



# IRAQ CRISIS

## 30 govts support US publicly

REUTERS, Washington  
Thirty governments have agreed to be named in public as supporters of a US invasion of Iraq, and about 15 others are co-operating behind the scenes, the State Department said on Tuesday.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said the basic criterion for inclusion in the published list was that the countries wanted to be publicly associated with the idea that Iraq has to be disarmed now. They are not necessarily providing any assistance to the US war effort.

The only allies known to be contributing offensive military forces are Britain and Australia, but the Danish government offered on Tuesday to send military personnel. Boucher declined to say how many were willing to fight.

The 30 governments, together with the United States, represent some 1.1 billion people, about one-sixth of the total population of the world.

The list includes no governments in the Arab world, although states in the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council are giving

logistical support to the US forces expected to invade. The only mainly Muslim countries are Albania, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Uzbekistan.

On Monday President Bush gave Iraqi President Saddam Hussein 48 hours to go into exile or face an attack that will start "at a time of our choosing."

Boucher said the 30 countries on the list are Afghanistan, Albania, Australia, Azerbaijan, Britain, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, South Korea, Spain, Turkey and Uzbekistan.

Rep. Lloyd Doggett, a Texas Democrat, ridiculed the list. "While the president's directive to Saddam to 'Get out of Dodge by sundown' is tough, the posse announced today is mighty weak," he said in a statement.

"It includes such military powerhouses as Eritrea and Estonia and pariahs like Uzbekistan with a human rights record as difficult to

defend as Saddam Hussein's ... This list is an embarrassing indication of the administration's foreign policy failure," the congressman added.

A US official earlier included Bulgaria, which supported Washington in its quest for a UN Security Council resolution authorising war, but Bulgaria is not on the final list.

Japan qualified its support by saying it was willing only to help with post-conflict peacekeeping and reconstruction.

"In addition to these countries, there are actually another 15 or so that we know of, probably more than 15, that are co-operating with us and the coalition, are perhaps offering defensive assets in the event that Saddam resorts to the use of weapons of mass destruction," the spokesman added.

He gave no explanation for their silence but some Arab governments, sensitive to public opinion, have done more behind the scenes than they have discussed in public, officials say. Israel, Washington's closest ally in the Middle East, is assumed to be co-operating but it too is not on the list.

## Blair fights back party rebels

AFP, London

Prime Minister Tony Blair took Britain closer to war in the Gulf after weathering an unprecedented rebellion within his own Labour party against his tough stance on Iraq.

After a highly charged emergency debate that ran for almost 10 hours, the House of Commons passed a motion that Britain should use "all means necessary" to ensure the disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction with Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, won the ballot by a vote of 412-149.

But that was not before 217 MPs -- out of a Commons total of 659 -- voted for an amendment which stated that the case for war with Iraq had "not yet been established".

Those who voted for the amendment included 138 Labour backbenchers, or about a third of the governing party's caucus.

Though the amendment was defeated, the size of the rebellion was an embarrassment for Blair's

stance in leading Britain towards a US-led war on Iraq after giving up on seeking a fresh UN resolution.

It was a further setback for the premier after the resignation of three of his ministers, including Commons leader Robin Cook, who was foreign secretary during the 1999 Kosovo war, and six ministerial aides.

Blair had put his own authority on the line, delivering a combative and passionate speech, and hinting that he would be ready to resign if a majority of MPs voted against military action.

But with the opposition Conservatives lining up in support of the government, and despite angry anti-war protests outside parliament and in the Commons' public gallery, Blair gained the backing he needed.

Last month, Blair suffered what was then the biggest rebellion in his own party since he became prime minister in 1997 when 122 Labour MPs voted against the government to say that more time be given to UN arms inspectors.

After Tuesday's late-night vote,

Blair's spokesman urged parliament and the nation to rally behind the 45,000 British soldiers, sailors and airmen preparing for battle in the Gulf.

"It is now time for all of us in parliament and in the country to come together and show the support our armed forces deserve," he said.

Blair had told parliament during Tuesday's debate that a failure to deal with Saddam would lead other nations to think that they too can develop weapons of mass destruction with impunity.

"This is a tough choice," said Blair, his voice quivering. "But it is also a stark one -- to stand British troops down and turn back; or to hold firm to the course we have set. I believe we must hold firm."

Blair said he was "sad" to have seen French President Jacques Chirac, who has insisted on more time to be given to UN arms inspections, so determined to veto a fresh UN resolution on Iraq.



Video picture of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, next to International Development Secretary Claire Short, addressing the House of Commons.

## Bush mending fences with Russia, China

REUTERS, Washington

After earning the ire of many world leaders with his ultimatum to President Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq, US President George W Bush is now mending fences with the Russians and Chinese despite their joining the French to thwart Washington's plans to secure a second resolution authorising war in the UN Security Council.

White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer said Bush telephoned Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday and discussed the Iraq situation. "They underscored the importance of bilateral cooperation, despite the disagreements the

United States and Russia have over the situation in Iraq," he said.

"President Putin reiterated to President Bush his invitation to visit St. Petersburg at the end of May."

Bush also called the new Chinese President Hu Jintao and both stressed the importance of good US-China relations for the advancement of bilateral interests and international peace and stability. China is also opposed to war against Iraq.

"The Presidents shared views on Iraq and North Korea. President Bush expressed appreciation for Beijing's efforts to help resolve the North Korean issue peacefully.

President Bush also reiterated his administration's commitment to a one-China policy," Fleischer said.

In striking contrast to the warmth Fleischer displayed towards the Russians and Chinese, when asked about the French Ambassador's offer of his country's help to the invading American troops if Saddam Hussein uses chemical or biological weapons, he said: "I think it is a notable statement. Let us hope it never has to come to pass."

"I just said it is a notable statement. I have not had an opportunity to have it fully studied by the United States," he added.

## 'The wait is over'

AFP, Kuwait City

US troops toiling for months in the Kuwaiti desert stepped up their last-minute preparations and tough talk on Tuesday after getting word from President George W. Bush that the time to move on Iraq was near.

"I'm happy it's finally starting and going to end soon," Corporal Sophina Burnside, 22, said at the US Marines' Camp Grizzly after Bush gave Iraqi President Saddam Hussein 48 hours to clear out or face an invasion.

First Sergeant Ed Eagan, 42, a 23-year-old Marine veteran from New York, said he was nervous for his wife and three children but was ready to roll. "It's about time," he said.

With UN weapons inspectors, diplomats and other foreign nationals scrambling out of Iraq, activity was reaching a feverish pitch among the 150,000 US troops

in Kuwait, part of a 255,000-strong force mustered in the region.

Trucks and other vehicles began lining up for a trek northward after increased flights by warplanes and exercises by Apache attack helicopters and tank-busting A-10 Thunderbolts.

Signs that war was imminent abounded: troops at an aviation support battalion were given guidelines on cultural awareness in Iraq as well as a lecture on how to deal with prisoners of war. Last week soldiers were also asked to open their chemical weapons suits - which have a shelf life of 120 days - and war games were staged on how to breach the border defences.

Tensions were also high among members of the 101st Airborne, the army's elite air assault division, which fired the opening salvos of the 1991 Gulf War by taking out Iraqi radar sites.

## US aims for swift, crushing war

BBC NEWS ONLINE

The war to liberate Kuwait was marked by a lengthy air campaign - over five weeks of bombing - followed by a ground operation that lasted a mere few days.

This coming Gulf conflict is going to be radically different.

The Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers, has stressed speed and decisiveness; the aim being to knock the Iraqi regime off-balance and to keep it there.

Three elements of the campaign can be identified: an air campaign of great intensity; a psychological warfare assault to convince the Iraqi military that resistance is pointless; and a ground operation to encircle Baghdad.

The hope is that there will be only limited resistance from demoralised and isolated units. Those that do fight will face the full force of American combat power.

And the Iraqi regime, it is hoped, will collapse from within.

Unlike 1991, the air and ground phases of the plan will be less distinct. There could be movement on the ground quite early in this campaign, and if resistance is light, then US and British forces will be encouraged to continue advancing.

The opening phase of the war may look similar to 1991; but appearances will be deceptive. It will begin with air attacks against radars, surface-to-air missile systems and command and control centres.

New, so-called E-bombs could

be used to destroy electrical circuitry. The aim will be to isolate Saddam Hussein and his senior commanders. There will be fewer targets than in 1991.

But the attacks - especially in the Baghdad area - will be much more intensive and concentrated into a much shorter time period.

Unlike in 1991 when the weather - the worst for over a decade - significantly hampered air attacks using laser-guided weapons, this time they will be carried out with cheaper, and hence more numerous, satellite-guided weapons.

Even many cruise missiles are now satellite guided. These are highly accurate.

But like all man-made technology, precision-guided munitions can go wrong for a whole variety of reasons.

There will be civilian casualties. But the aim of the US and British is to reduce these to a minimum and to reduce damage to the civilian infrastructure to a minimum as well.

They are likely to be clearing up the mess afterwards and responsible for restoring essential services.

Full-scale air attacks against fielded Iraqi forces will depend upon what the Iraqi military decides to do. And this will depend in part on another important element of the campaign: psychological operations.

Their aim is to discourage Iraqi soldiers from fighting and to dissuade their commanders from using chemical or biological weapons.

This campaign, using leaflets and broadcasts is well under way. Its effectiveness will only be proven when war actually breaks out.

Within days - some people believe hours - US and British ground forces will be moving into Iraq. Some airborne units may leap-frog deep into the country.

The bulk of the heavy US and British armour is concentrated on the southern front where a number of water obstacles could pose challenges.

But if the advance is rapid then a key problem will be maintaining their lines of supply.

The US will also want to get significant forces on the ground in northern Iraq as quickly as possible to secure oilfields and to maintain order in Kurdish areas.

Clearly much can go wrong. But the outcome of this conflict is not in doubt. How long it takes and the level of casualties on both sides will depend upon the degree of Iraqi resistance.

But the imbalance between the two sides is stark. Urban warfare, say, in Baghdad could enable the Iraqis to inflict significant casualties on the Americans, but would risk a terrible price in civilian loss of life.

Equally the use of chemical weapons could cause some problems for advancing US and British forces, but they are well-equipped and trained to deal with this environment.

Civilian casualties, however, could be serious if the weapons were used near inhabited areas.

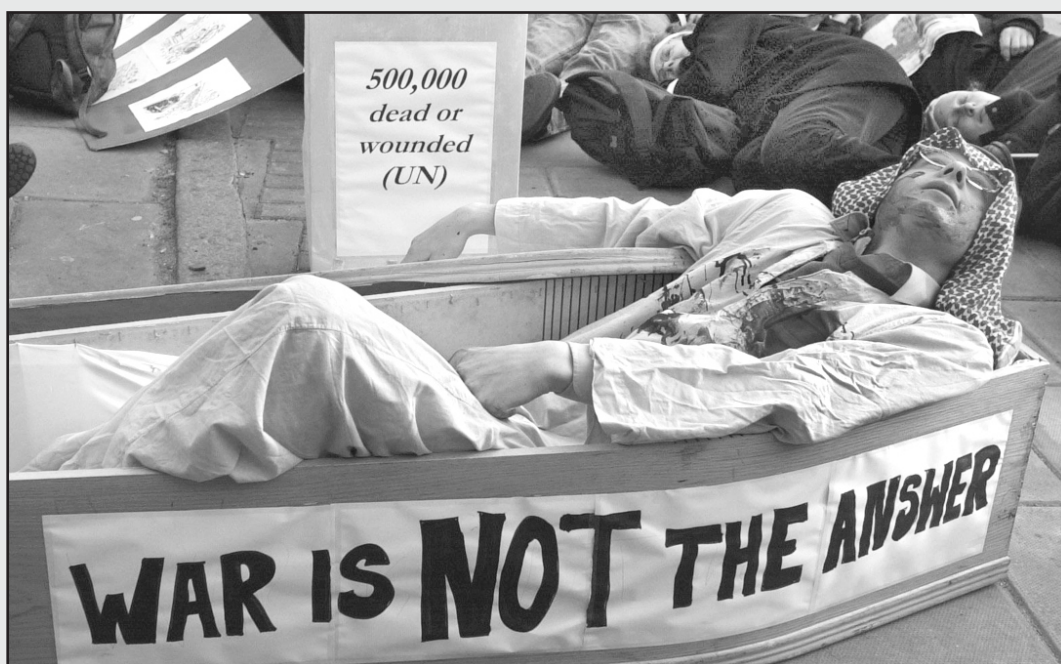
## Against the war



Several hundred protesters gathered in New York's Union Square to protest the impending war in Iraq.



One protester holding a mock baby (L) and another a placard, perform during a protest against the looming US-led attack on Iraq in front of the US embassy in Jakarta, March 19, 2003.



A protester lies in a coffin yesterday during a demonstration opposed to war with Iraq outside the south London home of Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. Up to 40 people shouted slogans and waved banners as Straw left his house.

## Saddam's downfall raises hopes for Kuwaiti POWs

AFP, Kuwait City

Twelve-year-old Kuwaiti Nasser Tariq is hoping that the downfall of Saddam Hussein after an attack on Iraq could be the key to finding out what has happened to the father he has never seen.

Nasser was not even born when his father Tariq Al-Ghathny disappeared in Kuwait City in 1990 after being seized by the Iraqi intelligence services for taking a picture of a sensitive site.

The youngster believes his father, once a policeman, was jailed in Kuwait and subsequently moved to Iraq but admits that his family have long run out of leads on his whereabouts or even if he is still alive.

"Saddam Hussein says there are no POWs in his jail but I think he is lying," Nasser told AFP. "If the word comes to Iraq, then the door will open."

Thousands of Kuwaiti civilians suspected of taking part in the resistance during the Iraqi occupation in 1990-91 were rounded up by intelligence agents and jailed without trial before being transferred to prisons in Iraq.

While most were subsequently handed over or freed after the liberation of Kuwait, some 600 are still unaccounted for.

The prospect of a US-led assault on Baghdad has raised the hopes of families who have been left in the dark for the last dozen years to find out what has happened to their loved ones.

Bahja Murrifa has never given up hope that her daughter Sammera is still alive, despite having heard no news for 10 years.

Bahja says her daughter, who was then 26, was picked up on the streets of Kuwait City in November 1990 after provoking the anger of the Iraqi authorities for working as a volunteer nurse in the capital's Mubarak hospital.

An escaped Lebanese prisoner has told Bahja that he travelled with her daughter in a minibus which was transferring prisoners across Iraq in 1993, but since then the family has had no news.

"We do not know if all of them are alive," said Murrifa, who is a member of the National Committee for Missing and POW affairs.

"Maybe most have been killed but we all have hope that they will come back."

Many of the families are bitter that the allies did not use their crushing victory in 1991 to push harder for the return of all the prisoners.

They hope that people with knowledge of what happened to their relatives will feel free to speak out after Saddam Hussein's downfall.

"We want the Americans and the British to force this issue," said Tariq Idris, whose brother Khalid was seized during a raid on his apartment.

"It must be a big responsibility for the new government in Baghdad and it should be one of the main humanitarian requirements."

Iraq agreed last December to resume technical talks with the International Committee of the Red Cross on the fate of the prisoners after readmitting weapons inspectors, but that has not resulted in any breakthrough.

"We hope that this (war) will be an opportunity. My brother has five sons and they need to know," said Idris.

"We hope that he is alive but if he is dead that is for God and then he is a martyr for Kuwait."

Nasser Tariq is also resigned to the fact that his father may be dead but refuses to give up all hope for the man whose picture is pinned to his chest.