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## U.S. probing alleged rape of Sunni woman

By Oren Dorell  
USA TODAY

BAGHDAD — The U.S. military said Wednesday that it will launch its own investigation into an alleged rape that has created a furor among Iraq's Sunnis and bitterly split the country's government.

Gen. David Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, ordered an investigation into allegations by a 20-year-old Sunni woman who said she was raped last week by members of Iraq's Shiite-dominated police force.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki cleared the three police officers Tuesday following an investigation that lasted less than a day. He announced an unspecified reward for the officers and said the rape charge was fabricated to discredit the U.S. and Iraqi security crackdown in Baghdad.

Al-Maliki on Wednesday fired a leading Sunni official who had called for an international investigation.

Maj. Gen. William Caldwell, top spokesman for the U.S. military here, announced Petraeus' decision to look into the allegations. Caldwell said U.S. doctors originally treated the woman and kept her overnight at a U.S. military hospital.

"What I can tell you is that at a point on Sunday evening an Iraqi woman was brought to our medical facility," he said. "She was put under the care of our medical personnel there, and sometime early Monday morning she was released."

The results of the U.S. investigation will be provided to Iraqi officials after they make a decision "on how they are going to move forward" with the judicial process, Caldwell said.

Ahmed al-Samaraie, the Sunni official fired by al-Maliki, said the woman's allegations were not unique.

"Many girls are raped, but they refuse to appear in the media so as not to tarnish their reputations," he said. Al-Samaraie heads the Sunni Endowment, which cares for Sunni mosques and shrines in Iraq.

The incident has fired public sentiment in a city riven by tension between Sunnis and majority Shiites.

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"Everybody is talking about her and laughing at her, on the bus, on the streets, my family and all my friends," said A'mer Ameer, 35, a Shiite in Baghdad's Karada neighborhood. In TV interviews, the accuser was too calm to be believable, he said. "I think it's a game to destroy the security plan after (Sunni extremists) see it's starting to give good results."

Sunni students in Mosul rallied to demand a new government probe.

Farooq Ihssan, 33, from Baghdad's Ameriya district, said Sunnis at his mosque were urged to protest today. "Shame on every Iraqi who says this woman is a liar," Ihssan said.


Ahmed Abdullah, 29, a Sunni from Zaiona, had doubts. "I don't believe that Iraqis will rape a woman. We don't have such a culture. We might kill, behead or do torture, but rape — I don't think so," he said.

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