

THE WAR IN IRAQ

House Democrats ready anti-war resolution

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Rep. John Boehner, R-Ohio

House Republican leader on how Republicans will vote for the Democrats' anti-Iraq war resolution

Measure will be voted on by Friday

By DAVID ESPO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

House Democratic leaders circulated a nonbinding resolution Monday saying that Congress "disapproves of the decision of President George W. Bush ... to deploy more than 20,000 additional United States combat troops to Iraq."

The measure, expected to come to a vote by Friday, also says that

"Congress and the American people will continue to support and protect the members of the United States armed forces who are serving or who have served bravely and honorably in Iraq."

Debate on the resolution is scheduled to begin today, with each of the 435 House members allotted five minutes to speak. It will mark the first debate in Congress on the war since Democrats won control of the House and Senate in November's elections.



BUSH

Opposition to the war figured heavily in the outcome of the election.

Democratic leaders in the House and Senate have vowed to force an end to U.S. participation in the war and made debate over a nonbinding resolution a symbolic first step.

The House measure was drafted in simple, unadorned terms, an attempt by Democrats to maximize the number of Republicans who would support it and also to emphasize support for the troops.

Republican leaders have said they expect at least a few dozen defections when the vote is taken later in the week.

House Republican leader John Boehner, R-Ohio, has said the GOP

will have an alternative, but it is not clear that majority Democrats will allow it to be offered on the House floor.

"We're going to have Republicans who are skeptical of (Bush's) plan who'll probably vote for this," he said. Asked if he thought House Republicans would lose a third of their members to the Democrats' resolution, he said, "I don't think we'll lose that many."

Boehner complained Sunday that Democrats had backed out of a promise to allow an immediate, wide-ranging debate on Iraq.

On Thursday, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer said Republicans would be permitted to pro-

pose an alternative this week to the Democrats' resolution. But on Sunday, Hoyer said that is "not necessarily our plan."

Hoyer, D-Md., said a House vote will be limited to the proposed resolution opposing President Bush's troop escalation and a Republican alternative would be voted on 30 to 45 days from now.

"Live up to your word," Boehner told Hoyer. Democrats, Boehner said, "won't even let us have a substitute. ... Give us a vote this week."

Boehner said Republicans want to offer a resolution saying a bipartisan panel should oversee the president's plan, with benchmarks to keep track of whether it is progressing.

Iran: No weapons given to militants

Iranian president wants dialogue with U.S. on Iraq

By ALI AKBAR DAREINI
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TEHRAN, Iran

Iran's hard-line president, who has berated the United States and refused to compromise on his nuclear program, is now softening his tone, saying Monday he wants dialogue rather than confrontation in Iraq.

Tehran also denied it gave sophisticated weapons to militants to attack U.S. forces.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad insisted that turmoil in Iraq is bad for his country and dialogue, not force, was the solution to the region's conflicts.

"We shy away from any kind of conflict, any kind of bloodshed," Ahmadinejad told ABC's "Good Morning America."

Ahmadinejad in recent weeks has taken a milder approach to diplomacy. The change in tone comes at a time when domestic criticism of the controversial leader has increased, with both reformers and fellow conservatives complaining that Ahmadinejad spends too much time criticizing the United States and Israel and not enough on internal issues such as Iran's struggling economy.

At the same time, the United States appears to be hardening its accusations against Iran, including claims that the highest levels of the Iranian leadership armed Shiites in Iraq with sophisticated armor-piercing roadside bombs that have killed more than 170 troops from the U.S.-led coalition.

Iran on Monday staunchly denied the accusations, comparing them to Washington's allegations before the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq that Saddam Hussein's regime possessed weapons of mass destruction. No such weapons were ever found.

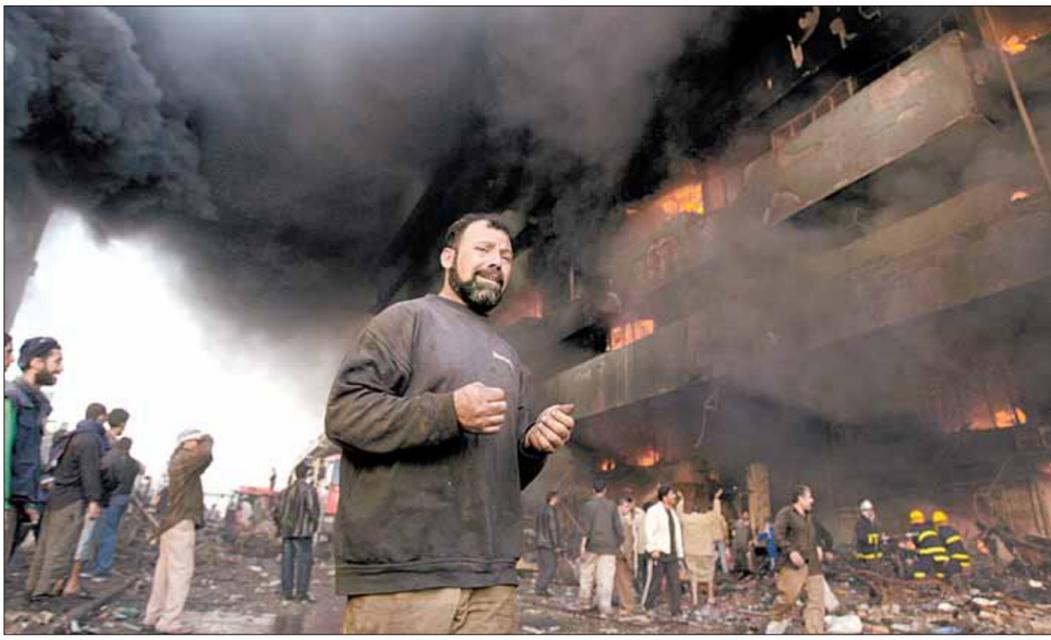
"Such accusations cannot be relied upon or be presented as evidence. The United States has a long history in fabricating evidence. Such charges are unacceptable," Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini said.

The White House on Monday did not back down from its allegations, saying it was confident the report about the weapons flow from Iran to Iraq was accurate.



AHMADINEJAD

Car bombs kill 78



An Iraqi stands in front of a building in flames after a double car bomb attack in central Baghdad, Iraq, on Monday. Several car bombs destroyed a marketplace, killing 78 people. Flames from the bombs ignited an eight-story building.

Multiple blasts destroy marketplace, 8-story building

By KIM GAMEL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

Thunderous car bombs shattered a crowded marketplace in the heart of Baghdad on Monday, triggering secondary explosions, engulfing an eight-story building in flames and killing at least 78 people in the latest in a series of similar attacks aimed at the country's Shiite majority.

The blasts in three parked cars obliterated shops and stalls and left bodies scattered among mannequins and other debris in pools of blood. Dense smoke blackened the area and rose hundreds of feet from the rubble-strewn street as firefighters battled blazes in two buildings.

"Where is the government? Where is the security plan?" survivors screamed. "We have had enough. We have lost our money and goods and our source of living."

The attack appeared timed to coincide with the first anniversary, on the Muslim lunar calendar, of the bombing of a Shiite shrine in the town of Samarra north of Baghdad, an al-Qaida provocation which unleashed the torrent of sectarian bloodletting that has gripped the capital for months.

Monday's bombings wrecked the Shorja market, Baghdad's oldest, a day after joint U.S. and Iraqi forces temporarily sealed an adjacent neighborhood. The operation was part of the latest Baghdad security push to which President Bush has committed an additional 21,500 American troops. The U.S. military would not say if it had increased security patrols against potential violence on the Samarra anniversary.

Nationwide, 139 people were killed or



People grieve following a bomb attack in central Baghdad on Monday.

found dead in violence on Monday, according to police reports. About 30 minutes before the attack on the market, a suicide bomber detonated an explosives vest in a crowd near a popular falafel restaurant in the nearby Bab al-Sharqi area. Nine people were killed and 19 were wounded.

A 15-minute period of commemoration in the capital marking the February 2006 attack on the al-Askariya shrine had just ended when attack on the market took place.

The sound of two of the blasts was caught on tape as Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was delivering a speech live on television from the Cabinet building in the heavily fortified Green Zone at the end of the commemoration.

The Shiite prime minister didn't flinch, though his bodyguards did, as he called for unity and said he was optimistic about the U.S.-Iraqi security sweep that officials said will gain momentum this week.

"We have great faith in our security ser-

vices, army and police who have proved that they are a real protective force for this country, and we have faith that Iraqis have realized that there will be no future for this country unless terrorism is curbed," he said.

Brig. Abdul-Karim Khalaf, the Interior Ministry spokesman, told Iraqiya state television that three suspects were arrested — an Iraqi and two foreigners — in the attack on the marketplace.

The car bombs exploded within seconds of each other. One of the cars was parked near the entrance to a parking garage under one of the two targeted buildings, about 200 yards apart.

Ambulances and pickup trucks rushed many of the nearly 166 wounded to nearby al-Kindi Hospital in the largely Shiite neighborhood, which has been hit by a series of deadly bombings this year.

Elsewhere in Baghdad, some roads and bridges were closed after al-Maliki called for government offices to set aside time to remember the Samarra bombing. The statement announcing the ceremony urged all citizens to "chant 'God is great' in all the mosques, and to ring bells in all the churches."

The anniversary fell on Monday according to the Islamic lunar calendar. The lunar month is never longer than 30 days or shorter than 29. The beginning of each lunar month is set by religious authorities. The Samarra attack took place on Feb. 22 according to the Western calendar.

"The explosion of the holy shrine pushed the country into blind violence, in which tens of thousands of innocents were killed. No one knows but Allah when this tragedy will be over," Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's top Shiite cleric, said in a statement issued Monday before the bombings.

Ex-Saddam deputy sentenced to death

Man's first verdict overturned by court

By SINAN SALAHEDDIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

An Iraqi court on Monday raised the sentence against

Saddam Hussein's vice president to death by hanging for the killings of Shiites in the town of Dujail.

The decision had been expected after an appeals court ruled that Taha Yassin Ramadan's previous sentence of life in prison was too lenient.

Ramadan is the fourth member of the ousted regime to face capital punishment for the killings of 148 Shiites after a 1982 attempt on Saddam's life in the mainly Shiite town of Dujail, north of Baghdad.

Saddam, his half brother and former intelligence chief Barzan Ibrahim, and Awad Hamed al-Bandar, former head of Iraq's Revolutionary Court, also were sent to the gallows.

"I swear to God that I'm innocent, Allah is my supporter and will take revenge on all who treated me unjustly!" Ramadan yelled after the verdict was read.

The chief judge, Ali al-Kahachi, ordered him removed from the courtroom. He said the case would be automatically appealed.

Ramadan was convicted on Nov. 5 of murder, forced deportation and torture and sentenced to life in prison. A month later, the appeals court said the sentence was too lenient and returned his case to the High Tribunal, demanding he be sentenced to death. The court agreed to turn it to a death sentence.

Saddam was hanged on Dec. 30, while Ibrahim and al-Bandar were executed Jan. 15, provoking anger among their fellow Sunnis after the former leader's half brother was decapitated on the gallows.

Human Rights Watch and the International Center for Transitional Justice issued a joint statement on the eve of Ramadan's hearing saying the evidence against him was insufficient for a death sentence.

"The tribunal found Ramadan guilty without evidence linking him to the horrific crimes committed in Dujail," said Richard Dicker, director of the International Justice Program at Human Rights Watch.

"Ramadan was convicted in an unfair trial, and increasing his punishment from life imprisonment to death reeks of vengeance."

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