

# The World

## Rumsfeld Gets Rosier Report in Iraq

During the defense secretary's visit, military officials laud a drop in attacks on U.S. troops. He looks at coalition's security strategy.

By JOHN HENDREN  
Times Staff Writer

BAGHDAD — Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld saw firsthand the U.S.-led coalition's strategy for turning over security to Iraqis in a sweep through the nation Saturday, as military officials lauded a precipitous drop in attacks on American troops even as they acknowledged it was probably the result of poor weather and the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

The Pentagon chief focused much of his visit on briefings and demonstrations of the fledgling Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, one of four security forces run by the occupying coalition. The Pentagon's strategy in Iraq is to increasingly turn control of security — police, border patrol and military actions — to newly established Iraqi agencies that, in the case of the Civil Defense Corps, often receive less than one month's training.

With 140,000 Iraqi border patrol and police officers, paramilitary troops, building guards and other security forces in place, Rumsfeld said, "they are increasingly taking over security in this country." He trusted his own fate to members of the corps, entering a Baghdad warehouse in which roughly 50 new recruits toting AK-47s were in their first days of training.

During his first stop of the day, in the northern city of Kirkuk, Rumsfeld met with a group of recruits and their commanders in crisp new khaki uniforms at a lavish home confiscated from an unnamed Iraqi on the most-wanted former regime officials list. The Civil Defense Corps is coming along "very fast," he told the recruits, giving Americans confidence that it "can make a tremendous difference."

"Foreign forces are necessarily unnatural," Rumsfeld told



Associated Press

**VISIT TO NORTHERN IRAQ:** U.S. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld greets a senior Kirkuk official in an image from television. Rumsfeld also met with a group of recruits from the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps and their commanders in Kirkuk.

reporters later after visiting the training center at an 82nd Airborne Division site in Baghdad. "They ought not to be in a country."

During the visit, which was roughly scheduled a week earlier but not announced publicly, Rumsfeld met briefly with the coalition's top civilian administrator, L. Paul Bremer III, U.S. Central Command chief Gen. John Abizaid and a who's-who of the commanding U.S. generals in Iraq.

In Kirkuk, Maj. Gen. Ray Odierno of the 4th Infantry Division briefed Rumsfeld on his area of responsibility in the volatile Sunni Triangle north of Baghdad, as did the 1st Armored Division's Brig. Gen. Martin

Dempsey, in charge of security in the sprawling capital. Rumsfeld was joined throughout the day by the top commander on the ground, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez.

Several senior military officials lauded a decline in attacks on U.S. troops, saying such assaults have plunged from nearly 40 a day in early November to 19 daily over the last week. Nevertheless, they acknowledged, it was not clear that the decline would endure, and many suggested that attacks might increase during the hajj pilgrimage that starts in late January.

"Well, I think that it's too early to say it's a trend," Rumsfeld told reporters. "It's a good sign that they've dropped off —

and they have dropped off. Gen. Sanchez and I have been talking about that fact, but of course Ramadan has just ended, there has been some rain in parts of the country, so I'm not in a position to say we're on a favorable trend line."

The coalition death toll soared during Ramadan, making November the costliest month in lives for the United States and its allies since the invasion of Iraq more than eight months ago.

Dempsey said four of 10 known guerrilla cells were disabled in November, including one that he said was responsible for the October rocket attack on the Rashid Hotel that killed a U.S. Army colonel while Deputy

Defense Secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz was in the building.

The 1st Armored Division is still pursuing intelligence that it hopes will allow the division to crush the remaining six cells, he said. The arrests have diminished but not ended the insurgents' ability to launch attacks because their leadership and financiers remain at large, Dempsey said.

Nevertheless, Sanchez painted a portrait of gradual success for Rumsfeld's third visit since President Bush declared major combat over May 1.

"The main message to the secretary is primarily that we're being successful, our troops are prepared, and we're making a lot of progress," Sanchez said.

## Uruguay May Keep Oil Firm State-Run

By HÉCTOR TOBAR  
Times Staff Writer

MONTEVIDEO, Uruguay — This small country's only oil refinery is a desultory antique on the outskirts of the capital whose tower casts a perpetual plume of black smoke over the shanties and homes that surround it.

The diesel fuel produced there is of poor quality, yet its gasoline is among the most expensive in the Americas: Filling up a 15-gallon tank here can set you back \$50.

And yet, Uruguayans are expected to vote in large numbers today to overturn a law designed to rectify the problem. If polls conducted ahead of the referendum are proved correct, voters here will instead preserve the monopoly of the state oil company, ANCAP, and derail any future attempts to privatize its operations.

"ANCAP is not for sale!" reads one graffiti repeated again and again here in the capital and in the Uruguayan countryside. "Uruguay is not for sale! Vote yes on Dec. 7."

The referendum in this country of 3.4 million people squeezed between regional powers Argentina and Brazil reflects a trend in those countries and across South America: a growing rejection of neoliberal economics and the leaders who backed the policies for a decade.

Polls show voters favoring a "yes" vote in the move to repeal Law 17,448 — approved last year by Uruguay's Congress — by a more than 2-to-1 margin. First proposed by President Jorge Batlle in 2000, the law allows private companies to import fuel into the country, which has no natural oil reserves.

"The law is a blow to our national patrimony," said Reinaldo Gargano, a senator and member of the Socialist Party. "ANCAP is our country's largest state-owned enterprise, and the law would give away half of the fuel market in exchange for practically nothing."

The left-leaning Broad Front-Progressive Encounter coalition and the ANCAP workers union backed the campaign that collected 685,000 signatures in favor of the referendum.

Analysts here say the opposition parties have transformed today's vote into a plebiscite on Batlle's government and its policies of privatization and fiscal conservatism, which many blame for Uruguay's lingering economic malaise.

"The referendum will be in large measure a kind of punishment vote against the government," said Alain Mizrahi, director of Radar Group, a polling firm here.

Uruguay's unemployment rate stands near 20%, inflation is rampant, and the currency, the Uruguayan peso, has lost half of its value relative to the dollar and other currencies since last year. The country's gross domestic product declined by about 10% in 2002.

As in neighboring Argentina, many young people are migrating to Europe and the United States in search of better horizons.

"This plebiscite isn't just about the [privatization] law, but rather about all the things that have brought Uruguay to this disaster and that have forced so many to emigrate to find work," said Tabare Vazquez, leader of the Broad Front-Progressive Encounter coalition.

Mizrahi said both parties are treating the election as a warm-up for next year's presidential election, which is expected to see Batlle's ruling Colorado Party driven from power.

Supporters of the privatization law argue that the issue has been politicized by the Broad Front-Progressive Encounter coalition. The issues of economic efficiency have been largely obscured in the debate over the law, they say.

"We have the highest gasoline prices [in the region] because we are a market of just 3 million people," said Alejandro Atchugarry, a senator who backs the privatization law. "When we buy crude oil, we don't have any power to negotiate."

When the privatization law was approved, several foreign-owned firms stepped forward with an offer to buy part of ANCAP's operations, including Chevron-Texaco and the Brazilian firm Petrobras.

Those plans are now likely to be placed on hold.

Times staff writer Andres D'Alessandro in Buenos Aires contributed to this report.

## Compassionate Conservatism, Chinese-Style

Planners hope Premier Wen's approach will play well when he visits Washington this week.

By MARK MAGNIER  
Times Staff Writer

BEIJING — Premier Wen Jiabao shook hands last week with AIDS patients, the first Chinese leader to do so publicly. In a country where HIV-positive people are beaten, tattooed and treated like pariahs, it was a significant signal from a top official.

It's the kind of assignment Wen is good at, part of a new administration seen as more user friendly and sympathetic to the plight of ordinary Chinese even as it helps maintain the Communist Party leadership dating back half a century.

Planners hope that Wen's mix of compassion and conservatism with Chinese characteristics will play well when he visits Washington this week. His nation places great importance on its relations with the U.S. and hopes that the new premier can develop the kind of close personal bonds with President Bush that leaders from Japan and other lands have formed.

Topping China's wish list in meetings that start Tuesday would be some sort of written language from Washington categorically opposing any moves toward independence by Taiwan, which Beijing views as rightfully part of the mainland.

Beijing is highly unlikely to get such a declaration from the U.S.; however, Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian's statement Thursday — apparently under pressure from Washington — that any island-wide referendum will not call for Taiwanese independence takes some of the pressure off Wen.

On Saturday, Chen's office announced details of the March 20 vote, demanding that China stop threatening Taiwan and remove hundreds of missiles aimed at the island.

Still, Wen wants something to take home, including at the very least private reassurance that the U.S. will rein in Taiwan's threatened moves toward independence, along with some public reaffirmation of U.S. support for a "one-China" policy.

Wen's ability to deliver will be closely watched back home, where the U.S. is viewed as a key broker of China-Taiwan relations and, in some quarters, as an instigator fanning the island's statehood aspirations.

The trained geologist has a firm handle on economic issues, but his credentials as a diplomat are less distinguished. For many Chinese, the way Beijing handles Taiwan is a key test of their new administration's legitimacy.

"The Taiwan issue is the first priority in our relationship," said Yan Xuetong, director of the Institute of International Studies at Qinghua University. "The U.S. and China have to avoid conflict over this. Sometimes the tail wags the dog. We can't let this tail wag two dogs."

Another issue on the agenda is Iraq. Washington would welcome more help from Beijing, but China is expected to balk at sending troops, given the lack of a United Nations mandate. It may consider giving a symbolic contribution to the rebuilding effort.

North Korea's nuclear weapons program is another security issue high on the agenda. Wen's visit comes shortly before a possible second round of six-party talks in Beijing, involving the two Koreas, the U.S., China, Russia and Japan. The Bush administration would welcome China's help in brokering a deal with the North, given everything else Washington is juggling, said Wang Jisi, head of the Institute of American Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Studies.

"With Iraq, European relations and an upcoming election year, the U.S. doesn't want to make things more complicated," he said.

Wen, Bush and Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing will



Associated Press

**THE PREMIER:** China's Wen Jiabao is seen at home and abroad as a sympathetic leader in tune with the plight of the underprivileged. "I am a very ordinary person," Wen has said.

try to iron out their different views on a possible North Korean settlement. Beijing wants the regime in Pyongyang to renounce its nuclear weapons program and the U.S. in turn to promise it will not attack the North. Washington would prefer to wait until after the program is fully shut down before offering that concession.

Another issue high on the agenda will be trade and economics, an area where Wen is on much more familiar ground.

Wen will ask the U.S. to reconsider recent moves to limit Chinese imports, pointing to his country's recent multibillion-dollar deals to purchase U.S. goods. Wen probably will also ask Washington to ease restrictions on sales of U.S. high-tech products to China. The U.S. for its part will seek safeguards on intellectual property and improved access for U.S. companies to the Chinese market.

Even as the Bush administration comes under pressure to act tougher toward China to help preserve U.S. jobs, China's leadership faces critics at home who contend that it's giving away too much by cozying up to a country that sells advanced weapons to Taiwan.

In a bid to ease American

concerns about the loss of jobs to China, the premier might meet with U.S. labor groups. "He wants to understand what Americans are thinking about, especially ordinary people," said Wang Yizhou, a senior research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Although personal chemistry is hard to gauge in advance, several analysts said they didn't expect any problems between Wen and Bush.

"Both Wen and Hu have no problem getting along with the American president," said Qinghua University's Yan, referring to Chinese President Hu Jintao. "Neither one talks a lot. Bush is no-nonsense and doesn't like big mouths."

The son of teachers, Wen was born in the city of Tianjin in 1942 and grew up in a tumultuous period. "My childhood was spent in the turmoil of war," he said in March at his first news conference as premier. "Our home was literally burned down by the flame of war and so was the primary school, which my grandfather built."

After graduating from high school, he headed in 1960 to the Beijing Institute of Geology, where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in structural

geology. Along the way he joined the Communist Party and was sent after graduation to remote Gansu province in northwestern China.

Wen remained a geological engineer for a decade in Gansu before party officials noted his abilities and promoted him to a series of successively higher posts. In 1985 he was named to the General Office of the Central Committee where over the next 15 years he earned high marks as an aide to three top Chinese leaders, including then-President Jiang Zemin.

His ability to weather the shifting tides of China's top leadership earned him a reputation as a *budaoweng*, a doll that stays upright no matter how hard you try to tip it over.

Wen and Hu are seen at home and abroad as compassionate leaders sympathetic to the plight of the underprivileged. "I am a very ordinary person," Wen has said.

He's known to have a good memory, telling reporters this year that "a former Swiss ambassador to China once said that my brain works like a computer." By some accounts, he also has a healthy suspicion of official reports, preferring to do his own legwork.