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Full U.S. Control Planned for Iraq

American Would Oversee Rebuilding

By Karen DeYoung and Peter Slevin
Washington Post Staff Writers
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The Bush administration plans to take complete, unilateral control of a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, with an interim administration headed by a yet-to-be named American civilian who would direct the reconstruction of the country and the creation of a "representative" Iraqi government, according to a now-finalized blueprint described by U.S. officials and other sources.

Gen. Tommy Franks, the head of the U.S. Central Command, is to maintain military control as long as U.S. troops are there. Once security was established and weapons of mass destruction were located and disabled, a U.S. administrator would run the civilian government and direct reconstruction and humanitarian aid.

In the early days of military action, U.S. forces following behind those in combat would distribute food and other relief items and begin needed reconstruction. The goal, officials said, would be to make sure the Iraqi people "immediately" consider themselves better off than they were the day before war, and attribute their improved circumstances directly to the United States.

The initial humanitarian effort, as previously announced, is to be directed by retired Army Lt. Gen. Jay M. Garner. But once he got to Baghdad, sources said, Garner would quickly be replaced as the supreme civil authority by an American "of stature," such as a former U.S. state governor or ambassador, officials said.

Officials said other governments are being recruited to participate in relief and reconstruction tasks under U.S. supervision at a time to be decided by Franks and officials in Washington. Although initial food supplies are to be provided by the United States, negotiations are underway with the U.N. World Food Program to administer a nationwide distribution network. Opposition leaders were informed this week that the United States will not recognize an Iraqi provisional government being discussed by some expatriate groups. Some 20 to 25 Iraqis would assist U.S. authorities in a U.S.-appointed "consultative council," with no governing responsibility. Under a decision finalized last week, Iraqi government officials would be subjected to "de-Baathification," a reference to Hussein's ruling Baath Party, under a program that borrows from the "de-Nazification" program established in Germany after World War II.

Criteria by which officials would be designated as too tainted to keep their jobs are still being worked on, although they would likely be based more on complicity with the human rights and weapons abuses of the Hussein government than corruption, officials said. A large number of current officials would be retained.

Although some of the broad strokes of U.S. plans for a post-Hussein Iraq have previously been reported, newly finalized elements include the extent of U.S. control and the plan to appoint a nonmilitary civil administrator. Officials cautioned that developments in Iraq could lead them to revise the plan on the run. Yet to be decided is "at what point and for what purpose" a multinational administration, perhaps run by the United Nations, would be considered to replace the U.S. civil authority.

"We have a load of plans that could be carried out by an international group, a coalition group, or by us and a few others," one senior U.S. official. President Bush, the official said, doesn't want to close options until the participants in a military action are known and the actual postwar situation in Iraq becomes clear.

The administration has been under strong pressure to demonstrate that it has a detailed program to deal with what is expected to be a chaotic and dangerous situation if Hussein is removed. The White House plans to brief Congress and reporters on more details of the plan next week.

No definitive price tag or time limit has been put on the plan, and officials stressed that much remains unknown about the length of a potential conflict, how much destruction would result, and "how deep" the corruption of the Iraqi government goes. The administration has declined to estimate how long U.S. forces would remain in Iraq. Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman told Congress last week that it might be two years before the Iraqis regained administrative control of their country. But "they're terrified of being caught in a time frame," said retired Army Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey, one of a number of senior military and civilian experts who have been briefed by the Pentagon on the plan. "My own view is that it will take five years, with substantial military power, to establish and exploit the peace" in Iraq.

Correction

CLARIFICATION - Feb. 21 article about post-Saddam Hussein Iraq should have made clear that an assessment by Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman about a future U.S. presence in Iraq did not refer to the duration of an American military deployment there.

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Although more than 180,000 U.S. troops are on the ground in the Persian Gulf region, U.S. officials continued to emphasize that President Bush still has not made a final decision on whether to go to war. Negotiations at the United Nations, where Bush is seeking a new Security Council resolution declaring that Hussein has violated U.N. disarmament demands and authorizing that he be disarmed by a U.N. multinational force, are at a delicate stage.

A majority of the council's 15 members have said they believe a decision on war should be delayed while U.N. weapons inspections, launched in November, continue. Bush has said that, if necessary, the U.S. military and a "coalition of the willing" will disarm Iraq without U.N. approval.

The administration also is continuing discussions with Arab governments about the possibilities of exile for Hussein and several dozen of his family members and top officials. Sources said, however, that even if Hussein and a small group of others were to leave, uncertainties about who would remain in charge, the need to destroy weapons of mass destruction, and concerns about establishing long-term stability would likely lead to the insertion of U.S. troops there in any case.

Among the other parts of the post-Hussein plan:

- Iraqi military forces would be gathered in prisoner-of-war camps, with opposition members now receiving U.S. training at an air base in Hungary serving as part of the guard force. The Iraqi troops would be vetted by U.S. forces under Franks's command, and those who were cleared, beginning with those who "stood down or switched sides" during a U.S. assault, would receive U.S. training to serve in what one official called a "post-stabilization" force.

U.S. forces would secure any weapons of mass destruction that were found, including biological and chemical weapons stores. "At an appropriate time," an official said, the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency, who are conducting U.N.-mandated weapons inspections in Iraq, might be brought in to examine weaponry, scientists and documentation.

In addition to the consultative council, an Iraqi commission would be formed to reestablish a judicial system. An additional commission would write a new constitution, although officials emphasized that they would not expect to "democratize" Iraq along the lines of the U.S. governing system. Instead, they speak of a "representative Iraqi government."

Officials said the decision to install U.S. military and civilian administrations for an indeterminate time stems from lessons learned in Afghanistan, where power has been diffused among U.S. military forces still waging war against the remnants of the Taliban and al Qaeda, a multinational security force of several thousand troops in which the United States does not participate, and the interim government of Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

The administration is particularly keen on averting interference by other regional powers, and cites the "ability of people like the Iranians and others to go in with money and create warlords" sympathetic to their own interests, one official said. "We don't want a weak federal government that plays into the hands of regional powers" and allows Iraq to be divided into de facto spheres of influence. "We don't want the Iranians to be paying the Shiites, the Turks the Turkmen and the Saudis the Sunnis," the official, referring to some of the main groups among dozens of Iraqi tribes and ethnic and religious groups.

A similar anxiety led to the decision to prohibit the Iraqi opposition based outside the country from forming a provisional government. The chief proponent of that idea, Ahmed Chalabi, head of the Iraqi National Congress, was informed this week that any move to declare a provisional Iraqi government "would result in a formal break in the U.S.-INC relationship," the official said.

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