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## IRAQ NOW OFFICIALLY RULING ITSELF

U.S.-LED COALITION IN IRAQ TRANSFERS SOVEREIGNTY OVER TO IRAQI INTERIM GOVERNMENT MONDAY.



ARCHIVE - ALYSSA - RASHBAUM  
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The U.S.-led coalition in Iraq transferred sovereignty over to the Iraqi interim government on Monday.

In a small ceremony in the Coalition Provisional Authority's "Green Zone" headquarters in Baghdad, U.S. administrator L. Paul Bremer gave the legal document transferring sovereignty to the head of the Iraqi Supreme Court, who gave it to President Sheikh Ghazi al-Yawar, according to CNN.

The transfer marked a "great hope for Iraqis," President Bush said at a NATO summit in Turkey following the ceremony. "After decades of brutal rule by a terror regime, the Iraqi people have their country back."

The handover, which occurred at 10:26 a.m. Baghdad time, took place two days before the scheduled transfer of sovereignty, originally set for June 30. When reporters asked about the change in date, an Iraqi official explained that Prime Minister Allawi requested it because "every day matters."

"I welcome Iraq's steps to take its rightful place of equality and honor among the free nations of the world," Bremer said in his letter attached to the transfer document.

Given the barrage of attacks and bombings by insurgents, the new date of the transfer was kept secret until the ceremony took place.

The decision to hasten the transfer came on Monday morning (June 28) at the NATO summit, though preparations for the possibility of an earlier transfer began a week ago, according to CNN. Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari met with coalition leaders in Istanbul, Turkey, where the summit took place, and told reporters that the early transfer is "a sign we are ready for the job."

With the transfer of sovereignty the Iraqi government will be focused on preparing for official elections, which are scheduled to take place in January 2005. In addition, the new government will manage Iraq's daily affairs and work in conjunction with the U.S.-led multinational force, which is responsible for security, according to *The Associated Press*.

After the transfer, Allawi led each member of Iraq's interim government in placing a hand on the Quran and taking an oath of office. "The transformation from dictatorship to civil society," he said, is "a major task."

"This is a historical day ... A day that all Iraqis have been looking forward to," President Al-Yawar said. "This is a day we are going to take our country back into the international forum. We want a free and democratic Iraq, and we want a country that is a source of peace and stability for the whole world."

Despite the transfer, about 135,000 U.S. troops continue to occupy Iraq.

Bremer, who has been in Iraq for 14 months as the coalition administrator, boarded a helicopter out of Iraq less than an hour after the ceremony, according to CNN.