



# IRAQ INVASION

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PHOTO: NEW YORK TIMES

## Chaos from Basra to Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

From Basra to Baghdad, celebration has given way to chaos after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's brutal regime. Shopkeepers opened fire Friday on mobs of looters in the Iraqi capital, which has been marred by sporadic clashes with small pockets of pro-Saddam Hussein resistance.

US marines patrolled checkpoints throughout Baghdad, where no attacks against coalition troops were reported Friday morning.

But shopkeepers in central Baghdad opened fire on looters for the first time since US troops entered the city, and the widespread chaos left 25 people injured.

"We want the law to rule and if the Americans don't defend us then we'll defend ourselves with our own weapons," said merchant Khazen Hussein.

US troops, who say they are still involved in a military campaign and do not have the capacity to maintain law and order, have not intervened to stop the looting.

In Al-Rasafi market, merchants fired pistols in the air outside a seven-storey garment store, while at Al-Arabi market

shopkeepers fired Kalashnikov rifles toward approaching looters.

Young people were also seen with iron bars running after potential thieves.

Almost everything has been considered fair game, from the luxury homes of senior Iraqi officials to European diplomatic missions and former state institutions that once inspired fear.

Twenty-five people were admitted to Baghdad's Al-Kindi hospital on Friday after suffering gunshot wounds in clashes during the looting.

But the hospital, Baghdad's largest, can provide little help as it has been ransacked itself.

"The situation is chaotic and catastrophic," Peter Tarabula, medical coordinator for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) here, said after an ICRC team inspected the hospital.

All staff have fled Al-Kindi hospital with the exception of two doctors who administer first aid but do not carry out operations.

Shiite Muslim fighters from the southern city of Najaf have now set up camp at the hospital and are posted at

all the exits.

The fighters are led by Sheikh Abbas al-Zubaidi, who has donned a white doctor's gown over his traditional robe.

Scenes of widespread chaos and near anarchy in Iraqi towns prompted UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Thursday to demand the United States and Britain respect their international obligations as occupying forces and maintain order.

Elsewhere on the ground, a US soldier died in a suicide bombing in north Baghdad late Thursday after marines came under heavy fire from pro-regime pockets of resistance.

It was the first suicide attack against American forces since they captured Baghdad amid scenes of jubilation and looting, and raised fresh doubts about how firmly coalition forces held the city in their grip.

The incident was the third such assault against troops of the US-British coalition since their invasion on March 20 and followed the assassination of pro-Western Shiite leader Abdul Majid al-Khoei in the holy city of Najaf in central Iraq.

### Hunting the Husseins

## Baghdad sealed but they could still flee

THE GUARDIAN

Saddam Hussein is almost certainly still in Iraq although his wife and one of his daughters have fled the country, intelligence sources said yesterday.

They said his wife, Sajida, had "passed through Syria" to an unknown destination.

Although Syria might also have allowed in some leading figures of the Iraqi regime, it is assumed that Saddam is still either in Baghdad or his home town of Tikrit, possibly accompanied by his sons Qusay and Uday.

Intelligence sources say there could be little doubt that Saddam had worked out an "exit strategy" to get out of Baghdad. He has certainly had enough time to prepare it.

American forces are now sealing the main roads around the capital. "The outer cordon in the vicinity of Baghdad really is complete," a senior American officer, Major General Victor Renuart, said yesterday.

"We believe we have cut the major routes in and out of the city, eliminating the opportunity for large forces to move in and reinforce, and certainly complicating the problem of anyone trying to

leave the city."

However, intelligence officials made it clear yesterday that in their view, Saddam could still find a way to Tikrit, if he had not already gone there. The journey was still "do-able", they said. Saddam has always insisted he would never leave Iraq.

American and British intelligence agencies are in touch with special forces and Iraqi informers in Baghdad. They now say there is little sign of the Iraqi leadership in the capital. Special Republican Guard and Ba'ath party leaders have vanished - the result, some intelligence officials say, of a final order from Saddam.

Some of Saddam's ring of loyal and close supporters are assumed to have left for Tikrit to prepare for a last bloody confrontation with the invading American forces. Tikrit faced heavy bombing from American aircraft yesterday.

General Renuart said yesterday he did not know if Saddam and his sons were in Tikrit. "I don't know where they are, or whether they are alive or dead. But that's not really important to us," he claimed.

Other senior regime officials are

suspected of escaping to Syria with members of Saddam's family. This may explain heavy fighting around Qaim, near the Iraqi border with Syria. In Baghdad US marines yesterday approached an area near the Imam al-Adham mosque in the north of the city after receiving a tip-off that some leaders of the regime were meeting nearby at the house of a senior Ba'ath party official. Initial reports that Saddam might have been hiding there were later dismissed.

"We had information that a group of regime leadership was attempting to organise a meeting. The fighting in and around the mosque complex could not be avoided as enemy forces were firing from the area of the mosque," said Captain Frank Thorp, a spokesman at American central command headquarters in Qatar.

"Intense fighting" took place near the Az Amiyah palace and the Ba'ath party official's house, he said. One US marine was reported killed and up to 20 wounded. Capt Thorp said Iraqi forces opened fire from a large compound behind a closed wall, and the marines shot back.

## Anti-war alliance pushes for key UN role in Iraq

REUTERS, St. Petersburg

Russia added its voice on Friday to European calls for a central UN role in Iraq as the French, German and Russian leaders prepared for talks on rebuilding the nation and mending ties with Washington.

But comments from Secretary of State Colin Powell boded ill for the three most vocal opponents of the conflict - dubbed the "non-nyet-nein" alliance - and their efforts to guarantee the United Nations a political say in post-war Iraq.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, on a visit to former Soviet Tajikistan, told reporters it was up to the United Nations to safeguard international peace and security.

"We hope the United Nations will perform this central role, in particular, in the settlement of Iraq's post-war situation," he said.

"This authority must be used to achieve a political settlement in Iraq within the shortest time possible. This is in the interests of the Iraqi people. This is in the interests of the whole region."

Powell has mocked similar appeals from European leaders for a central UN role.

"I'm not quite sure what that means," Powell told the Los Angeles

Times. "They just say 'central' and then they go on to their next meeting."

"The suggestion that some of my colleagues would give that now that the coalition has done all of this and liberated Iraq, thank you very much, step aside and the Security Council is now going to become responsible for everything, is incorrect. And they know it. And they were told it," Powell said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is due to begin talks with the French and German leaders in Russia's second city of St Petersburg on Friday evening.

The talks were originally supposed to have been just a meeting between Putin and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

But French President Jacques Chirac was hurriedly added to the guest list in Putin's home town as US and British forces neared their aim of ousting Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

All three appear to lend little credence to statements by President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair this week that the United Nations will play a major role.

"The statements by Blair and Bush in Belfast amount to little more than being polite," said Yevgeny Volk, an analyst with the Heritage Foundation

thinktank.

In the run-up to the war, all three stood firm against using force to ensure Iraq held no banned arms, refusing to back any Security Council resolution endorsing military intervention.

Now they have to reckon with a US administration still smarting from their blocking tactics.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan had also been due to attend the meeting. But diplomats said he backed out to avoid complications in drawing up plans for reconstruction when it became clear all three leaders would be attending.

Schroeder and Chirac restated their case ahead of the talks.

Schroeder told German TV channel RTL Germany would only contribute to rebuilding Iraq under a UN umbrella.

Chirac said France was pleased at Saddam's fall and wanted Iraq to recover its sovereignty as soon as possible "in a region of stability with the legitimacy that the United Nations gives."

Putin, eager to balance opposition to war with Moscow's post-September 11, 2001, friendship with Washington, has made no comment since US tanks moved into central Baghdad.



PHOTO: AFP

An Iraqi boy pushes a chair and box which he looted from vacant building in front of a US Marine M1A1 tank in Baghdad.



PHOTO: AFP

Thousands of people demonstrate by forming an antiwar symbol at Catalunya square in Barcelona against the US-led war in Iraq.

## Kurdish dream put on hold for now

AFP, Kirkuk

Iraqi Kurds hailed here the fall of Saddam Hussein while putting long-held dreams of an independent state on hold, for now.

The situation in this oil-rich northern city remained uncertain, however, with the newly installed local governor warning Friday that it was spiralling out of control of local Kurdish chiefs.

Already on Wednesday, tens of thousands of Kurds celebrated the entry by US troops into Baghdad, gleeful over the Iraqi strongman's ouster.

Saddam is accused of having used chemical weapons against Kurds, and the 1988 killing of around 5,000 people in the Kurdish town of Halabja was a key argument used by US President George W. Bush to justify the invasion of Iraq.

Seventy-five percent of those victims were women and children, according to Kurdish estimates.

In 1991, Saddam crushed a Kurdish uprising that followed the Gulf War, and widespread persecution and expulsions of Kurds have regularly marked his reign, which spared few Kurdish families in one form or another.

But contrary to Iraqi Shiites in the south, Kurds won autonomy in some northern parts of the country, protected by the United Nations, as well as by US and British warplanes enforcing a no-fly zone over their territory.

They have used that ground to host US special forces sent to identify targets for air attacks and expel Islamic groups believed linked to Al-Qaeda terrorists, which occupy a sliver of territory in northeastern Iraq.

Kurdish forces became an essential element in US strategy after Ankara rejected Washington's request to allow the 4th Infantry Division to drive into northern Iraq from southeastern Turkey.

Under Kurdish treats to send its own forces into Iraq to prevent the creation of an independent Kurdish state, Washington has sought to control the Kurdish troops and prevent them from becoming a major force in the region.

Ankara fears such an entity would revive the nationalist aspirations of its own sizeable Kurdish minority, with which it has established a fragile truce after years of armed conflict.

## Another mistake? US admits killing 2 Iraqi children in checkpoint error

REUTERS, Nassiriya

US Marines said they killed two children at a checkpoint in Iraq on Friday, when the driver of the vehicle in which the youngsters were traveling ignored warnings to stop, creating fears of a suicide attack.

Captain Jay Delarosa, spokesman for the 15th U.S. Marine Expeditionary Unit in the southern city of Nassiriya, said nine other people in the vehicle were wounded in the incident.

"Our Marines took action to protect themselves against what they thought was a suicide bomber," Delarosa told Reuters correspondent Adrian Croft in Nassiriya, adding that the driver had ignored repeated warnings to stop.

"Currently, we are providing the best available medical assistance to those injured," he said, adding that no weapons had been found in the vehicle. "It was a regrettable mistake."

US forces manning checkpoints

across Iraq are on edge following suicide attacks that have killed or wounded marines or soldiers checking vehicles.

US military spokesmen or witnesses have reported several incidents over the past couple of weeks in which civilians have been killed or wounded after being mistaken for suicide bombers.

Delarosa said a vehicle, which he described as a minivan, had approached a US checkpoint in Nassiriya at "a high rate of speed" at 6.45 a.m. on Friday.

"The vehicle was told numerous times to stop, not only by the signs but by motions by the Marines," he said in a statement.

"The vehicle...picked up speed and moved through the serpentine protecting obstacles in front of the checkpoint. The Marines suspected, because of the actions, that it was a suicide bomber. The Marines...opened fire," he added.

"Our command regrets this incident."