

Iraqi mob mutilates and kills 2 soldiers

Officials are unsure of the causes of death because the soldiers were shot but also had slashed throats

By Christine Spolar
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

BAGHDAD — Two American soldiers were shot and mutilated Sunday by assailants who attacked their vehicle in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul in another day of insurgent violence against coalition forces, according to U.S. military sources.

The men were traveling in a white four-wheel-drive car when a brick or stone was thrown at the vehicle, causing it to stop, military sources said. A crowd of armed assailants quickly overwhelmed the car.

Soldiers from a nearby compound tried to rescue the men, military officials said, but before they could get there, a mob killed the two soldiers, leaving their bodies lying in the street.

There were conflicting reports whether the men were shot or slashed to death. Military spokesmen in Baghdad refused to discuss the attack in detail.

The 101st Airborne Division, the soldiers' unit, released a statement Sunday night that said the men were shot to death and "that there was no official report of anything to do with stabbings or throat slashings."

Another military official Sunday night, however, acknowledged that an internal report found that soldiers were shot and slashed. The report

had not determined how they died, he said, and the slashings may have happened in the mayhem after the men died.

"Their bodies were mutilated," said the official.

In Washington, the bloodletting in the streets of Mosul provided political fodder for Sunday talk shows as Democratic leaders challenged the Bush administration's handling of the war in Iraq and the escalating insurgency against the U.S.-led coalition.

The incident, reported widely on satellite news broadcasts and Western and Arab Web news sites, underscored the vulnerability of the heavily armed American troops as they operate in urban areas of Iraq.

"The slashing of throats of Americans by the enemy shows how inhuman, how brutal, how dangerous the enemy is that we're facing," Sen. Joseph Lieberman, a presidential candidate, said on CNN's "Late Edition."

The Connecticut Democrat said the Bush administration's lack of preparation was to blame for "the chaos that's there now." Such attacks should make the administration "redouble our commitment to do whatever's necessary to defeat the enemy," he added.

Joseph Biden, the senior Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said on "Fox News Sunday" that more troops were needed in Iraq now to put down an escalating insurgency.

"I understand it's incredibly difficult for the president to go to the American people and say we're going to put more troops in near term," Biden said.

"... (But) there is not enough force or the right type of force there at this moment to quell the insurgency."

Coalition forces recently launched two high-profile operations, using AC-130 gunships, F-16 fighter jets and satellite-guided bombs against rebel targets in and around Baghdad to stanch the flow of attacks.

Guerrillas responded this week with suicide bombings on two police stations, a first-time missile strike on a civilian cargo plane leaving Baghdad International Airport, and attacks on the Oil Ministry and two Baghdad hotels with rocket-propelled grenades that were hidden in donkey carts.

In addition to the Mosul attack, another American soldier was killed Sunday and two others wounded in a roadside bomb attack in Baqouba, 35 miles northeast of Baghdad, the military said. The military also reported that three American civilian contractors were wounded in an explosion in the northern oil center of Kirkuk.

In another development, an Iraqi police colonel from Mosul was fatally shot Saturday evening while heading to a mosque. The death of Col. Abdul-Slam Qanbar, in charge of the police force in Mosul and in protecting oil installations in the north, was described by the coalition as part of the insurgency campaign against U.S.-backed security forces.

Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, a military spokesman, has continued to characterize such insurgent attacks, including the attack Sunday in Mosul, as militarily insignificant. Kimmitt would not discuss specifics about the

soldiers' deaths Sunday and rebuffed all questions about the circumstances.

"We're not going to be ghoulish about this," he said.

Still, witness accounts at the scene were at odds with official military reports. CNN, which broadcast video of the two slain men lying in the street covered with a sheet, reported that witnesses at the scene said the men's throats had been slit.

The Associated Press and Reuters news agencies reported from Mosul that the military said the men were shot to death but witnesses said their throats were slashed.

The Associated Press later dropped the reference to the slashings. In later reports, the AP cited witnesses' accounts that "Iraqi teenagers dragged two bloodied U.S. soldiers from a wrecked vehicle and pummeled them with concrete blocks."

Also Sunday, the Iraqi Governing Council named the country's ambassador to the United States. She is Rend Rahim Francke, an Iraqi native and veteran Washington lobbyist. Francke led the Iraq Foundation, a Washington-based pro-democracy group, and has spent most of her life outside of Iraq.

The appointment will establish close diplomatic ties between Washington and Baghdad for the first time since they were cut in 1990 when Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

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Democrats trade rhetoric before debate

Presidential candidates have begun airing TV ads that criticize foreign policy as well as each other

By Rick Pearson
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa — In a prelude to a potentially contentious debate among Democratic presidential contenders, Dick Gephardt accused rival Howard Dean on Sunday of governing Vermont "without compassion" by resorting to cuts in services for the poor and disabled to try to balance his state's budget.

But Dean countered that "Gephardt has delivered empty rhetoric" during his 26 years as a Missouri congressman in Washington while, "as a governor, I worked hard to make the tough choices to deliver results."

The ratcheted-up rhetoric between the two men came on the eve of the latest in a series of debates sponsored by the Democratic National Committee — but the first forum held in Iowa, which holds its first-in-the-nation presidential caucuses Jan. 19.

With the likely absence of Sens. John Kerry of Massachusetts and John Edwards of North Carolina because of a Democrat-led filibuster in the Senate over a Republican-backed Medicare package, much of the debate is expected

to center on the give and take between Gephardt and Dean, who are leading the pack in the most recent Iowa poll. The other senator in the race, Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., is not campaigning in Iowa and will not take part in Monday's debate. Retired Gen. Wesley Clark, who also is focusing on New Hampshire, will participate.

Gephardt's remarks before an audience at Coe College were his sharpest to date attacking Dean. They came after a week of unchallenged television ads by the former Vermont governor that criticized Gephardt's support for the war in Iraq and \$87 billion for military operations and reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Gephardt buttressed his speech by joining the television war in Iowa on Sunday with a new ad that takes on Dean for previously supporting the Iraq appropriation and saying that he did not intend to make the funding measure a campaign issue.

"Leadership is about making tough decisions and sticking with them," Gephardt says in the ad.

Delivering a speech billed as "The Democratic way to balance the budget," Gephardt lashed out at President Bush's economic policies in the first half of his address before turning his fire on Dean's efforts to cut social services to balance Vermont's budget.

"Time after time, when faced with budget shortfalls, Gov. Dean's first

and only instinct was to cut — cut education, cut prescription drug coverage, cut Medicaid funding, cut aid to the elderly, blind and disabled," Gephardt said.

"Gov. Dean wears his bravado as a budget cutter like a badge of honor," he said. "There is no place for governance without compassion. You can be proficient without empathy, but human lives deserve something more."

Afterward, Gephardt told reporters that Dean should have considered higher taxes on Vermont's wealthier citizens, made cuts in other state programs and looked at such actions as raising the minimum wage to spur economic growth. He said such considerations were the basis of the 1993 federal budget crafted by the Democrats.

But Dean quickly fired back at Gephardt, releasing a statement saying he was proud of what he did as Vermont governor from 1991 until last year, expanding social services and leaving the state with a surplus, though he did not address specific program cuts that Gephardt discussed.

Instead, Dean said a "fundamental difference" was beginning to surface between him and Gephardt. Dean portrayed himself as an outsider compared with his Democratic opponents in Congress who quietly supported the Bush administration.

"My opponents stood behind the president instead of standing up and asking tough questions," Dean said. "Then, when faced with the toughest decision of his career, whether to send the country to war in Iraq, Dick Gephardt took the easy way out at the expense of our country and our party."

Gephardt's critique of Dean was not the only addition to the Iowa television airwaves over the weekend. The Republican National Committee launched a TV commercial defending the president, contending that Bush was being unfairly attacked by the Democratic candidates for attacking terrorism.

Democrats, who have spent months running ads challenging Bush's foreign and domestic policies, assailed the airing of the ad on behalf of a president who faces no primary opposition.

"A 30-second television advertisement will not undo 30 months of failed foreign policy," Dean said.

The debate Monday is the fifth forum sponsored by the Democratic National Committee. Held in Des Moines, the debate will be televised live at 3 p.m. CST on MSNBC.

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