

Officials: Man who recorded hanging arrested

Two co-defendants in Saddam trial to be executed soon

By STEVEN R. HURST
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

Iraqi authorities reported the arrests Wednesday of two guards and an official who supervised Saddam Hussein's hanging and said the guard force was infiltrated by outsiders who taunted the former leader and shot the video showing his body dangling at the end of a rope.

The unauthorized video, which ignited protests by Saddam's fellow Sunni Arabs in various Iraqi cities, threatens to turn the ousted dictator into a martyr. Saddam was shown never bowing his head as he faced death and asking the hecklers if they were acting in a manly way.

Saddam, who was convicted for the killings of 148 Shiites, was dignified and courteous to his American jailers up to the moment he was handed over to the Iraqis outside the execution chamber, a U.S. military spokesman said Wednesday.

He "was courteous, as he always had been, to his U.S. military police guards," Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell said. "He spoke very well to our military police, as he always had. And when getting off there at the prison site, he said farewell to his interpreter. He thanked the military police squad, the lieutenant,



Iraqis hold up pictures of Saddam Hussein while protesting his execution in Samarra, Iraq, on Wednesday. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ordered an investigation

the squad leader, the medical doctor we had present and the colonel that was on site."

Although Saddam "was still dignified toward us," Caldwell said his demeanor changed "at the prison facility when the Iraqi guards were assuming control of him."

National Security Adviser Mowaffak al-Rubaie and two other top officials variously reported one to three men were

being questioned in the investigation into who heckled Saddam as he was minutes from death and took cell phone pictures of his execution.

"The investigation has already had an arrest warrant against one person and two to follow," al-Rubaie told CNN. He said the guard force at the execution was infiltrated by an Arab television station or another outsider.

The clandestine footage appeared on Al-Jazeera television and Web sites just hours after Saddam was hanged Saturday. The tumultuous scenes quickly overshadowed an official execution video, which was mute and showed none of the uproar among those on the floor of the chamber below the gallows.

Sami al-Askeri, a Shiite lawmaker who advises Prime

Minister Nouri al-Maliki, said two "Justice Ministry guards were being questioned. The investigation committee is interrogating the men. If it is found that any official was involved, he will face legal measures."

A second key al-Maliki adviser, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to release the information, said, "In the past few hours, the government has arrested the person who videotaped Saddam's execution. He was an official who supervised the execution and now he is under investigation."

Prosecutor Munqith al-Faroon, one of 14 official witnesses to the execution, told The Associated Press that he saw two government officials using camera phones at the hanging.

"I saw two of the government officials who were ... present during the execution taking all the video of the execution, using the lights that were there for the official taping of the execution," he said. "They used mobile phone cameras. I do not know their names, but I would remember their faces."

Caldwell said no Americans were present for the hanging and that the tumultuous execution would have gone differently had the Americans been in charge.

As the storm over the handling of the hanging gained strength, Caldwell was among several U.S. officials who suggested displeasure with the conduct of the execution.

"If you are asking me: 'Would we have done things differently?' Yes, we would have. But that's

not our decision. That's the government of Iraq's decision," the general said.

The Bush administration sent conflicting signals Wednesday about the taunting and baiting that accompanied Saddam's execution, with the White House declining to join criticism of the procedure and the State Department echoing the U.S. military's questions about it.

"The president is focused on the new way forward in Iraq so these issues are best addressed out of Iraq, out of Baghdad," deputy White House press secretary Scott Stanzel said. "Prime Minister Maliki's staff have already expressed their disappointment in the filmings, so I guess we'll leave it at that."

Stanzel said the U.S. military and the U.S. Embassy in Iraq had expressed concerns about the timing of the execution and about "the process and what took place."

State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said U.S. officials had questioned holding the execution on a Muslim festival day, the opening of Eid al-Adha, and as well as some procedures.

U.S. Embassy spokesman Lou Finton said Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and his diplomatic team "did engage the government of Iraq on issues relating to procedures involved in the timing of the execution (of Saddam), given the upcoming holy days. While the government of Iraq gave consideration to U.S. concerns, all decisions made regarding the execution were Iraqi decisions based on their own considerations."

Official: Too many Afghans killed

NATO working to reduce number of civilian casualties from fighting

By JASON STRAZIUSO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, Afghanistan

NATO said Wednesday that it killed too many Afghan civilians during fighting last year against resurgent Taliban militants, but that the Western alliance was working to change that in 2007.

The acknowledgment came one day after President Hamid Karzai's latest plea for foreign forces to use maximum caution following the deaths of two civilians, reportedly involving NATO troops.

"The single thing that we have done wrong and we are striving extremely hard to improve on (in 2007) is killing innocent civilians," Brig. Richard E. Nugee, the chief spokesman for NATO's International Security Assistance Force, told a news conference.

Nugee said the alliance has been reviewing for several weeks measures to reduce the number of civilian casualties, without elaborating.

NATO forces were accused of killing dozens of civilians last year in airstrikes, battles and other shootings, prompting Karzai to issue several pleas for international forces to use greater caution in their operations.

Still, Nugee said NATO forces had killed far fewer civilians than the Taliban, which launched a record number of roadside and suicide bombs last year.

"There is absolutely no comparison to be made," he said. "The Taliban are killing significant numbers of their own people and showing no remorse at all."

Militants launched 117 suicide attacks in 2006, about a sixfold increase over 2005, killing 206



An Afghan police officer passes a damaged vehicle used in a suicide bombing attack that most likely targeted a member of the Afghan parliament in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Dec. 22. The bombing took place outside Bacha Khan Zadrans home, missing the parliamentarian but injuring eight others, police said.

Afghan civilians, 54 Afghan security personnel and 18 NATO soldiers, according to NATO numbers.

Karzai, in a statement Tuesday, expressed "deep regret" over the deaths of two civilians in Nangarhar province a few days earlier. The Afghan Interior Ministry had said foreign troops were involved, although NATO spokesman Maj. Dominic Whyte said no NATO or U.S.-led coalition soldiers were responsible.

"Once again, I urge the Afghan and international forces to ensure greater coordination between themselves and to practice maximum caution during their anti-terrorist operations so that civilians are not harmed," Karzai said.

Karzai last month broke down in tears during a speech in which he recounted stories of children

maimed by bombings. "We can't prevent the terrorists from coming from Pakistan, and we can't prevent the coalition from bombing the terrorists, and our children are dying because of this," he said.

NATO airstrikes in the Panjwayi district of southern Kandahar province in October reportedly killed dozens of civilians, including 20 members of one family, according to Afghan authorities.

A joint Afghan-NATO investigation into the incident has never been released. The New York Times has reported that the investigation found that 31 civilians were killed.

Nugee said that commanders have looked at the report "in very fine detail."

"While it has not come out publicly, it has made quite an impact

"The single thing that we have done wrong and we are striving extremely hard to improve on (in 2007) is killing innocent civilians."

Brig. Richard E. Nugee
Chief spokesman for NATO's International Security Assistance Force on the alliance's plan to reduce civilian casualties in Afghanistan

on this headquarters," he said. After the October incident, Human Rights Watch said NATO wasn't doing enough to prevent civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

Sam Zarifi, the group's Asia research director, said NATO "should reconsider the use of highly destructive but hard-to-target weaponry in areas where there is a clear risk of considerable civilian casualties," referring to aerial bombs and missiles that can easily miss their target. The human rights group also criticized the Taliban and other insurgents for placing civilians at risk "by using populated areas to launch attacks on NATO and Afghan government forces."

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