

Police shortage heightens danger in Iraq

Bombs have been found throughout Baghdad during the scramble to increase protection for future election

BY JIM KRANE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The Iraqi capital is still far short of the numbers of

Iraqi policemen needed to secure it, and the force won't be up to strength in time for national elections in January, the U.S. general in charge of

security in Baghdad said Tuesday.

The blunt assessment of police deficiencies contradicts upbeat assessments that the Iraqi force would be able to protect Iraqi voters by the scheduled election, or even earlier.

Maj. Gen. Peter Chiarelli, commander of the Army's 1st Cavalry Division, said Baghdad needs 25,000 police. Of those, 7,000 would patrol Sadr City, the Shiite slum home to more than a third of the capital's 6 million residents, he said.

Right now, the city counts 15,000 police — most of whom have had just eight weeks of training.

"We're about 10,000 short of what we need," Chiarelli said in a lunch briefing with reporters. He said Baghdad's required contingent of 25,000 police should be on the streets by spring or summer 2005.

Meanwhile, a thousand home-made bombs have been hidden in the

streets and alleys of Sadr City, and Chiarelli said neighborhood leaders have promised to disarm them as part of an ongoing weapons amnesty.

The rebel bombs remain hidden in the east Baghdad neighborhood's walls and buried under its streets. Such roadside bombs have proven the most lethal weapon used by Iraqi guerrillas against U.S. troops.

"We're not digging them up. That's their responsibility," Brig. Gen. Jeffery Hammond, a 1st Cavalry deputy commander, said of the Shiite militia that still controls portions of Sadr City.

The revelation came during recent discussions between commanders in the 1st Cavalry Division, responsible for security in Baghdad, and leaders of Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army. Al-Sadr's one-time rebel group has handed in multiple truckloads of heavy weapons in an unprecedented

disarmament that has been under way for more than a week.

Hammond said militia leaders told the Army they also plan to remove the buried bombs.

The disarming of the Mahdi Army, if it takes hold, leaves the U.S. military freer to concentrate on a widely expected assault on guerrilla-held Fallujah. Iraqi and U.S. officials have long suggested an assault on the city west of Baghdad will begin after the U.S. presidential election Nov. 2.

The Mahdi Army fought gritty urban battles with U.S. troops in April and August that saw more than a thousand killed.

In Sadr City, law enforcement melted away in the face of Mahdi militia assaults. Only 500 police remain in the neighborhood, which has been largely under control of the Shiite rebels for months.

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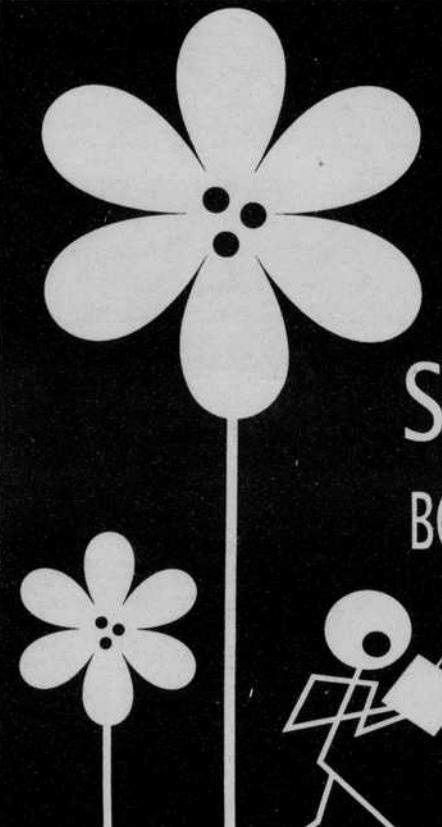
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CARE International director latest in string of abductions

Margaret Hassan has worked for 30 years in Iraq supplying medicines and other humanitarian aid

BY ROBERT H. REID
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Gunmen seized the head of CARE International's operations in Iraq — a woman who has worked on behalf of Iraqis for three decades — as the British government on Tuesday weighed a politically volatile American request to transfer soldiers to dangerous areas near the capital.

Early Wednesday, CARE Australia, which coordinates the international agency's Iraq operations, announced it had suspended operations because of the abduction, but it said staff would not be evacuated.

Margaret Hassan, who holds British, Irish and Iraqi citizenships and is married to an Iraqi, is among the most widely known humanitarian officials in the Middle East. She is also the most high-profile figure to fall victim to a wave of kidnappings sweeping Iraq in recent months.

The Arab television station Al-Jazeera broadcast a brief video showing Hassan, wearing a white blouse and appearing tense, sitting in a room with bare white walls. An editor at the station, based in Qatar, said the tape contained no audio. It did not identify

what group was holding her and contained no demand for her release.

Hassan, who is in her early 60s, was kidnapped about 7:30 a.m. while being driven from her home to CARE's office in a western neighborhood of the capital, a CARE employee said. The employee said the group did not employ armed guards.

In an interview with Al-Jazeera, Hassan's husband, Tahseen Ali Hassan, said his wife was abducted near the CARE office.

"Two cars intercepted her from the front and back," he said. "They attacked the car and pulled out the driver and a companion. Then they took the car to an unknown destination."

He said his wife had not received threats and that the kidnappers had not contacted anyone with any demands. "Nothing like this happened before, because CARE is a humanitarian organization, and she has served the Iraqi people for 30 years," he said.

Hassan has lived in Baghdad for 30 years, helping supply medicines and other humanitarian aid and speaking out about Iraqis' suffering under international sanctions during the 1990s.

She went to work for CARE International soon after it began operations in


Iraq in 1991 following the Gulf War, with programs focusing on rebuilding and maintaining water and sanitation systems, hospitals and clinics.

The kidnapping was the latest attack against humanitarian organizations, many of which have curtailed operations and withdrawn international staff because of the violence in Iraq. It also follows a wave of abductions targeting foreigners in the heart of the capital.

"Our staff are not operating currently there, they're certainly not working there now in light of the current situation," Robert Glasser, CARE Australia's chief executive officer, told Australian Broadcasting Corp. radio.

Although militants have kidnapped at least seven other women over the past six months, all were later released. By contrast, at least 30 male hostages have been killed, including three Americans beheaded by their captors. Hassan's abduction occurred less than two weeks after a video posted on an Islamic Web site showed the beheading of British hostage Kenneth Bigley.

CARE said Hassan was born in Britain, but the British and Irish foreign offices said she was born in Ireland, which is not part of the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. When the kidnappers sent the tape to Al-Jazeera, they said they had abducted a "British aid worker," according to the station.

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