



## KERIK CLOSE CALL - EX-CITY TOP COP DODGES BAGHDAD BOMB

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BY Lathem in D.C. and Al Guart in N.Y.

Baghdad's fourth car bombing in a month killed an employee of a U.S.-sponsored police academy yesterday - but spared former New York top cop Bernard Kerik, who would have been in the building if he hadn't left Iraq a day early.

Eighteen people were injured by the massive bomb, set off by remote control in a stolen Iraqi government car.

It went off in a parking garage next to the Rafasa police headquarters in downtown Baghdad, sending a huge column of smoke into the sky.

Investigators believe Hassan al-Obeidi, the U.S.-appointed Baghdad police chief, was the bomb's target. Officials said he was out of his office during the bombing.

Kerik said he was to have been in the building yesterday. "I was scheduled to be at the academy to say my goodbyes," he told The Post.

"At the last minute, I decided to leave a day earlier, otherwise I would have been there when that bomb went off."

Kerik said the blast, probably set off by Saddam Hussein loyalists, won't intimidate the Iraqi cops. "They are courageous people," he said.

In An Najaf yesterday 400,000 people, many carrying rifles and others whipping their backs with chains, took to the streets as Shiite Muslim leader Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim, who favored creation of an Iranian-style theocracy in Iraq, was buried.

In an angry eulogy, his brother Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim, a member of the U.S.-appointed Iraq governing council, blamed the American military for the death of his sibling in a massive bombing last week, and called on GIs to get out.

"The occupation force is primarily responsible for the pure blood that was spilt in holy An Najaf. Iraq must not remain occupied, and the occupation must leave so that we can build Iraq as God wants us to do," he told the mourners.