



IRAQ INVASION

DAY
23

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The Daily Star
DHAKA FRIDAY APRIL 11, 2003



PHOTO: NEW YORK TIMES

The body of an Iraqi lying at the foot of a bridge over the Tigris River west of Baghdad.

How many Iraqis have been killed?

NEW YORK TIMES, Doha, Qatar

The effort to number the dead on the Iraqi side in the war begins with a conundrum: who is a civilian and who is a soldier?

In Basra, for example, ambulance drivers and hospital workers estimate that they have handled between 1,000 and 2,000 corpses in three weeks of war. Some were clearly military: they wore uniforms and military boots. Others were obviously civilians: women, children and older people. Some were burned or blasted beyond recognition by bombs, artillery or grenades.

But perhaps hundreds more were men and boys of fighting age who arrived at hospitals and morgues in civilian clothes. Were they members of the Republican Guard who threw off their uniforms? Were they armed Baath party loyalists fighting for Saddam Hussein's government? Were they Fedayeen or other irregulars? If they were, could they have been trying to surrender and been killed by their own side?

The same puzzle exists across the country, more acutely and on a much larger scale in and around Baghdad. For example, relentless bombing and a week of ground combat left the Baghdad

Division of Iraq's army reduced to "zero percent strength," according to Marine officers who engaged the division, once thought to number about 10,000 soldiers. Where are they?

One military official here said the number of Iraqi dead was certainly high but ultimately unknowable.

In some incidents, there has been no doubt about the number of dead and their status as combatants or civilians. The shooting by American soldiers of a van at a checkpoint near Najaf in the first week of the war, for example, killed seven women and children. A marketplace bombing in Baghdad killed dozens of civilians, although which side was responsible is not clear.

But more broadly, the problem of sorting out and then trying to quantify the dead in this war is one that will trouble journalists, human rights groups and military historians for years.

Neither British nor American military officials will provide even rough estimates of the number of Iraqi soldiers killed in the war, although they occasionally release figures on individual engagements. The most startling such estimate came from Central Command officials on Saturday, when they said that 2,000 to 3,000 Iraqi soldiers had been killed in a three-hour sweep

through part of Baghdad by a column of American armored vehicles. No evidence was offered to back the assertion.

The bombing campaign that accompanied ground actions to squeeze Iraqi military units into ever-smaller "kill boxes" almost certainly left thousands of soldiers dead, perhaps tens of thousands. But the world will probably never know how many, and no Iraqi authority is left to count them and notify their families.

The question of enemy dead does not come up in daily briefings for senior commanders at Central Command, a senior official here said. They are interested only in the combat effectiveness of the units they face and how that can be further reduced, the official said.

Nor are field commanders being asked to count the Iraqi battlefield casualties, although some, out of pride or the military impulse to quantify things, estimate casualties after battles. But at the policy level, no such estimates exist.

Mark Burgess, a researcher at the Centre for Defence Information in Washington, a private research group, said that the war in Iraq presented unusually difficult problems in estimating the dead because few Iraqi military units fought in an organised manner. It

was also hard to tell who was an enemy combatant, because many fought out of uniform and many were forced to fight by their superiors.

He said the powerful munitions used by American and British air forces probably left hundreds or thousands of battlefield victims pulverised, burned or buried in rubble.

The centre had been posting the official Iraqi government estimates of civilian deaths on its Web site, but dropped it yesterday because the figures coming out of Baghdad had become "outlandish," Mr. Burgess said.

Another group, the Iraq Body Count Project, posts a daily estimate of civilian casualties culled from Arab and Western media reports. That effort also suffers from the same problem that pervades the entire enterprise of counting the Iraqi casualties. Are people working in government ministries civilians or, as the Pentagon likes to call them, "regime targets"? Is a woman suicide bomber a civilian or an enemy combatant?

The Iraqi government's figures and the estimates from the Body Count Project both suffer from "dubious methodologies," Mr. Burgess said.

"We just don't know, and we might as well just make up a number," he added.

Garner waiting for last shot to be fired

AFP, Washington

Jay Garner, the retired general who is to run Iraq's postwar interim administration, will only go to Baghdad when the last shot is fired.

The 64-year-old Garner, who has been called a governor-in-waiting, the new sheriff of Baghdad and various other epithets, has been keeping a low profile in Kuwait while the US Army finishes its work and the US administration wrangles over how to run Iraq. "They'll move to the Baghdad area at that point that the Baghdad airport is sufficiently secured to take a number of civilians who are not in a combat situation," US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said Wednesday.

General Richard Myers, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Garner did not need to be in Iraq to work.

"It really doesn't matter where General Garner and his group is because they are, in fact, acting now," he said.

"The restoration of water supplies in several southern towns, the restoration of electrical power grids, he's the one that is overseeing that work."

Garner knows Iraq and he knows about war so he has credentials for this delicate task. But the three-star general has also come under fire for his links to defence industry and his ardent pro-Israel stance.

First day sans Saddam

Baghdad wakes up to new dawn

AFP, Baghdad

Baghdad woke Thursday to its first day in more than two decades free from the iron grip of Saddam Hussein, a day after the world watched jubilant crowds cheer US forces rolling into the Iraqi capital.

However a series of loud blasts from the edge of the city during the morning provided a reminder of the dangers still lurking in Iraq.

"The game is over," said Baghdad's UN ambassador to the United Nations, the first top Iraqi official to concede defeat in the US-led war to "liberate" a nation from tyranny and strip Saddam of weapons of mass destruction.

The end came in a day of fast-moving, dramatic events capping three weeks of war. US tanks and troops swarmed Wednesday over the sprawling city of five million people, meeting little resistance.

To wild cheers and applause, US Marines used a tank recovery vehicle to help a crowd of Iraqis topple a giant statue of Saddam over Al-Fardus (Paradise) Square -- a symbol of the "great leader's feared, omnipresent rule.

In Washington, President George W. Bush welcomed the news from Baghdad but the White House warned "the war is not over."

A reminder crashed out early Thursday when a series of loud blasts were heard in Baghdad from the city's outskirts, while planes could be heard flying overhead.

The blasts started at 7:30 am (0330

GMT), but it was uncertain whether they were caused by airstrikes, an AFP correspondent reported.

In stark contrast to the stream of defiant declarations from Iraq over the past three weeks, there was not a whisper on Wednesday.

Mystery surrounded Saddam's fate and nothing has been heard from him since a US bomber on Monday obliterated the building in Baghdad where he was believed to be with his two sons.

At the White House, Fleischer said Saddam had "missed his chance" to go peacefully into exile, hinting the administration believed the Iraqi leader was still alive.

But there was no such hesitation on the streets of Baghdad on Wednesday, where crowds dismissed Saddam with chants of "Traitor!" "Torturer!" "Dictator!"

"We're ecstatic to get rid of him after all these years of war and deprivation," said resident Dinkha Khosina, who rushed to greet US troops.

In the southern city of Basra, largely under British control since Monday, British troops were struggling to contain rampant looting, murders and petty crime.

The growing anarchy gave urgency to British plans to set up an interim committee drawn from locals to run the city and restore some order.

Iraqi opposition leader Ahmad Chalabi meanwhile complained that the team chosen by the United States to administer post-Saddam Iraq was too slow in arriving.

But Rumsfeld countered that interim administrator Jay Garner, a retired US general, would not move into Baghdad until he and his team could do so safely.

And a senior US official said Washington was planning a meeting of Iraqi exiles and local leaders as early as next week as a first step towards organising an interim government.

Aid agencies had warned on Tuesday that the high casualties of bombings and fighting had left the capital's hospitals low on medical supplies and stretched to the limit.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said a Canadian staff member missing since a shooting incident in Baghdad had been found dead, as it temporarily suspended aid deliveries.

US troops shot an ambulance transporting wounded in downtown Baghdad, killing two Iraqis and wounding three others, a Belgian doctor told AFP.

"When I went up to a US officer to denounce such behaviour, he just said: 'The ambulance could contain explosives,'" Geert Van Moorter said.

To the north of Baghdad, warplanes struck Iraqi positions around Saddam's home town of Tikrit, another potent symbol of his 24-year rule. US forces continued to move north towards the city that lies 200 km north of Baghdad, a US military spokesman said.

But there was still no sign of the weapons of mass destruction that Washington assured Saddam possessed -- a claim it used to justify the invasion.



PHOTO: AFP

Iraqi civilians wounded in an aerial bombing attack in Baghdad hold their hands up to tell troops not to shoot them April 9.



Removing Saddam at the cost of hundreds of lives.

Arabs show a mix of emotions

AP, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

The fall of Baghdad provoked shock and disbelief among Arabs, who expressed hope that other oppressive regimes would crumble but also disappointment that Saddam Hussein did not put up a better fight against America.

"Why did he fall that way? Why so fast?" said Yemeni homemaker Umm Ahmed, tears streaming down her face. "He's a coward. Now I feel sorry for his people."

Arabs clustered at TV sets in shop windows, coffee shops, kitchens and offices to watch the astounding pictures of US troops overwhelming an Arab capital for the first time ever.

Feeling betrayed and misled, some turned off their sets in disgust when jubilant crowds in Baghdad celebrated the arrival of US troops.

"We discovered that all what the (Iraqi) information minister was saying was all lies," said Ali Hassan, a government employee in Cairo, Egypt. "Now no one believes Al-Jazeera anymore."

In a live report from Baghdad, correspondent Shaker Hamed of Abu Dhabi Television said: "We are all in shock. How did things come to such an end? How did US tanks enter the center

of the city? Where is the resistance? This collapse is puzzling. Was it the result of the collapse of communications between the commanders? Between the political leadership? How come Baghdad falls so easily."

Mohammed al-Shahhal, a 49-year-old teacher in Tripoli, Lebanon, said the scenes reminded him of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"Those who applauded the collapse of Lenin's statue for some Pepsi and hamburgers felt the hunger later on and regretted what they did," al-Shahhal said.

However, Tannous Basil, a 47-year-old cardiologist in Sidon, Lebanon, said Saddam's regime was a "dictatorship and had to go."

"I don't like the idea of having the Americans here, but we asked for it," he said. "Why don't we see the Americans going to Finland, for example? They come here because our area is filled with dictatorships like Saddam's."

Tarek al-Absi, a Yemeni university professor, was hopeful Saddam's end presaged more democracy in the region.

"This is a message for the Arab regimes, and could be the beginning of transformation in the Arab region," al-Absi said. "Without the honest help of

the Western nations, the reforms will not take place in these countries."

The overwhelming emotions for many Arabs were disbelief or disillusionment after weeks of hearing Saddam's government pledge a "great victory" or fight to the death against "infidel invaders."

"We Arabs are clever only at talking," Haitham Baghdadi, 45, said bitterly in Damascus, Syria. "Where are the Iraqi weapons? Where are the Iraqi soldiers?"

Many resorted to conspiracy theories to explain the rapid collapse. "There must have been treason," said Ahmed Salem Batmira, an Omani political analyst.

"It seems there was some deal. Saddam has put himself ahead of his people," said Yemeni government employee Saad Salem el-Faqih, 50.

Three men having tea and smoking in a coffee shop in Riyadh were unsettled as they watched the TV even though they said they were against Saddam and felt sorry for the long-suffering Iraqis.

"I can't say that I'm happy about what's going on because these are non-Muslim forces that have gone in and I hope they will not stay," said Mohammed al-Sakkaf, a 58-year-old

businessman.

Many said they were disturbed by images of US troops lounging in Saddam's palaces or draping the US flag around the head of a Saddam statue.

"Liberation is nobler than that," said Walid Abdul-Rahman, one of the three Saudis. "They should not be so provocative."

In Jordan, hotel receptionist Wissam Fakhoury, 28, said he was disappointed in the Baghdad crowds.

"I spit on them," he said. "Do those crowds who are saluting the Americans believe that the United States will let them live better?" Fakhoury said. Americans "will loot their oil and control their resources, leaving them nothing."

Bahraini physician Hassan Fakhro, 62, said he was saddened.

"Whatever I'm seeing is very painful because although Saddam Hussein was a dictator, he represented some kind of Arab national resistance to the foreign invaders the Americans and the British," Fakhro said.

After an anti-war march in Khartoum, Sudan, lawyer Ali Al-Sayed said US troops should not misinterpret the relief as an invitation to stay.

War planned long in advance: Blix

AFP, Madrid

The invasion of Iraq was planned a long time in advance, and the United States and Britain are not primarily concerned with finding any banned weapons of mass destruction, the chief UN weapons inspector, Hans Blix, said in an interview on Wednesday.

"There is evidence that this war was planned well in advance. Sometimes this raises doubts about their attitude to the (weapons) inspections," Blix told Spanish daily El Pais.

"I now believe that finding weapons of mass destruction has been relegated, I would say, to fourth place, which is why the United States and Britain are now waging war on Iraq. Today the main aim is to change the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein," he said, according to the Spanish text of the interview.

Blix said US President George W. Bush had told him in October 2002 that he backed the UN's work to verify US and British claims that Baghdad was developing biological, chemical and nuclear weapons.

But he said he knew at the time

"there were people within the Bush administration who were sceptical and who were working on engineering regime change". By the start of March the hawks in both Washington and London were getting impatient, he added.

Blix said that he thought the US might initially have believed Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction -- although its "fabrication" of evidence raised doubts about even that -- but that Washington was now less convinced by its own claims.

"I think the Americans started the war thinking there were some. I think they now believe less in that possibility. But I don't know -- you ask yourself a lot of questions when you see the things they did to try and demonstrate that the Iraqis had nuclear weapons, like the fake contract with Niger," he explained.

That was a reference to US allegations -- later denied -- that Iraq had sought to purchase uranium from the west African state of Niger.

"I'm very curious to see if they do find any (weapons)," he said.