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## U.S. General Apologizes for Desecration of Koran

By ANDREW E. KRAMER

BAGHDAD — The commander of United States troops in Baghdad asked local leaders and tribal sheiks this weekend for their forgiveness after the discovery that a soldier had used a Koran for target practice at a shooting range.

Responding to an episode ripe with the potential to stoke unrest, the commander, Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond, held a meeting Saturday with Iraqi leaders.

“I come before you here seeking your forgiveness,” General Hammond said at the meeting, in remarks carried by CNN. “In the most humble manner, I look in your eyes today and I say, please forgive me and my soldiers.”

General Hammond also read a letter of apology from the soldier, who was not identified. “I sincerely hope that my actions have not diminished the partnership that our two nations have developed together,” the general read from the letter.

Another American officer kissed a Koran and gave it to the tribal leaders, according to news agency reports.

A statement Sunday from the American military called the desecration of the Koran, in Radwaniya, just west of Baghdad, “serious and deeply troubling” and said the soldier had been disciplined and sent out of [Iraq](#). Iraqi police officers had found the Koran on May 11 perforated with bullet holes after American forces withdrew from the area.

Elsewhere in Iraq, the interior minister, [Jawad al-Bolani](#), warned insurgents in the northern city of Mosul that they would become “targets” if they did not take advantage of an amnesty and weapons buyback offer made on Friday by the prime minister, [Nuri Kamal al-Maliki](#).

The Iraqi government is conducting an offensive against Sunni insurgents in Mosul.

The government also announced details of the weapons buyback offer.

It is offering \$167 for a 60-millimeter mortar tube and \$416 for a machine gun. In a reflection of the surfeit of guns in Iraq, payments for handguns and assault rifles were lower, ranging from \$41 for a pistol to \$120 for a Kalashnikov assault rifle. Iraqis are allowed to possess one assault rifle or pistol for self-defense.

In Baghdad, the Oil Ministry said that it had compiled a list of 35 foreign companies eligible for contracts to raise production at Iraqi oil fields, in a step toward meeting the government’s goal of pumping an additional 500,000 barrels per day by the end of the year.

After years of neglect, Iraq’s oil fields are decrepit and produce far less oil than they did at their peak, in 1979, when [Saddam Hussein](#) took power. The companies are bidding for contracts to make repairs and improve performance of existing fields.

Also on Sunday, Iraqi television, citing a government spokesman, reported that a court in Baghdad had sentenced to death the killer of the Chaldean Christian archbishop of Mosul, Paulos Faraj Rahho, 65, who was kidnapped Feb. 29 and found dead two weeks later.

Gunmen had sprayed his car with bullets, killed two guards and shoved him into the trunk of a car. Still, Archbishop Rahho managed to reach his cellphone and call church officials and implore them not to pay a ransom for his release, saying the money would only finance more violence.

The slaying elicited a statement of regret from the [Vatican](#), condemning the senseless violence that has hit the Christian minority particularly hard. The Chaldeans are the largest Christian group in Iraq. The Chaldean Church is an Eastern Rite

church that is part of the Roman Catholic Church but maintains its own customs and liturgy.

*Mudhafer al-Husaini contributed reporting.*

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