

APOGALIPSE HOWE

Hijacking, murder, kidnap. Last week anarchy seemed to

have gripped 'post-war' Iraq. Mark Franchetti reports from

Baghdad on the revolt that gained momentum as it spread

and the slogans menacing. As several American tanks hunkered together in Sadr city, the lawless slum near the centre of Baghdad, the words daubed on two were clear. "Anger Management" read one: "Analyse This" read another.

For the three marines nervously uncoiling barbed wire around the position last Wednesday, the analysis was all too uncomfortable: anger management, American-style, was not working. The locals were just getting more vengeful, more bloodthirsty.

A few hundred yards down the road a horde of armed Shi'ite Muslims were spoiling for a fight. Clustered on a rooftop, they were dressed in black and laden with rocketpropelled grenades, AK-47s, sabres and other weaponry.

"Come and get us if you dare," they chanted at the tank crews. "We will fight you to the death." Below, the street crowd cheered and children set fire to truck tyres built into a barricade.

The fighters were members of the al-Mahdi army, an outlawed militia loyal to Moqtada al-Sadr, the fiery Islamic cleric blamed for the bloody rioting that erupted last week throughout central

he barrels were long and southern Iraq. Inside the building al-Sadr's local representative was holding court.

Surrounded by aides and wearing a thick black turban, Said Amir al-Husseini looked more warlord than cleric as people queued to offer him their help. One woman, her face covered with a veil, came in cradling an AK-47 saying she would fight the Americans. A man kissed the sheikh's ring and claimed he was willing to sell his house to raise money for al-Sadr. Some visitors offered food, others weapons and ammunition.

"This is a proper army defending our beliefs and our people," said al-Husseini. The Americans are no longer welcome. They are killing and arresting innocent people. This is our country. We want to rule ourselves. And if they want to fight we have no shortage of volunteers."

It sounded like a declaration of war — and yesterday the battles were still raging. In the town of Falluja, west of Baghdad, men and teenagers brandished rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) as American planes screamed overhead. Explosions rocked buildings. Bodies and burnt-out vehicles littered the streets.

Inside Sadr city, tens of thousands of Shi'ite men per-



weekend's holy festival. In unison they raised their fists

and pledged their lives to al-Sadr. It was a fearsome sight at the end of a bloody week in which militants across the country had battled the troops who had liberated them from Saddam Hussein. By last night 42 US troops and more than 500 Iraqis had died.

Civilians, aid workers and journalists all came under fire. Then a terrifying new tactic — kidnap — seemed to take hold. Three Japanese citizens were snatched by militiamen and an ultimatum was issued: Japan must withdraw its forces helping the coalition or the captives

would be burnt alive. Yesterday two US soldiers were reported missing, feared kidnapped. A British worker, Gary Teeley, is also missing.

In Hit, a town 110 miles west of Baghdad, a British contractor called security Bloss Michael e-mailed

to be overrun tonight and we may have to fight our way to a safe haven. Unfortunately all the safe havens are already under attack.

The next day, as Bloss was shot dead.

Some calm. One unit com- you.' mander contacted in the field on Thursday said: "I survived an RPG attack . . . one of doz-

the rioting: "We are expecting action and two vehicles destroyed."

Even Paradise Square,

where the toppling of Saddam's statue had symbolised triumph, was sealed off. "Warning, warning," blared guided workers to safety, he loudspeakers in Arabic. "If anyone tries to get close to a In Basra, controlled by Brit-ish troops, the Ministry of attacked. If anyone is carrying Defence claimed all was calm. a gun he will be shot. Thank

For Bush and Blair it was a grim anniversary of "victory". On Wednesday, on the secure ens of multi-weapon attacks in videolink from the basement to be hit, and hit hard. They the last 48 hours. My regiment of No 10 to the White House,

HARD TIMES, HARD CHOICES
Editorial, page 20

VIETNAM IN REVERSE Andrew Sullivan, page 20

THE GAIN IS WORTH THE PAIN

Irwin Stelzer, Business, page 4

formed prayers outside for the friends on Wednesday amid alone has had four wounded in they discussed what to do ahead of Blair's forthcoming visit to Washington.

Blair is said to have advised the president to be more conciliatory. But the American instinct was to be bold: al-Sadr's support was limited, they judged, and ordinary Iraqis wanted the process towards democracy, however imperfect, to continue.

This was no popular uprising or "intifada", the Americans argued. The trouble was being caused by a limited number of hotheads who had would either be martyred or driven to the negotiating table.

THE road to democracy in Iraq was always going to be spattered with blood. As Iraqi exiles returned after the fall of Saddam to vie for power with local politicians, the struggle quickly turned murderous.

Soon after allied troops began racing through southern Iraq towards Baghdad in

March last year, Ayatollah Abdul Majid al-Khoei, a young, moderate Shi'ite Muslim, flew in from London. With American money behind him, he went to Najaf to hold talks with the most senior Shi'ite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. The two were seen as offering Iraq

some of the best hopes for a prosperous future. But the day after Saddam's statue fell in Baghdad, al-

Khoei was emerging from a holy shrine in Najaf when he was stabbed. As people tried to get him to safety, he was stabbed again, near al-Sadr's offices. This time it was fatal. Although the evidence of

murder pointed at al-Sadr and his supporters, the coalition let them be. In October he denounced America as the "Bigger Satan", in an echo of the old Iranian chant of the US being the "Great Satan", but still he was left alone. The cleric's power base is

the Baghdad slum of Sadr city, home to some 2m Shi'ites who live in desperate poverty. A sprawling labyrinth of fetid streets, it is the poorest and most crimeridden district of the capital.

It is to the dispossessed youth of this ghetto that al-Sadr owes his power. He has established a sophisticated

welfare network there and "courts" that dispense sharia justice in his name.

It was his militia — the al-Mahdi army — he likes to remind people that protected the local Shi'ites from looters and Saddam loyalists in the wake of the war.

If the Americans thought that they could ignore or sideline al-Sadr, they were wrong. The young cleric has proved to be an adept media manipulator and his al-Mahdi army is now thought to number about 6,000 men.

"The word was put out in the mosques," said Abu Ham-med, from Sadr city, who gave up his job to join the militia. He now heads a cell of 40 men. "The recruiting has been going on for months. I was given an AK-47 and joined overnight to protect our people and our land from the Americans. They are cheating us and have become occupi-

ers, not liberators.' Al-Sadr fomented trouble by spreading his poisonous preachings through a weekly newspaper called al-Hawza. "We are still under the rule of Saddam but with an American face," began one article, which went on to accuse the coalition of spreading "moral corruption by the selling of

Nationwide

Continued on page 16

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experience, Italian troops in

Nasiriya and the British in

peacefully back into the

no-go areas with regular

Amara and Basra are getting

patrols and local police, but

Fitting 34 non-US forces

into a coherent strategy to

dwarfs anything achieved in

Moreover, if peacekeeping

2003

cannot police the insurgents

Moqtada al-Sadr's "Mahdi

Army" appears to number at

hope to stir several hundred

they have limited options to

they have to beat them.

which risks inflaming

least 5,000 fairly

retrieve a deteriorating

CLERIC'S ARMY SPARKS

throwing dead soldiers into Earth". almost landlocked) to avoid more outspoken, Bremer and results. bad publicity. Another railed the Americans started to take

smile voted "Best Current

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Continued from page 15 erately killing Iraqi police and Sadr's most senior aides. vehicles. Their mission: to colpieces. Some of the remains one Humvee take a direct hit ple were said to have died. Americans. Sheikh Qais a pornographic movies and civilians. The newspaper also Shi'ites took to the streets lect kitchen equipment. America brought with it to American consul running act then? Had he just had members of the Iraqi Civil delight.

but we didn't get

a shiny award or

anything

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ay published Oct 2003: 4,356 UK respondents indicated how satisfied they were with the way

the sea (although Iraq is As al-Sadr grew more and ing together with explosive masked men were waiting one had no head." with guns and grenades. Two vehicles caught fire that the contractors were delib-

More seriously, other artinewspaper to close for 60 called Blackwater set off from a car and dragged through the Regardless of whether the cles accused America of delib- days and arrested one of al- an army base in a convoy of streets. Another was hacked to incident was engineered by

were strung up from a bridge from an RPG and explode. As tanks and armoured vehi- Qazali, one of al-Sadr's senior liquor and hashish that derided Paul Bremer, the in protest. Why did Bremer According to Blackwater, as the mob chanted their Minutes later an ambulance cles sealed off the city, the aides, said: "The Americans carrying a mother and daugh- hospital filled with hundreds have managed to achieve in Iraq, as a "third-rate intelli- enough of al-Sadr or did he Defence Corps (ICDC) prom- "The bodies were hanging ter was caught in the crossfire. of casualties, including one year what Saddam did not

Another report claimed that gence agent" with a desire want to deal with the al-Mahdi ised to help the contractors upside down on each side of Both died." American forces had started to "erase Islam from the "army" before it was too late? with safe passage through the bridge," said one resident. The attacks spread across "It was terrible," said one rule: an alliance between Events were suddenly com- Falluja. But inside the town, "They had no hands, no feet, the country. In Ramadi, 12 US witness speaking on a satellite Sunni and Shi'ites. We are all soldiers died. In al-Kut, phone from inside the be- brothers in arms." Blackwater now believes

gainst Freemasons for being an interest. Then on March 28 THREE days after the news- and the occupants were erately led into the ambush in league with Zionists in a - without warning - paper was closed, four employ- dragged out. A mob de- either by renegade members Bremer acted: he ordered the ees of a private security firm scended. One body was tied to of the ICDC or by impostors. al-Sadr or by Sunni extrem-

> The next day militants gathred in Najaf outside a coali- Ukrainian forces pulled out sieged town. "People are heavily armed men stood

tion base and a three-hour gun after a night of relentless mor- holed up at home. Groups of guard in open defiance of the battle erupted against the tar fire. It took American insurgents are fighting in the Americans who have branded Spanish, American and Salva- troops two days to retake the streets firing at the Americans them outlaws. Others were dorian troops there. It left town. In Karbala, Polish with RPGs. I saw the dead digging in and stockpiling 24 dead and some 200 forces were attacked. bodies of three Americans in weapons. Among them was

REPORTING TEAM

men also let rip with RPGs marines moved in to quell the and burnt them."

vounded.

In Falluja, hell and vengeInside Sadr city, the militiaance came to town as US tants poured petrol over them

Ali Hassani, 29, who a year tants poured petrol over them before had been jubilant at the

fall of Saddam. and small arms when they city where their countrymen Shi'ite Muslims from Bagh- He had watched the bronze encountered an American had been butchered. Plumes dad set out to take food and statue of the Iraqi dictator torn of black smoke rose as heli- other supplies to the Sunnis in down in central Baghdad "There was shooting every- copter gunships attacked doz- Falluja. Other Shi'ites were and had been among the where," said Hasen Keldar, ens of targets. A mosque was said to be donating blood to throng that jumped onto the who witnessed some of the hit by two 500lb precision- help. It seemed as if the countoppled monument and thumpfighting. "It was hell. I saw guided bombs. Some 40 peo- try was uniting against the ed the dictator's face with his

As fear gripped the towns,

oled up in Najaf, where his

the city gates and had full con-

Outside al-Sadr's main

offices opposite the Iman Ali

sque, one of the holiest

trol of the main police station.

itia manned checkpoints at

1-Sadr was reported to be

'Mad Max' lays claim to a

Richard Woods, Nick Fielding, Hala Jaber, Adam Nathan,

Gareth Walsh, David Cracknell and Peter Almond

he maverick cleric who threatened to bring Iraq

Two weeks ago Moqtada al-Sadr was a to the brink of all-out fringe fanatic. Now he is the focus for a rebellion last week has long been happy to lace his rebellion. Hala Jaber charts his rise theology with anti-western vitriol. However, Hojatoleslam Moqtada al-Sadr, 30, owes his status in Iraq's major-

in domestic politics.

mantle but found himself a year ago.

ersion of Islam has been his goadings and stuck to an religious police, but the almported from Iran's ultra- unwritten understanding with Mahdi has swelled into some- ship between al-Sadr and alonservative clerics, with the Iranians that as long as thing even more sinister. Thou-Sistani has deteriorated drawhom he has forged strong Tehran encouraged Iraq's sands of Iranian Revolution- matically in recent months. links. Western intelligence Shi'ite majority to remain ary Guards are said to have Al-Sadr is said to be jealous of sources also suggest that peaceable, the Shi'ites would crossed the border and joined the ayatollah's ability to general-Sadr has won considerable be assured a larger role in the up and Iran is believed to have ate revenue from religious financial and logistical sup- running of Iraq. Perhaps provided the force with train- seminaries and grave sites, as port from Iran. They believe fatally, he was ignored when ing and weapons.

senior cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who has not left his home for six years, al-Sadr is happy to take the limelight and makes great political capital from his father's enduring While several of Saddam's

ity Shi'ite community not to that his charitable work in the coalition formed its in- former followers are said to his somewhat limited skills as a theologian and preacher but part by a network of extremist a theologian and preacher but part by a network of extremist Governing Council. Iranian charities and that he Meanwhile, al-Sadr has con- the Governing Council, moder-His father, Ayatollah has received advice and train- solidated his power base in ate Shi'ites have watched his Muhammad Sadeq al-Sadr, ing from Iran's Revolutionary Sadr city. With more than 2m evolution with dismay. They rose to become a revered reli- Guard in building the paramili- inhabitants, the slum has dev- see the young man as a far cry gious leader in Iraq under tary wing of his movement — eloped its own municipal, edu- from the ascetic figure cut by Saddam Hussein but was mur- the so called "al-Mahdi" army cational, medical and social his late father, whose image dered by the dictator in 1999, which took to the streets with services, along with courts pre- his son ensures graces most together with his two elder such impact last week. sided over by young judges, shopfronts in Sadr city.

sons, after becoming involved Certainly if Iran ever had a followers of al-Sadr. Their ver- Al-Sadr has leant increasspokesman in Iraq, it is al- dicts are executed by shadowy ingly towards a strict Islamic As the only surviving son of Sadr, who has happily ranted "security committees" under state, where freedoms for modthe family, Moqtada initially against America and its co-sharia (Islamic law), and the erates and Sunnis would be hoped to adopt his father's alitionallies since Saddam fell system has been compared curtailed, political and scienwith that of the Taliban in tific advancement would be

well as his control of funds



RAQ BLOODBATH

heart — aid their target was afoot.

lence seemed beyond resolu- most Shi'ites."

can't blame them."

in black with an AK-47 cra- prompted the best soundbites putting pressure on public family was negotiating with demand for them that the This week Blair is deterdled in hislap. Hand grenades did not tell the whole story. opinion and on al-Sadr's supand ammunition magazines did not tell the whole story. opinion and on al-Sadr's supmembers of the governing electricity supply cannot keep mined to stand by Bush,
council for much of last week. up. Sales of mobile phones despite some aides advising Anger andhatred were in his bloodshed, other moves were from resorting to intrigues". al-Sadr was said to be talking lite dishes abound. ourselves in human bombs," many mistakes, but it would patience and wisdom".

father's good name. He does of the population so far. For some the fury and vio- not represent the opinion of Reliable figures for the size Americans have some 70,000

tion. "The intenational civil- It was a view echoed by obtain, but Donald Rumsfeld, British have a total force of ians here are not robust," said another middle-class Iraqi, the US defence secretary, 8,700. Detachments from one leading secrity adviser in Haider al-Jelaui, an engineer. reckoned that it numbers no other nations number in the "We don't need a new war," more than 6,000 active mem- low thousands or hundreds. "Okay, they like to get a he said. "We need negotiabers in a country of some 25m Military commanders admit share of the \$8 billion on tions. I am Shi'ite. We have people. American generals that these numbers are too offer [in reconsruction aid], clerics like al-Sistani. He is vowed to "destroy" the militia small to control Iraq if large but they're not hat keen on a wise and respected man. while Bremer ordered al- swathes of the population turn ritualised murde. A lot of Our interests are best served Sadr's arrest.

cans when thy got rid of Sad- in Baghdad. "There would be was clear: do not join al- to rise up against the dam. But the have become an civil war. Al-Sadr is trading Sadr's fight. Certainly there "occupiers" army of ocupation. They only on his father's and grand- has been no general uprising

of al-Sadr's militia are hard to combat troops to hand; the

sense since the Shi'ites are the ing to the council (rather than was never far from the surface this summer. But the flourish-Now all that was forgotten. As ever, though, the bombs majority in Iraq. So as the the Americans) and calling off last week, the shops are now ing of consumer goods may be Hassani was sitting in the and killings that grabbed the fighting raged last week, his militia. According to one full of refrigerators and air- a glimmer of hope amid the back of a pick-up truck, clad television headlines and calmer Shi'ite leaders were well placed source, al-Sadr's conditioning units. Such is the chaos

he said. "Thre will be a blood- be terrible if they left now," The language was quaintly Friday he issued another call the air-conditioning units will long-term desire is for fridges,

bath. I welcomed the Ameri- said Raad al-Khafagi, a writer restrained but the message for Iraqis across the country be blamed on the coalition, not firearms.

were straiped to his chest. not heard. Away from the involved parties to refrain At the time of going to press, and cars are also rising. Satel- him not to travel to Washing-Another moderate, Ayatollah directly to representatives True, there are problems while Iraq is in turmoil. Sayed Hayeri, said that all about handing himself in. with crime and black markets, Both the president and the dare provole us we will turn "THE Americans have made sides "should observe However, in public he and some observers worry that prime minister must be hoping remained defiant. On a lack of electricity to run all that among ordinary Iraqis the

It's kind of ironic that our

A YEAR ago America was | contingents also lack

TROOPS LACK NUMBERS AND SKILLS

celebrating the success of "warfare-lite". It took fewer supported by smart bombs to topple Saddam Hussein. Critics had told the US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld he would need double that number, writes Michael Clarke.

But while Rumsfeld's new security situation, rather military doctrine won the I than police a basically stable initial battle, it now threatens one, has not been achieved to undermine the war. Faced | before. And with Iraq, a with the possibility that Iraq | country as big as France, might slide into anarchy the size of the challenge unless they can better control the streets, US the Balkans or Afghanistan commanders are hurriedly rethinking their strategy. For troops are not numerous peacekeeping, it seems a enough, or good enough, much heavier "footprint" is then commanders tend to needed on the ground. keep them inside their armoured vehicles. If they

Until now, the Pentagon has always insisted that troop numbers in Iraq were adequate. There are 160,000 coalition troops in theatre from 35 countries but no more than 80,000 are frontline soldiers. Once shifts are taken into account, commanders can put only 25,000 to 30,000 fully prepared peacekeepers onto the streets at any one time.

The coalition has been trying to build up indigenous forces capable of taking some of the strain, but their numbers are even less encouraging. The US plans to build an Iraqi army of 40,000 troops but so far has less than one-tenth of that number operational. force of about 70,000 but it | thousand supporters to take needs retraining — a lengthy on the coalition. With so few process running at a rate of | experienced boots on the about 4,000 a year. There is ground, US officers may feel also an Iraqi Civil Defence Corps of about 35,000 and police the insurgency. a Facility Protection Service

foreign deployment.

They have the hardware to of around 55,000 but these, suppress the Mahdi Army, too, are of dubious quality. but facing down the The lack of peacekeeping insurgents and narrowing experience among the forces | the room for political is also a drawback. The US | manoeuvre is probably what military has not transferred al-Sadr most wants. the lessons it learned in the

Balkans. The troops sent to | Professor Michael Clarke is Iraq are often on their first | the director of the International Policy Institute Most of the other allied | at King's College London

them now are jist sitting in by him not by radicals like holes, keeping heir heads al-Sadr." Behind the scenes the Iraqi ever, shows that many of the Governing Council was trying population are more interested. Governing Council was trying population are more interested down and doing the accounts. To many moderates, engag- to cut a deal with al-Sadr, in cooling things down than render people speechless. There's no reconstruction ing with the American drive promising to give him a fair firing them up.

begun to show some fruit," he

told an Egyptian newspaper.

al-Sadr the Americans may

have initiated jihad. "Disaster

has struck in Iraq and it is the

Americans who are driving it

into a catastrophe," said Say

yed Hani Fahes, a Shi'it cleric. "They have elevated an

otherwise ordinary — albeit

eisty — cleric to new heights

Iraq needs to be saved now

otherwise the outcome is ex-

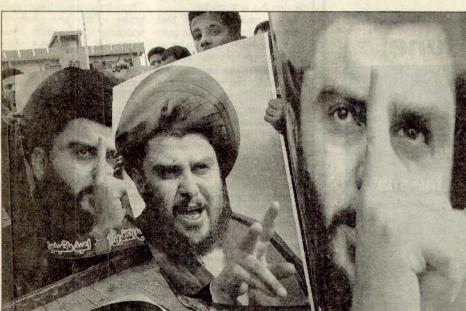
tremely dire not only for the

Americans and its coalition

but for the remaining Shi'ites

the Sunnis and the Kurds."

nation with Mahdi army



Fate of hate: posters of al-Sadr are sold in Sadr city, the Baghdad suburb named after his father

cemented his popularity. they pretend to be".

father, the Grand Ayatollah and meekly calling his follow- "There are other methods several trump cards over a coa-Abu al-Cassem al-Khoei, was ers to avoid mob violence. before taking a decision on lition that he has on the run.

Among anxious foreigners wondering whether to stay in Iraq, al-Sadr's alarming antics have earned him the sobriquet of "Mad Max". In a further self-reinvention, al-Sadr i this weekend said to have de

The animosity with al- Although there is little love Yet despite his fearsome Karbala and Najaf. Any harm Sistani ntensifed further with lost between the two men, reputation and his incitements to al-Sadr will be seen as a dirthe muder of Abd al-Majid over the past week al-Sistani, to rebellion in the past week, ect attack against the prophal-Khoe, a moderate cleric 72, has kept his counsel, even al-Sadr has cannily avoided et's family itself. With hi who retuned to Iraq from Brit- legitimising his young rival's any mention of jihad, or holy shrewd sense of timing and ain in Aril 2003. Al-Khoei's move against the occupation war, against the Americans. symbolism, al-Sadr still holds • £5 monthly line rental for the first 6 months (then £12.50 a month).*

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