



# IRAQ INVASION

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## Grieving parents curse Bush

REUTERS, Baghdad

Rasoul Hammed Najeed stood outside his home sobbing uncontrollably for his five-year-old son, killed while playing near a busy Baghdad vegetable market when an air raid struck.

"After this crime, I wish I could see Bush in order to cut him to pieces with my teeth," he cried.

Another man, identified as Saad Abd Qasim, stood as if in a trance, unable to speak.

Friends told Reuters that his wife, his child and his wife of his son had been among the 50 to 60 people Iraqis say were killed in the raid.

"We heard a plane flying over us. We saw a rocket coming in our direction, and then we heard the explosion. My shop was shaken but, thank God, I am safe," said Eyad Abadi, 30.

The raid took place late on Friday in the run-down, working-class district of Shula in northwest Baghdad, inhabited mostly by Shi'ite Muslims.

Most of the one-story shops in the immediate area were demol-

ished. The ground was covered with blood and broken glass.

This correspondent saw 10 corpses. He also saw a crater about two meters (yards) wide and half a meter deep. Many cars nearby were badly damaged.

Abu Dhabi television said US cruise missiles may have hit the market.

The US military blamed another explosion earlier this week in a Baghdad residential area on an errant Iraqi missile. It had no immediate comment on Friday's raid.

There were scenes of panic and confusion at the nearby Al-Noor Hospital as relatives tried to locate or comfort injured loved ones.

"Is this the humanity that Bush is talking about? He has no mercy at all. May God make him fail," said Ali Kadhin, whose three-year-old son was badly injured in the attack.

Dr Osama Sakhari said he had counted 55 people killed in the raid and more than 47 wounded. Iraqi Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf said at least 58 people had been killed.

Sakhari said he had counted 15 children among the dead.

"The hospital couldn't accommodate all the wounded. We had to send some of the wounded to two other hospitals in Baghdad," Sakhari said.

He added that a child had just died in his arms.

"I ask Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair to imagine how they would feel if their child died in their arms," he said.

Bush and Blair say their 10-day war is aimed at removing President Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi leadership and ridding the country of weapons of mass destruction. Baghdad denies it has any such weapons.

But the television pictures of Friday's attack, broadcast across the Arab world and beyond, are sure to damage further their efforts to convince ordinary Iraqis that the military onslaught is not aimed against them.

"I think Bush and Blair are angry because the name of the market hit is called 'Victory' (Nasr in Arabic). I think this is why they raided it," said Sakhil Jabbar Hussein, nursing a large cut in his leg.



Inside their homes, relatives of the dead prayed over the bodies in darkness. Thirty people were reported killed and a large number wounded close to the al-Naser market in the Shuwalla area of Baghdad by a US-led raid.

PHOTO: INTERNET

## Beans, bullets and band-aids in short supply

TIMES ONLINE, near al-Diwaniyah

This is a force of Marines that has run out of energy on a patch of mud in the central Iraqi marshlands.

What was supposed to be a ten-day sprint towards Baghdad ended on Friday when the US Marines 11th regiment came to rest. The force had all but exhausted its supplies of fuel, food rations, ammunition and water, and morale was at an all-time low.

The officers said that it lacked everything: "beans, bullets and Band-Aids."

The final straw was an aborted mission on Thursday to capture an airfield that proved too small to bother about, and was surrounded by sniper-infested civilian buildings.

The tanks alone had used hundreds of gallons of diesel fuel on the 40-mile round trip. The return journey was made more difficult by the Marines' own unexploded munitions, which littered the road. One young Marine stepped on a hidden dud round, losing his foot.

The young men spent their first break of the war stripped to the waist, sunbathing on the bonnets of their Humvees, occasionally looking up to enjoy a panoramic view of mud.

Some listened to the BBC on

shortwave radios. An entrepreneurial soldier brandishing a pair of electric clippers had set up a temporary barber shop. He offered two styles - bald and nearly bald and was soon knee-deep in clumps of hair that had not seen shampoo in weeks.

Some units were down to just one day's supply of food. Many of the vehicles' fuel gauges were close to the red.

The man in charge of solving the logistics problem is Lieutenant-Colonel Keil Gentry, a fair-haired Marine who has moved around too much to claim a hometown. It is his job to refuel the American war machine and since the war began last week he has spent every day narrowly avoiding disaster.

First it was the sheer pace of the troops' dash towards Baghdad. Then it was the awful mud storms. Now he must cope with Iraqi "civilians" who wave and smile at his supply convoys, then lob mortars and grenades as they drive past. "Everybody's taken a few potshots," Colonel Gentry said.

"The resupply guys, they got hit the other day by a handful of soldiers. The big threat is irregular forces: they take a few shots, fire a few mortars. I'm not so sure the Iraqis pick and choose their targets very carefully though."

The Iraqis may be disorganised and may cause few US casualties but their tactics have managed to bog down the Americans' supply chain. Heightened security has caused log-jams ("log" as in logistics, the Marines say) along Highway 1, the main supply route northwest.

Even advancing troops get caught in the chaos, remaining stationary in tailbacks for hours at a time. Officers fume in their sweltering Humvees as Cobra helicopters are forced to guard the convoys instead of hunting down Republican Guard units and their weapons caches. "We planned for it, we trained for it, but we really hoped it wouldn't happen," Colonel Gentry said of the guerrilla-style fighting.

Like the Iraqis, the Americans have improvised where they can. Some of the fuel, for example, is being delivered by civilian petrol tankers.

Some essential supplies like ammunition a lot more of which has been used than expected has been flown in by helicopter. "We thought this would be a liberation of Iraq. We thought the people would be throwing flowers at us," Colonel Gentry said.

"But it's been a lot more hostile than that."

## Another lie unveiled

THE GUARDIAN, Camp as-Sayliya

British PM Tony Blair appeared to backtrack yesterday when his official spokesman said there was no "absolute evidence" that two British soldiers who were killed after being separated from their unit in southern Iraq were executed, as the prime minister had earlier suggested.

Despite Mr Blair's unequivocal accusation that two British soldiers were executed by Iraqi forces, his official spokesman later said: "The bodies were some distance from the vehicles in which they were travelling. They had lost their helmets and flak jackets. We accept that this is not absolute evidence, but it does point in the direction that these people were shot."

Mr Blair had been told by defence chiefs that the way the bodies were lying in images shown on the Arabic language television channel, al-Jazeera, suggested that they were dragged out of their Land Rover and killed in cold blood.

The two men were named by the Ministry of Defence last night as Sapper Luke Allsopp, 24, from north London and Staff Sergeant Simon Cullingworth, 36, from Essex, both of 33 EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) Engineer Regiment.

During a joint press conference with George Bush at Camp David,

Mr Blair called the supposed executions acts "of cruelty beyond all human comprehension".

A British military official at central command in Qatar was less adamant: "While the footage shown yesterday suggested that they might have been executed, the pictures are of a poor quality and don't provide us with the facts."

Mr Bush had supported Mr Blair. "They were murdered, unarmed soldiers executed. That's a war crime," he said.

Sources said that the fact that the bodies were lying away from their vehicle without their rifles and helmets suggested they were not killed in the course of a battle. It is also possible the bodies may have been pulled away from their vehicle after the men were killed and their rifles and helmets stolen as trophies.

Yesterday, members of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment expressed their anger at the reports that colleagues had been "executed". Private Danny Quirk, 22, from Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, said at a checkpoint close to the spot where the British soldiers were missing: "Now we know we are fighting a dirty war. If it's true that the British soldiers were executed in cold blood, we have to accept that we are fighting barbarians."



Iraqi civilians, fleeing Nasiriyah, pass by a destroyed American truck as they raise their hand to US Marines 29 March 2003. Waves of attacks on the Iraqi capital and its surrounds continued, the 10th day of the war, with at least one missile crashing into the Information Ministry at dawn after scores of people died in a market.

PHOTO: AFP

## US Apaches launch night attack on Karbala

AFP, Baghdad

US Army Apache attack helicopters and airforce planes launched a night attack on Iraqi forces near the holy Shiite city of Karbala, military officials said early Saturday, as Baghdad took another heavy pounding.

The "Screaming Eagles" of the 101st Airborne Division late Friday struck the "vicinity" of the city, about 80 kilometres (50 miles) southwest of the Iraqi capital, its Aviation Brigade commander, Colonel Greg Gass, told AFP.

The joint army-airforce strikes followed a day of intense aerial bombardment of Baghdad and the northern city of Mosul.

But in a major blow to the coalition's global public relations battle, at least 30 people were killed and 47 wounded in an air raid on the capital Friday in the fiercest day of strikes since the war began on March 20.

Meanwhile, the US army's 3rd Infantry Division, backed by the 101st Airborne Division, was as close as 50 miles (80 kilometres) south of Baghdad, while marines advanced north in two prongs between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers.

However, stiff resistance, bad weather and long, vulnerable supply lines have significantly slowed their advance and prompted the coalition to publicly defend its strategy amid concern that all is not going to plan.

US President George W. Bush insisted Friday that US forces were

"making great progress" and General Richard Myers, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the coalition has "air supremacy" over 95 percent of Iraq and that 35 to 40 percent of the country's territory is no longer under the control of the Iraqi regime.

In the north, Iraqi Kurd rebels advanced Friday to within 16 kilometres (10 miles) of the northern oil capital Kirkuk in the first major movement on the northern front against Baghdad, their commanders said.

Fighters from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) captured the town of Qarah Anjir, situated in hills to the east of Kirkuk, after clearing scores of anti-tank and anti-personnel mines left behind by the retreating Iraqi army.

"The Iraqi army is finished. They were ordered to pull back to defend the city," Rostam Hamid Rahim, a top PUK commander, told reporters, adding that his forces were determined to seize Kirkuk, despite the risk of angering Washington and especially Ankara.

But the Iraqi forces near Kirkuk were quick to signal that their battle was not over. A salvo of around 10 rockets slammed into Chamchamal, east of Qarah Anjir, injuring at least one person, a PUK security official said.

Also Friday, thousands of PUK fighters backed by US special forces swept into territory held by Ansar al-Islam, a hardline group allegedly linked to the al-Qaeda terror network, Kurdish officials said.

Around the central-southern cities of Najaf, Nasiriyah and Al-Samawa, Iraq had deployed thousands of militiamen who were "fighting tenaciously," said one officer with the Third Infantry Division.

A US military spokesman at the forward command center in Qatar said four marines went missing during a "combat operation" in Nasiriyah.

Meanwhile, British forces had their hands full in the southern port of Basra, where Iraqi militia began shooting at civilians who were trying to flee in their hundreds Friday, British military spokesmen charged.

Another British spokesman Major Will McKinlay said that centres were being set up on the outskirts of the city to provide food and water to the "hundreds" of fleeing civilians who would be given safe passage.

But in what will be another psychological setback for the coalition, a British soldier was killed and three were injured on Friday in a friendly fire incident, Britain's Press Association (PA) reported, citing defence sources.

It said the soldier was killed after an American A10 tankbuster plane targeted two armoured vehicles near Basra. Defence ministry officials in London confirmed that an investigation was underway.

Further south, the first mass shipment of humanitarian aid arrived aboard the British naval support vessel Sir Galahad, which docked Friday in Umm Qasr.



PHOTO: AFP

A soldier stands guard yesterday at a Forward Arming and Refueling Point (FARP) Shell in southwestern Iraq near the wreckage of an AH-64 Apache Longbow belonging to the 2nd Battalion 101st Airborne Aviation Brigade, which crashed after take off late 28 March. Two Apaches crashed, one on take off and another on landing at the FARP, during 2nd battalion's attack near the holy Shiite city of Karbala.

## US allies list sparks global concern

AFP, Washington

Eager to present the war on Iraq as a worldwide effort, the United States has taken to releasing on an almost daily basis an ever-growing list of the members of the so-called "coalition of the willing."

But the list, available on the White House website (www.whitehouse.gov), has created nearly as much confusion as it has cleared up, as some countries have disavowed membership, demanded inclusion or reacted angrily to snide commentary about their value as partners in the conflict.

"It's become a logistical nightmare," said one senior US official. "We've created a monster that demands constant attention for consistency's sake."

The most recent list of what the State Department terms the "Coalition for the Immediate Disarmament of Iraq" names 49 countries, including the United States, which have publicly committed to support the war in some fashion.

This backing can range from

overt military involvement (the United States, Britain and Australia) to supposedly covert troop deployments (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine) to overflight rights (Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey) to political and moral support (many small South Pacific island states).

Even from its birth on March 18, the roster has been plagued by problems, including Washington's claim to have the support of some 15 nations that wished to remain anonymous.

The existence of this secret bloc of countries -- dubbed by some "the shadow coalition" or "the coalition of the unwilling to be named" -- is now neither confirmed nor denied by US officials when they boast of global support for the current conflict exceeding that of the 1991 Gulf War.

Bulgaria, which was on the first public list, decided it wanted to be anonymous and was removed, but later changed its mind, and was put back on. Iceland, which had wanted to be included, wasn't, and had to be hastily added.

In a later incarnation, the Solomon Islands was added to the list, prompting a quick rebuttal from the South Pacific nation's prime minister, who said his government was "completely unaware" of its participation in the coalition.

Slovenia, which has never been on the list, asked on Thursday to be removed after coming under the mistaken impression that US funds set aside for it to fight the war on terrorism were intended as a reward for supporting the war on Iraq.

Poland, one of several eastern European countries to provide troops to respond to a chemical, biological or nuclear attack by Iraqi forces, asked that its participation not be used for "propaganda purposes" after President George W. Bush mentioned Warsaw's contribution prominently in a Wednesday speech.

In the meantime, angered by media sarcasm about their role in the coalition, Palau and the Marshall Islands fired back at snide commentary deriding their paucity of military capability.