

This issue contains news of war on day 11 and 12



An elderly man is carried on the shoulders of two men as he and hundreds of others cross a checkpoint on the outskirts of the southern city of Basra yesterday as fighting inside the city between coalition troops and Iraqi forces continues. Hundreds of men were seen going into the city to collect family members and take them out to safety.

US, Britain recruiting UN arms inspectors to find banned arms: Blix

AFP, Stockholm

The United States and Britain are recruiting UN arms inspectors to help find banned weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix told Swedish Radio in an interview on Saturday.

"They have turned to some people who currently work for us and asked them to come down and help. These are our people who come from countries that are engaged in the conflict down there," Blix said, adding that the inspectors were free to release themselves from their UN contracts if they wished.

The inspectors were evacuated out of Iraq after less than four months into their mission and shuttled to Cyprus on March 18, two days before the US-led bombing campaign began on Baghdad.

Blix, who announced Friday that he would step down from his post when his contract runs out in June, said his team was still receiving British and US intelligence information about weapons finds made in Iraq.

"Our contacts with their intelligence organisations are continuing and it is clear that some of the information we receive is coming from there, but I don't think it is much more than what has been reported in the media," he said.

The 74-year-old Swede said he was not convinced that the discovery of discarded Iraqi gas masks by coalition troops and a suspected

chemical weapons factory was evidence that the Iraqi regime is hiding weapons of mass destruction.

"We want real proof before we believe it. And what has been presented so far does not fall under that category," he said, adding that he wanted "the smoking gun".

In a separate interview with the German weekly Welt am Sonntag, to be published Sunday, Blix said the inspectors' work "irritated" the United States as Washington had sought a UN resolution legitimizing a war on Iraq.

Asked if the United States had asked him to provide information or any expertise, Blix said: "No, I rather had the feeling, before they decided to go to war, that our work irritated them."

US officials "wanted us to present certain results, which would have allowed them to obtain a (UN) resolution" legitimizing the use of force.

Blix said that searches undertaken by the inspectors at Iraqi sites following hints by US intelligence had brought only very poor results.

"We only found weapons at three of the places where were sent," he said. "And they weren't even illegal weapons of mass destruction."

"Now it will be interesting to see if the Americans will inspect sites of which they never told us," he added.

'Pull out of bloody, unjust war', Cook warns Blair

THE GUARDIAN, London

Robin Cook launched a searing attack on the US and British governments for their prosecution of what he called a "bloody and unjust war".

It is the first time since the start of the conflict that a leading British political figure has called for hostilities to be ended with Saddam Hussein still in power.

Mr Cook's call for an immediate withdrawal from the war zone is a warning to Tony Blair of the immense political problems ahead if as is now feared the conflict drags on and the coalition forces are obliged to lay siege to Baghdad.

The former foreign secretary broke the silence he has maintained since his resignation speech in the Commons nearly a fortnight ago, which was greeted with an unprecedented standing ovation from fellow Labour MPs.

Mr Cook's intervention will raise new doubts about whether

Mr Blair can survive in office if the war is not over quickly. His opponents on the far left of the party issued a new call yesterday for his removal.

Writing in the Sunday Mirror, Mr Cook said: "I have already had my fill of this bloody and unjust war. I want our troops home and I want them home before more of them are killed."

He attacked Mr Bush for "sitting pretty in the comfort of Camp David" while Allied forces risked death in an "unnecessary and badly planned" war. "It is easy to show you are resolute when you are not one of the guys in a sand-storm peering around for snipers," he wrote. "Nobody should start a war on the assumption that the enemy's army will co-operate. But that is exactly what President Bush has done."

"And now his Marines have reached the outskirts of Baghdad, he does not seem to know what to do next."

He was scathing about the new



Cook still against the war

PHOTO: AFP

tactic outlined by the US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, which Mr Cook summarised as sitting down outside Baghdad "until Saddam surrenders".

He warned: "There is no more brutal form of warfare than a siege. People go hungry. The water and power to provide the sinews of a

city snap. Children die.

"There will be a long-term legacy of hatred for the West if the Iraqi people continue to suffer from the effects of the war we started."

Mr Cook revealed the thinking of many of those who sent the coalition into war, confident of a quick victory. "Shortly before I resigned, a Cabinet colleague told me not to worry about the political fallout the war would be finished long before polling day for the May local elections. I just hope those who expected a quick victory are proved right."

He commended the decision to bring back the bodies of slain troops for burial in Britain, but added: "I can't help asking myself if there was not a better way to show consideration for their families."

"A better way could have been not to start a war that was never necessary and is turning out to be badly planned." Mr Cook's call for an immediate end to the war was

echoed by Doug Henderson, who worked with him in the Foreign Office as Minister for Europe.

He told BBC Radio 4 that the only alternative was an escalation of the conflict, dragging in Syria and possibly Iran. "I think a ceasefire and withdrawal is by far the better way forward," he added.

Downing Street played down Mr Cook's comments and insisted that the war would be fought to the finish.

A spokesman said: "Robin Cook has a well-known position on Iraq and it is not one that the Government shares."

"As the Prime Minister said in the press conference in Camp David, we will see the military campaign through until we achieve our objectives: that is, Saddam gone and Iraq's weapons of mass destruction disarmed."

Meanwhile, some of the Prime Minister's most hardened opponents were meeting in London yesterday to plan how they could "reclaim" control of the party.

Coalition braces for more suicide attacks

BBC NEWS ONLINE

British and American servicemen have been on alert for possible suicide attacks for the past few days. It appears now that those fears may have been well-founded.

The apparent suicide bombing that has killed four American soldiers near the southern city of Najaf signals a new threat against US-led forces fighting what looks more and more like guerrilla-style tactics.

Only a few days ago, the British 3 Commando Brigade was reported to have raised its alert level and all Royal Marines were ordered to wear body armour vests and helmets at all times when outdoors.

In the days leading up to the conflict in Iraq, top Iraqi officials vowed attacks by suicide squads should there be a war against Iraq.

Now Iraqi Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan has promised they will become a "routine" tactic to fend off invaders.

The first physical evidence of plans to employ suicide missions appeared to come last week with the discovery of an Iraqi speedboat

packed with half a tonne of high explosive, raising fears of a naval attack.

The boat was intercepted by Iranian gunboats near the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab waterway that connects Iraq's second city Basra to the Gulf.

Coalition naval forces were immediately put on high alert.

Also last week, Iraq claimed a suicide bombing against a coalition tank in the south of the country, although no other casualties were reported.

One of the main fears has been of potential "suicide PoWs" - Islamic militants posing as Iraqi fighters, who, appearing to be surrendering would use suicide tactics to try to cause as many casualties as possible.

Coalition troops have been given special training on how to search and handle PoWs.

It is also feared that the Fedayeen Saddam, irregulars whose name translates as "those ready to sacrifice themselves for Saddam", might commandeer civilian vehicles, such as ambu-

lances, to deliver bombs.

The group is currently putting up much of the resistance to advancing American and British troops in the south of the country.

Suicide attacks by Palestinian militant groups targeting the better equipped Israeli army have been common during the intifada (uprising) that broke out more than two years ago.

Iraqi state television, as it praised the junior officer who had carried out Saturday's attack against American soldiers, said he had wanted to "teach the invaders a lesson in the same manner of our Palestinian martyrdom fighters".

Osama Bin Laden, no friend of Saddam Hussein's secular regime but an avowed enemy of the US, urged Iraqis last month to use the tactic to repel invading Americans.

The last time the US military faced suicide bombers was in Lebanon in the early 1980s, when 241 were killed in an attack after a member of the Hezbollah movement drove a truck packed with explosives into the US marine base in Beirut.

War reminiscent of Vietnam

Tension, misunderstandings rife as troops confront Iraqi citizens

WASHINGTON POST, North Of Nasiriyah

As about 40 Marines walk toward a mud and stone house in a front-line village here, a bearded man in a long white robe emerges, his arms raised to show he is unarmed. He seems relaxed. Behind him, a woman in a black shawl holds a young girl close to her dress. The Marines maneuver toward positions on either side of the house, their rifles trained on surrounding fields.

Maj. Frank Simone, a Marine reservist, turns to an Iraqi who serves as his interpreter. "Ask him if he minds if we search the house."

The man in the robe begins a long answer in Arabic, and the interpreter starts to translate. "He says that the area is outside of Iraqi government control and there is nothing to worry about here."

But Simone, who has the street smarts of a drug enforcement agent, which is what he is in his home town of Hermosa, Calif., cuts him off. "Tell him we need to search the house," he says. "Especially because of those two white pickup trucks out front." White pickup trucks have been used by Iraqi fighters in the area.

Plagued by nightly ambushes as

they make their way north through Iraq, the Marines are conducting regular foot patrols in villages such as this one, located just off a major road. The war they find here is not the one they came to fight. There are no enemy tanks or infantry formations, just houses -- most of them with no electricity or running water -- and people in civilian clothes, some looking on with open hostility, others with friendliness that may be feigned.

It is a Vietnam-style environment with high tensions on both sides -- and, often, ambiguous results. U.S. troops walk through with weapons poised, unable to understand words spoken to them, detaining people they think might be shooting at them the next night, but often unsure if they get the right ones.

"We are here to show a presence, to let people know we're here, and to make sure everything here is safe," said Lt. Seneca Todd, who today led the platoon from the 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment's Bravo Company on their first patrol since arriving in Iraq. "We're not trying to frighten anyone who isn't doing anything wrong, but even a harmless-looking home can be a hornet's nest."

To begin the search of the farmer's house, a dozen Marines leave their positions and approach the two main doorways. As they are about to enter, the black-bearded man, who looks to be in his late thirties, explains to the interpreter that he has a weapon inside, an AK-47 assault rifle. He says that he has it to defend his family and livestock, including some chickens and ducks that are wandering around in the yard.

"How many weapons are inside?" Simone asks.

"One."
"And how many other people?"
"One more woman, and two other children."

"Hold up!" Simone screams to the Marines, who are inches from the door, poised to enter as soon as the order is given. And then, to the Iraqi man: "Clear out all of the women and children before we go in."

A second woman emerges from the building with a child on either side. She is crying. Through the interpreter, Simone tells her not to worry, that everything will be fine.

The Marines enter the home, in two-man teams. Soon one emerges with the AK-47 that the Iraqi man

had mentioned, and leans it against a wall. "You'll get this back when we go," Simone tells the man. It's common for ordinary Iraqis to have such a rifle. "Have you seen Iraqi troops near here? How recently?"

And then, from inside the house, an excited Marine shouts: "Hey, we have a machine gun in here!"

The farmer turns nervous, and begins speaking quickly. r.

Platoon Sgt. Eric Strause walks out carrying a light RPK machine gun, which the Marines found wrapped in blankets in a bedroom.

"Ask him where he got the machine gun," Simone says. The man says that he bought it. The Marines prepare to move to the next set of houses.

In the end, they aren't sure whether they've found a fighter or merely upended the house and frightened the family of a man who intended no harm to them. They found a lot of weapons, but it's conceivable that the Iraqi army stopped by days earlier and distributed guns that people couldn't refuse. All the Marines are sure of is that there's another house to check, and another one after that.



Explosions rock Baghdad late Saturday night during a coalition raid on the Iraqi capital. It was not immediately clear what targets had been hit in the bombing on the southern rim of the city but Iraqi satellite television broadcasting outside the country was interrupted.

PHOTO: AFP