from 2,000 Australians to 70 Albanians.

Among the larger contributors to pull out of Iraq was Ukraine, which withdrew its final contingent of 876 troops in December.

Bulgaria also brought home its 380 infantry troops, and though it plans to send in 120 soldiers by mid-March to help guard a refugee camp north of Baghdad, those will be non-combat forces with limited rules of engagement.

Many of the non-U.S. forces are in heavily Kurdish and Shiite regions that are relatively peaceful, unlike Sunni Arab flashpoints where American troops are concentrated.

Key coalition members such as South Korea and Italy — the United States' No. 2 and 3 partners in Iraq after Britain — will begin drawing down this spring.

South Korean officials say they plan to bring home about 1,000 of their 3,270 troops in phases this year from their current base in the northern region of Irbil, where they help train Iraqi security forces and provide security for U.N. officials stationed in the area.

Although a timeframe and details have not been set, the South Korean parliament in December approved the staged draw-down while extending the overall deployment to the end of the year. The South Koreans have not engaged in combat with insurgents, but their deployment nonetheless has been highly unpopular back home.

Italy, which has about 2,600 troops based in the southern city of Nasiriyah, announced last month it would withdraw all its forces by the end of 2006. Officials say the troops will be pulled out gradually and that the current contingent will be roughly halved by June, with civilians replacing soldiers in some tasks.

White House offers select lawmakers details on eavesdropping

By KATHERINE SHRADER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

After weeks of insisting it would not reveal details of its eavesdropping without warrants, the White House reversed course Wednesday and provided a House committee with highly classified information about the operation.

The White House has been under heavy pressure from lawmakers who wanted more information about the National Security Agency's monitoring. Democrats and many Repub-



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licans rejected the administration's contention that they could not be trusted with national security secrets.

The shift came the same day Senate Judiciary Committee

Chairman Arlen Specter, R-Pa., announced he is drafting legislation that would require the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to review the administration's monitoring program and determine if it is constitutional.

It also came after Rep. Heather Wilson, R-N.M., chairwoman of a House intelligence subcommittee that oversees the NSA, broke with the Bush administration and called for a full review of the NSA's program, along with legislative action to update the 1978 Foreign Intelli-

gence Surveillance Act.

She and others also wanted the full House Intelligence Committee to be briefed on the program's operational details. Although the White House initially promised only information about the legal rationale for surveillance, administration officials broadened the scope Wednesday to include more sensitive details about how the program works.

"I think we've had a tremendous impact today," Wilson said at a news conference as Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and Gen. Michael Hayden, the nation's

No. 2 intelligence official, briefed the full Intelligence Committee.

"I don't think the White House would have made the decision that it did had I not stood up and said, 'You must brief the Intelligence Committee,'" said Wilson, a U.S. Air Force veteran.

When asked what prompted the move to give lawmakers more details, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said the administration has stated "from the beginning that we will work with members of Congress, and we will continue to do so regarding this vital national security program."

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