

THE STRUGGLE FOR IRAQ: The Administrator, and Antiwar Rallies Around the World

THE RECONSTRUCTION

Bremer Tries to Push Iraq on Difficult Path Toward Self-Rule

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than 100,000 American soldiers trying to crush the guerrilla and terrorist campaigns still roiling the cities and countryside.

Most ambitious of all, Mr. Bremer has spearheaded the Bush administration's plan to implant a democratic system here, a blueprint that includes nationwide elections, a federal constitution and the rapid transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqi people.

To accomplish that, he and his team have set up more than 250 city councils across the country and are rapidly preparing the central government to take over when the American occupation officially ends on June 30. And that, finally, will be the measure of his success or failure: whether the institutions he has tried to implant here — at the accelerated pace he demanded — sink or float.

Mr. Bremer, a polished diplomat who does not want for self-assurance, says the desire for democracy he sees in the eyes of Iraqis will prevail over the efforts of those who are trying to destroy it. Success, he says, is much more likely than the nightmare set of events feared by many Iraqis of terrorism and civil war. "I think the chances are very slim," he said of the likelihood of disaster, when he made public remarks on Friday to observe the anniversary of the start of the war. "You can always play 'what if.' I just don't think it's going to happen. This country is very different from 12 months ago."

As the man who replaced Mr. Hussein, Mr. Bremer looms large over this occupied land. He is regarded by many Iraqis as earnest and hard-working, the benevolent despot they never had.

In January, when the Americans began replacing the old Iraqi currency, known here as "Saddam money," the face of the deposed Iraqi leader was removed from the new notes. Mr. Hussein's face was replaced by a date palm, but Iraqis quickly gave the currency a new name: "Bremer money."

Some Iraqis ask Mr. Bremer for personal help. Among them is Ali Bresssem, a villager who has been searching for a year for a way to help his 12-year-old son. The boy's face was scorched by an American cluster bomb at the start of the war. One day, Mr. Bresssem went to a computer shop and had a letter typed.

"Dear Mr. Bremer," the letter began. "Please accept our gratitude. During the last war of liberating Iraq, my house was exposed to a bombing. What is worse is that my son Ayad was exposed to a very severe injury in his eyes and face. We need help. We have no one to resort to but your excellency."

Mr. Bresssem, a date farmer in the southern town of Kifil, recently took a bus to Baghdad, looking for Mr. Bremer's driver. "If I could find his driver," he said, "he could take my letter to Mr. Bremer." But when he got to the heavily protected area known as the green zone, he said, soldiers shoed him away.

For Americans in the green zone, the impeccably dressed Mr. Bremer has inspired something of a fad. His one sartorial concession to the war zone is a pair of combat boots, usually worn with a wool blazer, silk tie and white handkerchief. Many American officials now wear combat boots with suits and ties; so, too, when he visits, does Mr. Bremer's boss, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld.

Summing up his accomplishments, Mr. Bremer reminds his questioners that he did not create the disaster that befell Baghdad and much of Iraq in the anarchic days that followed the collapse of Mr. Hussein's government. He was merely asked to clean it up.

"As I drove in from the airport, Baghdad was on fire, literally," Mr. Bremer said. "There was no traffic in the streets. There was not a single policeman on duty anywhere in the country. There was no electricity anywhere in the country. There was no economic activity anywhere."

When he gazes out on Iraq today, he sees a country where a measure of law and order

Jeffrey Gettleman contributed reporting from Baghdad for this article.



L. Paul Bremer III, the chief American administrator in Iraq, heads for his helicopter after a recent meeting with officials in Al Kut.

has been restored, where economic growth has resumed, where the basic elements of a modern society, like electricity and running water and schools, have largely returned to what they were before the war. Oil production, the country's fountain of wealth, has returned to its prewar levels. There is a constitution, finally signed by the Iraqis, that provides for individual rights.

Iraq is now poised, Mr. Bremer says, to enter a period of rapid growth, development and prosperity. "So when I look at where we have arrived from where started, it is an

Widely criticized decisions, and impressive gains like an interim constitution.

astonishing record," he said.

Americans and Iraqis who work closely with him praise his drive and his ability to grapple with the range of Iraq's problems. To many Iraqi leaders, his finest moment came with the completion of the interim constitution, an effort that succeeded in securing the assent of all 25 members of the Iraqi Governing Council and reconciling the desires of Iraq's tapestry of ethnic and religious groups.

The agreement was reached after days of intricate bargaining, which Iraqi leaders say Mr. Bremer shepherded at almost every step. When the Iraqis hit a snag around midnight on Feb. 29, the deadline they had set for themselves, Mr. Bremer proved decisive in breaking the deadlock. "It was past midnight, but Bremer said no one was going home," said Rozh Shawais, a senior leader in the Kurdish Democratic Party.

In fact, Mr. Bremer let the Iraqi leaders go home early that morning. They later returned, finally striking a deal at 4:20 the next morning. "Bremer was involved in every detail of the constitution," Mr. Shawais said.

But while few doubt Mr. Bremer's commitment, some Iraqis say that in his drive to impose his vision on the country, he has sometimes failed to listen and, as a result, has

made serious mistakes.

The most widely criticized of his decisions was one he made before he had even arrived. On the plane to Iraq, he decided to disband the 400,000-man Iraqi Army, which left thousands of trained soldiers unemployed. American officials say many of those former soldiers later formed the backbone of the guerrilla resistance to the occupation.

Despite the criticism, Mr. Bremer stands by the decision, saying there was no Iraqi army left to deal with anyway. "I don't have any second thoughts about disbanding the army," he said. "Neither did the secretary of defense, and he's my boss."

Other pitfalls have marked Mr. Bremer's tenure here, many of them turning into political embarrassments. According to administration officials, Mr. Bremer assured officials in Washington last fall that he could persuade Iraqi leaders to accept the presence of Turkish troops in the country.

Instead, the Iraqis, deeply suspicious of Turkish motives, rebelled, forcing the Bush administration and the Turks to back off.

Like many Americans and Iraqis, Mr. Bremer also seemed to underestimate the political power of Iraq's Shiite majority, and in particular, of its religious leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Shiite leaders say they warned Mr. Bremer last fall when he presented them with a plan that called for caucus-style gatherings as the primary means for choosing a national assembly.

When Mr. Bremer persisted, Ayatollah Sistani declared his opposition and sent thousands of Iraqis into the streets. The caucus plan was abandoned.

"Bremer has a personality type which is domineering, determined and decisive," said Dr. Mowaffak al-Rubaie, a member of the Iraqi Governing Council and a neurologist. "He makes decisions on the run. Nine out of 10 times, he makes the right decision. But the 10th time, he makes the wrong one, and that's the really important issue."

Many Iraqi leaders have credited Mr. Bremer with helping transform the Governing Council from an unwieldy debating society into a functioning legislature. At the same time, some Iraqis say he has sometimes gone too far, dictating to the Iraqis what they must and must not do.

In February, with Iraqi leaders nearly finished writing their constitution, Mr. Bremer publicly threatened to veto any attempt to impose Islamic law. The statement enraged Shiite leaders, who say they were so angered by his threat that they inserted stronger terms regarding Islam than they had originally favored.

"When Mr. Bremer said that, we felt that Islam might be excluded," said Hamed al-Bayati, a senior leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, a political party. "So we decided to strengthen the role of Islam."

What seems certain is that the next few months will be dangerous. American and Iraqi officials are bracing for new waves of suicide attacks, intended to turn the Iraqis against their would-be protectors.

On a visit to Al Kut, a city southeast of Baghdad, Mr. Bremer found mixed signs. The chairman of the provincial council, Abid Sulaiman al-Satar, told him that there was not enough time before June 30 to prepare for the transfer. The police were incompetent, Mr. Satar said, and he feared that some local political parties would take advantage of the instability. "We have to have a longer period of time," he told Mr. Bremer. "This is a very short time to ensure that the political process is good."

Mr. Bremer waved away the warnings. "People are going to have to learn faster," he told Mr. Satar. "Most Iraqis do not want elections to be delayed."

Later in the day, Mr. Bremer flew by helicopter to inspect an irrigation project financed by the United States. The scene, choreographed by his handlers, nonetheless contained signs that the Iraqi enterprise was gathering a momentum of its own.

The project, costing \$167,000, refurbished or replaced five aging irrigation pumps on the Tigris River. It was the first time in 36 years, said an Iraqi supervisor, that the pumps had operated at full capacity.

"Thank you, thank you!" cried Hekmet Rasoo, the 64-year-old supervisor, shaking Mr. Bremer's hand. Behind him, a crowd of Iraqis had come of their houses to wave.

"They should thank you," Mr. Bremer said of the Iraqis. "You're doing all the work."

THE MILITARY

6 G.I.'s in Iraq Are Charged With Abuse Of Prisoners

By THOM SHANKER

BAGHDAD, March 20 — The American military brought charges on Saturday of assault, cruelty, indecent acts and maltreatment of detainees against six soldiers in connection with alleged abuse of prisoners in Iraq.

Eleven other soldiers remain suspended from duty while the investigation continues into possible mistreatment of detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison, west of Baghdad.

Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, deputy director of operations for the joint task force here, announced the charges against the six members of a military police battalion.

The military also said that American troops might not have been responsible for killing two journalists for an Arabic-language station at a checkpoint this week but that the investigation was continuing. In the tense area near Falluja on Saturday, an American marine was killed by guerrillas, the military said.

General Kimmitt, making his announcement of the charges, said: "The coalition takes all reports of detainee abuse seriously, and all allegations of mistreatment are investigated. We are committed to treating all persons under coalition control with dignity, respect and humanity."

Even so, the announcement will doubtless be cited by human rights groups, as well as former Iraqi detainees, as further evidence to bolster their claims that the American military has treated prisoners harshly or abused them in certain cases.

Besides the criminal investigation, an equally significant inquiry is under way, a possibly far-reaching administrative review of commanders' policies regarding detainees and of internal procedures in use at all of the prisons in Iraq that are controlled by occupation forces.

The American-led, multinational force is holding about 9,500 suspected insurgents and criminals, a military spokesman said Saturday. Just under 1,500 are at Abu Ghraib, a prison that was notorious under Saddam Hussein for overcrowded cells and torture chambers.

The current investigation into possible abuse involves the treatment of about 20 of those prisoners in November and December of last year.

No specifics about the alleged mistreatment have been released. The names, ranks and even branch of service of the six military police battalion members charged with the crimes also have not been released.

Under the Uniform Code of Military Justice that governs members of the armed services, the six now face a hearing to determine whether the case will go forward to trial.

All 17 of the soldiers being scrutinized in the case remain in Iraq, and the 11 suspended from duty remain under investigation and are performing administrative tasks.

Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, the senior military officer in Iraq, ordered an investigation on Jan. 14 after allegations of abuse surfaced.

But complaints go far beyond specific allegations of harsh treatment and abuse. The families of many of those held by the military have complained to commanders that they cannot find their relatives within the detention system, and are demanding that the detainees be charged with crimes or freed.

The Abu Ghraib case is not the only set of accusations against soldiers for abuse of detainees.

In early January, three Army reservists were discharged for abusing prisoners at a detention center near Basra, in southern Iraq. Their commander determined that the three soldiers had kicked and punched prisoners or encouraged others to do so.

Late last year, Lt. Col. Allen B. West, a battalion commander in the Fourth Infantry Division, resigned from the Army after it was disclosed that he fired a pistol near a detainee during an interrogation, apparently in an effort to frighten the man into disclosing information about impending attacks. Colonel West defended his actions as necessary to protect his troops.

Names of the Dead

The Department of Defense has identified 575 American service members who have died since the start of the Iraq war. It confirmed the death of the following Americans on Friday:

BROWNFIELD, Andrew D. 24, Cpl., Marines; Summit, Ohio; First Expeditionary Force.
ESPOSITO, Michael J. Jr., 22, Sgt., Army; Brentwood, N.Y.; 10th Mountain Division.
LAGMAN, Anthony S., 26, Staff Sgt., Army; Yonkers, N.Y.; 10th Mountain Division.
SUTPHIN, Ernest Harold, 21, Pfc., Army; Parkersburg, W.Va.; 25th Infantry Division.

MIDEAST VISIT

U.S. Doesn't Seek to Impose Reforms, Powell Tells Kuwaitis and Saudis

By STEVEN R. WEISMAN

KUWAIT, March 20 — Secretary of State Colin L. Powell sought this weekend to allay the furor in the Middle East over the Bush administration's proposed democracy initiative for the region, assuring the leaders of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia that there was no intention to impose reforms on their countries.

Speaking after a session with Kuwaiti officials on Saturday, Mr. Powell said the United States simply wanted to support "the voices of reform in this region" with assistance that would be coordinated with other major industrial nations when they meet at a summit session later this year in Sea Island, Ga.

An initial proposal for a resolution calling for democratic reforms was circulated earlier this year and proposed for adoption at Sea Island. But it stirred an uproar when a copy was leaked to an Arabic-language newspaper.

Administration officials said later that the leaked version would be set aside and replaced by something that promised to support reforms already under way.

"President Bush has advanced a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East," Mr. Powell said here at a joint news conference with the Kuwaiti foreign minister, Sheik Mu-

hammad Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah.

Reform, he added, "must come from within the region" and with each country "examining its own history, its own culture, its own stage of political development."

The initial American proposal for the Sea Island meeting also stirred criticism in Europe. French officials called the original draft condescending and likely to backfire. European and Arab leaders are also demanding that any declaration be accompanied by support for peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

The Europeans have also demanded that Pakistan and Afghanistan be removed as recipients of aid in the so-called Greater Middle East Initiative. They said labeling those two countries as part of a "greater" Middle East reflected ignorance and anti-Muslim bias.

Some administration officials say it is not clear whether those two countries will be included. The matter did not come up in Mr. Powell's comments this week when he visited Pakistan and Afghanistan, both recipients of billions of dollars in American aid. He left Kuwait on Saturday to return to the United States.

Administration officials now say they will work to encourage indigenous reform efforts in the Middle East so that the Sea Island meeting will have something to endorse. Mr. Powell said in both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia that he was particularly hopeful about statements to come out of an Arab League meeting in Tunisia this month.



Secretary of State Colin L. Powell left Kuwait yesterday, escorted to his plane by Foreign Minister Muhammad Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah.

But when he was asked in Saudi Arabia whether the United States would be satisfied if the Arab League adopted a democracy resolution, Mr. Powell bristled.

"It's not a matter of satisfying the

United States," he said. "It's a matter of satisfying the aspirations of the people in the Arab world."

He went on to say he was "very encouraged" that the Arab League would be taking up the issue of re-

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