

WAR IN IRAQ



AP PHOTO

A woman reacts at the scene of a car bomb blast in the predominantly Shiite commercial district of Karradah in downtown Baghdad, Iraq, on Tuesday. Four people, including a woman and a 7-year-old boy, were killed, and seven others were wounded, police said.

General predicts 'tough days' as buildup unfolds

Senators grill officer who would carry out Bush plan

By ANNE FLAHERTY
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

The Army general who would carry out President Bush's new war plan urged a skeptical Congress and American public Tuesday to be patient but acknowledged the situation in Iraq is dire.

"None of this will be rapid," Lt. Gen. David Petraeus told the Senate Armed Services Committee. "The way ahead will be neither quick nor easy."

Many in Congress, including some Republicans, oppose Bush's plan, which would send an extra 21,500 U.S. troops to Iraq as part of a revised strategy for quelling sectarian violence in Baghdad and stabilizing the country. Before Bush's buildup began in recent days, there were 132,000 U.S. troops there.

In a sign of the strain of the Iraq war, the top generals in the Army and Marine Corps told a House committee Tuesday voiced concern about the military's ability to respond to other world crises.

"We have examined other war plans and our capability to respond to those plans, and we see that we are lacking in some areas in our ability to do so," said Gen. James Conway, commandant of the Marine Corps.

"We feel we would be able to respond with those forces that are not committed to Iraq or Afghanistan, that the response would be slower than we might like," he said.

Bush nominated Petraeus to replace Army Gen. George Casey as the senior American commander in Iraq. Petraeus is considered a shoo-in to win Senate confirmation as commander of Multinational Forces-Iraq, but senators used his appearance Tuesday before the Senate panel to question him on how Bush's new strategy would work.

Sen. Carl Levin, committee chairman



PETRAEUS

HELICOPTER CRASH



SOURCES: National Imagery and Mapping Agency AP

BAGHDAD, Iraq — A helicopter owned by the private security firm Blackwater USA crashed Tuesday in central Baghdad, killing five civilians on board, U.S. military officials said.

A senior Iraqi defense official said the aircraft was shot down over a predominantly Sunni neighborhood, but an American military official said there was no indication the helicopter was shot down.

The Iraqi official, who would not allow use of his name because the information had not been made public, said a gunman with a PKC machine gun downed the small helicopter of a private security firm Tuesday afternoon over the heavily Sunni Fadhill neighborhood in north-central Baghdad, where witnesses reported clashes between insurgents and U.S. and Iraqi forces.

and a leading war policy critic, pressed Petraeus on whether the flow of additional U.S. troops could be halted in mid-stream if the Iraqi government failed to meet its commitment to provide thousands more Iraqi troops.

"It could," Petraeus replied. Earlier he said there were no "specific conditions" the Iraqis must meet in order to keep the flow of U.S. forces moving. The last of five additional U.S. brigades are scheduled to arrive in the Iraqi capital in May; the first got there just days ago.

Petraeus said that in the event the Iraqis did not meet their commitments,

he would consult with Defense Secretary Robert Gates on how to respond.

He said he would not have accepted the nomination to take command in Baghdad if he did not believe Bush's plan could achieve its goals.

In his opening statement, Petraeus, 54, painted a grim picture of conditions in Iraq. "The situation in Iraq is dire. The stakes are high. There are no easy choices. The way ahead will be very hard. ... But hard is not hopeless," he said.

Petraeus is a former division commander and once the head of the Iraqi training mission. Devoted early in the war to trying to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis, Petraeus later wrote the Pentagon manual on how to tackle insurgencies. He also previously supported expanding U.S. forces in the region.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., a leading proponent of Bush's troop buildup plan, asked Petraeus how long he thought the U.S. buildup could be sustained.

"I am keenly aware of the strain" on the Army and Marine Corps, Petraeus said, adding that he welcomes Bush's proposal to increase the size of the land forces over the coming five years.

Asked by McCain how soon he thought he would know whether the new strategy was working, Petraeus said, "We would have indicators at the least during the late summer." As currently planned, he said, the last of the five additional U.S. Army brigades would be ready to fight in Baghdad by the end of May.

"I wonder whether the clock has already run out," said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, a sponsor of a GOP-led resolution saying the Senate disagrees with the buildup. She said she was worried that U.S. troops in Iraq are already perceived not as liberators, but as occupiers.

Sen. Edward Kennedy asked Petraeus why an extra 21,500 would make a significant difference.

Petraeus replied that the important factor was how extra troops are used, not their numbers. Their main focus, he said, will be on securing the civilian population of the capital rather than killing insurgents.

Defense: Officials sacrificed Libby to protect Rove

Attorney aims to cast aide as scapegoat

By MATT APUZZO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

Top White House officials tried to blame vice presidential aide Lewis "Scooter" Libby for the 2003 leak of a CIA operative's identity to protect President Bush's political strategist, Karl Rove, Libby's defense attorney said Tuesday as his perjury trial began.

Libby is accused of lying to FBI agents, who began investigating after syndicated columnist Robert Novak revealed that a chief Bush administration critic, Joseph Wilson, was married to CIA operative Valerie Plame.

When the leak investigation was launched, White House officials cleared Rove of wrongdoing but stopped short of doing so for Libby, who had been asked to counter Wilson's criticisms, felt betrayed and sought out his boss, Vice President Dick Cheney, Wells said.

"They're trying to set me up. They want me to be the sacrificial lamb," attorney Theodore Wells said, recalling Libby's end of the conversation. "I will not be sacrificed so Karl Rove can be protected."

Rove was one of two sources for Novak's story. The other was then-Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage. Nobody, including Rove and Armitage, has been charged with the leak. Libby is accused of lying to investigators and obstructing the probe into the leak.

Cheney's notes from that meeting underscore Libby's concern, Wells said.

"Not going to protect one staffer and sacrifice the guy that was asked to stick his neck in the meat grinder," the note said, according to Wells.

The description of the White House infighting was a rare glimpse into the secretive workings of Bush's inner circle. It also underscores how hectic and stressful the White House had become when the probe was launched.

By pointing the finger at Rove, whom he referred to as "the lifeblood of the Republican Party," Wells sought to cast Libby as a scapegoat.

"He is an innocent man and he has been wrongly and unjustly and unfairly accused," Wells said. As the trial opened with a pre-



LIBBY



ROVE

view of each side's position, it was clear that the jury will be tasked with sorting through conflicting statements in a high-profile case that has opened a very public window on the behind-the-scenes Washington practice of leaking sensitive information to the news media.

Special Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald told a far different story from Wells. He described for jurors a Bush administration effort to beat back early criticism of the Iraq war and accused Libby of lying to investigators about his role in that campaign.

Using a computerized calendar during opening statement, Fitzgerald described a tumultuous week in 2003 when he said the White House was under "direct attack" from Wilson.

Fitzgerald said Libby learned from five people — from Cheney to members of the CIA and State Department — that Wilson's wife worked for the CIA. Libby discussed that fact to reporters and others in the White House, Fitzgerald said.

"But when the FBI and grand jury asked about what the defendant did," Fitzgerald said, "he made up a story."

Libby told investigators he learned about Plame from NBC News reporter Tim Russert. But Fitzgerald told jurors that was clearly a lie because Libby had already been discussing the matter inside and outside of the White House.

"You can't learn something on Thursday that you're giving out on Monday," Fitzgerald said.

Libby says he didn't lie but was simply bogged down by national security issues and couldn't remember his conversations with New York Times reporter Judith Miller, Time magazine reporter Matthew Cooper and Russert.

"He spends his day trying to connect the dots to be sure we don't have another 9/11," Wells said.

The trial is expected to last four to six weeks.

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