

U.S. general in Iraq orders 'values' training

Iraq pledges own investigation; Bush told about probe 1 month after start

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BAGHDAD, Iraq - The U.S. military ordered American commanders to hold ethical training on battlefield conduct, and the Iraqi government Thursday announced its own investigation into reports that U.S. Marines killed unarmed civilians last year.

Lt. Gen. Peter Chiarelli, the commander of U.S.-led forces in Iraq, said the ethical training would emphasize "professional military values and the importance of disciplined, professional conduct in combat," as well as Iraqi cultural expectations.

"As military professionals, it is important that we take time to reflect on the values that separate us from our enemies," he said in a statement. "The challenge for us is to make sure the actions of a few do not tarnish the good work of the many."

The training will be conducted in units in the next 30 days and was aimed at reinforcing training service members received before coming to Iraq.

"Of the nearly 150,000 Coalition Forces presently in Iraq, 99.9 percent of them perform their jobs magnificently every day," Chiarelli said. Of those troops, about 130,000 are from the United States.

"They do their duty with honor under difficult circumstances. They exhibit sound judgment, honesty and integrity. They display patience, professionalism and restraint in the face of a treacherous enemy. And they do the right thing even when no one is watching," Chiarelli said.

He added, however, that "unfortunately, there are a few individuals who sometimes choose the wrong path."

The U.S. Marine Commandant, Gen. Michael W. Hagee, traveled to Iraq last week and cautioned troops on the danger of becoming "indifferent to the loss of a human life."

Their comments came amid rising anger over allegations that U.S. Marines shot and killed 24 civilians, including women and children, in the western city of Haditha on Nov. 19, after a bomb attack on a military convoy killed a Marine.

"It appears to be a horrible crime," Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki told a news conference. "A large number of women, men and children have been eliminated because of an explosion that targeted a vehicle of the multinational forces."

News of probe slow to reach Bush

The White House said Thursday President Bush was briefed about the Haditha probe nearly a

month after the military began investigating reports Marines murdered unarmed civilians in Iraq.

On Tuesday, the White House said Bush was briefed "soon after" the opening of the probe, which was prompted by inquiries about the Nov. 19 incident from Time magazine.

A reporter from the magazine asked U.S. military officials on Feb. 10 about the circumstances surrounding the alleged massacre, in which 24 people in Haditha, an insurgent stronghold in western Iraq, were killed following a bomb attack on a military convoy in which a Marine died. Four days later, on Feb. 14, Lt. Gen. Peter Chiarelli, commander of Multinational Corps Iraq, ordered an investigation into the incident, White House press secretary Tony Snow said Thursday.

But, Snow said, Bush was not informed about the existence of the investigation until March 11, when he was briefed by national security adviser Stephen Hadley.

A preliminary report on March 3 recommended additional inquiry. Chiarelli received initial findings from that on March 9 and asked for the further review, which still is ongoing, Snow said. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were informed the next day and Bush the day after, on a Saturday.

Time reported the investigation on March 19.

Bush pledged Thursday that the results of the inquiry will be made public.

Bush said Wednesday he was troubled by the allegations and that, "if in fact laws were broken, there will be punishment."

It was Bush's first public comment on allegations that Marines killed about two dozen unarmed Iraqi men, women and children in the western city of Haditha last November.

Responding to a reporter's question, Bush said he had discussed Haditha with Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "He's a proud Marine. And nobody is more concerned about these allegations than the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps is full of honorable people who understand the rules of war."

"If in fact these allegations are true," Bush said, "the Marine Corps will work hard to make sure that that culture — that proud culture — will be reinforced. And that those who violated the law, if they did, will be punished."

"I am troubled by the initial news stories," Bush said. "I'm mindful that there's a thorough investigation going on. If in fact, laws were broken, there will be punishment."

Iraq promises own investigation

The U.S. military already is conducting at least two investigations into the killings, and now Iraqi Cabinet members have decided to launch a separate inquiry, Adnan al-Kazimi, an adviser to al-Maliki, told The Associated Press.

He said a special committee of the Justice and Human Rights ministries, along with security officials, will handle the probe.

U.S. military investigators have evidence that points toward unprovoked murders by Marines in Haditha, a senior defense official said last week. And a U.S. military investigation will conclude that some officers gave false testimony to their superiors, who then failed to scrutinize the reports adequately, The Washington Post reported.

Full investigations into all allegations

The military probe, which is separate from an investigation into possible criminal actions by the Marines, also will call for changes in how troops are trained for duty in Iraq, the Post reported.

"We do want to express our deepest condolences to the families who lost a loved one in Haditha," Maj. Gen. William Caldwell, spokesman for U.S.-led forces in Iraq, said at a Baghdad news conference. "The coalition does not and will not tolerate any unethical or criminal behavior. All allegations of such activity will be fully investigated."

He added that the U.S. military constantly strives to avoid civilian casualties and has promised the deaths in Haditha, 140 miles northwest of Baghdad, will be fully investigated.

"Let me be very clear about one point. The coalition does not and will not tolerate any unethical or criminal behavior. Any allegations of such activities will be fully investigated and any members found to have committed these violations will be held accountable," Caldwell said.

He said that "about three or four" inquiries were being carried out around Iraq but would not provide any details.

Chiarelli ordered an investigation into the Haditha killings on Feb. 14 and based on the initial findings ordered a further, ongoing inquiry, Caldwell said. He would not talk about any specifics on that investigation or a separate probe by the U.S. Navy criminal investigative service.

"The naval criminal investigative service is investigating allegations of misconduct stemming from the Marines actions," he said, adding that their findings would be reported to the commanding general of Marine forces central command "for appropriate action."

He said that the investigation being conducted by Chiarelli was looking at "policies and procedures such as those pertaining to training and reporting," while the Navy was looking "looking into allegations of criminal misconduct."

Iraq will discuss rules for U.S. raids

The Iraqi prime minister said he asked a ministerial committee to hold talks with the U.S. military to set ground rules for raids and detentions.

When asked about Iraqi complaints that U.S. forces show no regard for their lives during raids and detentions, al-Maliki said he objected to such practices.

"We cannot forgive violations of the dignity of the Iraqi people," he said at a news conference. He also said the Cabinet had agreed to issue a statement denouncing such practices.

The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report.

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