

Americans plan giant, 3,000-staff embassy for Baghdad

By David Rennie in Washington

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America is to establish a 3,000-man embassy in Iraq, its largest mission anywhere, the secretary of state, Colin Powell, revealed yesterday.

The move is part of urgent steps being taken in an attempt to shore up the US post-occupation presence in Iraq.

The giant embassy will wield considerable sway over the new Iraq, not least because Washington expects to maintain a garrison of more than 100,000 troops in the country, even after the occupation formally ends.

The embassy will be immediately charged with overseeing elections and the creation of a new Iraqi constitution, complex steps that were originally planned to take place under direct US rule, until the deadline for handing over sovereignty was brought forward to this June.

Mr Powell told the Washington Post that the embassy's mission would not be easy. He said he planned to spend the next six months seeking international support from the United Nations and Nato.

"As I build up that large embassy, I've also got to generate more international support . . . get the UN back in there in force," he said, adding: "I think Nato is more and more willing to play a role in Iraq."

Unlike the Coalition Provisional Authority, the embassy will be the fiefdom of the State Department, many of whose Middle Eastern specialists were more or less openly opposed to invading Iraq in the first place.

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