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U.S. to Expedite Iraq Shooting Death Probe



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By *PATRICK QUINN, Associated Press Writer*

BAGHDAD, Iraq - The U.S. military decided Tuesday to expedite an investigation into the killing by its forces of an Italian intelligence officer and the wounding of the journalist he helped rescue from insurgents, an attack that has strained relations with a key American ally.



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(AP Video)

The decision to fast track the investigation into the March 4 incident came as the military also opened an official inquiry into the shooting death of a Bulgarian soldier, in what appeared to be another friendly fire incident that took place on the same day.

Both probes were an indication of the pressure being brought on the administration of President George W. Bush ([news - web sites](#)) by the few American allies in Europe that have steadfastly supported his policies in Iraq ([news - web sites](#)).

Italy and its prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, has sent 3,000 troops to Iraq, while Bulgaria has 460. Both countries have said they will not withdraw their troops, but growing domestic opposition to bring them home has been growing — especially in Bulgaria where it has become a campaign issue.

The military investigations came as American troops fought insurgents in the

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troubled city of Ramadi 70 miles west of Baghdad. At least two Iraqis were killed in the violence, officials said. At least six other Iraqis were killed in other violence around the country.

The man once held responsible for much of that violence, Saddam Hussein ([news - web sites](#)), may stand trial by year's end, according to interim National Security Adviser Mouwafak al-Rubaie.

"I will be surprised if I do not see Saddam in the box before the end of the year," he said. "I am very much hopeful that Saddam will be in the box around September and October, before the general referendum" on Iraq's new constitution.

That constitution will be drafted by Iraq's National Assembly, which convenes on March 16. Negotiations to form Iraq's first democratically elected government focused Tuesday on the makeup of its cabinet, after Kurds said they were close to a deal with the Shiite clergy-backed United Iraqi Alliance.

The shooting of Giuliana Sgrena, a 56-year-old journalist working for the left-wing Il Manifesto newspaper, has angered Italians and rekindled questions over the country's involvement in Iraq.

In Bulgaria, the death of Pvt. Gardi Gardev has made its continuing presence in Iraq an issue ahead of general elections in June. Opinion polls show a steady majority of Bulgarians oppose the country's military presence here.

The government is to decide by next month whether to keep them in Iraq after their current mission ends in July. The opposition Socialist Party, leading in polls, has promised a withdrawal if it wins.

In Rome, Berlusconi's office said he "expressed the satisfaction of the Italian government for this investigation" ordered by the U.S. military.

Berlusconi called Bush shortly after the shooting and demanded a full investigation into the attack, which took place after nightfall Friday as the car carrying Sgrena, intelligence officer Nicola Calipari, and two other agents approached Baghdad airport.

Calipari was killed, while Sgrena — kidnapped by insurgents on Feb. 4 — was wounded along with another intelligence officer.

Italian Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini told parliament that U.S. troops killed Calipari by accident, but disputed Washington's version of events.

Fini said the car carrying Calipari and Sgrena was not speeding and

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U.S. troops did not order it to stop, contrary to what U.S. officials say. But Fini dismissed allegations made by Sgrenna that the shooting was an ambush.

"It was an accident," Fini said. "This does not prevent, in fact it makes it a duty for the government to demand that light be shed on the murky issues, that responsibilities be pinpointed, and, where found, that the culprits be punished."

In Baghdad, the U.S.-led multinational force said follow-up investigation would be led by U.S. Brig. Gen. Peter Vangjel and that it would take three to four weeks. Italian officials were invited to participate, the command said.

"The follow-on investigation to the Multi-National Division-Baghdad commander's initial inquiry into the incident is expected to take approximately three to four weeks to complete," it said in a statement.

Vangjel is the 18th Airborne Corps Artillery Commander and the investigation was ordered by the top U.S. commander in Iraq, Army Gen. George Casey.

In Washington, Casey said he had no indication that Italian officials gave advance notice of the car's route.

"I personally do not have any indication of that, even on a preliminary basis," Casey told reporters at the Pentagon ([news](#) - [web sites](#)).

The U.S. 3rd Infantry Division, which controls Baghdad, said after the shooting that the vehicle was "traveling at high speeds" and "refused to stop at a checkpoint."

A U.S. patrol "attempted to warn the driver to stop by hand and arm signals, flashing white lights, and firing warning shots in front of the car," it said. "When the driver didn't stop, the soldiers shot into the engine block which stopped the vehicle, killing one and wounding two others."

In Rome, Fini said the Italian reconstruction "doesn't fully coincide with what has been communicated by U.S. authorities," including on whether the car was speeding and if the occupants had been warned.

According to Fini the car was "traveling at a speed that couldn't have been more than 25 miles per hour." A light, he said, was flashed at the car after a curve and that gunfire started immediately afterward. It last 15 to 20 seconds, he said.

The investigation into the Bulgarian soldier, killed near the central Iraqi city of Diwaniya, will focus on reports that he also may have been shot by U.S. troops.

"The Multi-National Forces-Iraq values greatly our partnership with Bulgaria in helping the Iraqis achieve democracy. We are committed to working with our Bulgarian partners to determine the cause of" Gardi's

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death.

Casey also said he was concerned by the fact that the Bulgarian soldier may have been hit by U.S. gunfire.

"It's another unfortunate incident," he said. "Again, both the Bulgarians and us are looking into exactly what happened up during that period, and we'll get to the bottom of it."

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