

IRAQ's new government with added sovereignty, which takes the reins on 30 June, has said it wants to review the role of foreign private military companies – or mercenaries as they're more commonly known – which currently operate under the same local legal immunity that US, British and other coalition forces enjoy.

One of their first targets may be a UK-South African outfit called Erinys (see *Eyes passim*). Erinys Management recruited about 350 foreign soldiers, many of them from apartheid South Africa's special forces. These soldiers command about 14,500 Iraqi soldiers. But most interest in Baghdad surrounds the manner in which Erinys secured an \$80m contract last year from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to guard oil installations. To the fury of Erinys' competitors, this newly-formed company didn't have to go through any competitive tendering arrangements and had had no experience in the Middle East.

Erinys South Africa formed a joint venture – Erinys Iraq – with Faisal Daghistani, the son of Tamara Daghistani, who was one of Ahmed Chalabi's most trusted confidantes. She helped create Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress. Erinys' lawyer in Iraq is Chalabi's nephew, Salem Chalabi. In Bagdad, Erinys is referred to as Chalabi's private militia.

Most surprising of all, last month Erinys was re-awarded the private security contract for another year by the CPA just three weeks before US deputy defence secretary Paul Wolfowitz publicly denounced Chalabi and about six weeks before the CPA was due to be wound up. The successor regime may be less impressed by Erinys' military record.

No. 1108
11 June –
24 June 2004
£1.30



PRIVATE EYE