



IRAQ INVASION

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Bush urges UN to end sanctions on Iraq

UNSC divisions cloud fate of waiver call

AP, St. Louis

President Bush urged the United Nations Wednesday to lift sanctions that have choked Iraq's economy for nearly 13 years as he toured a fighter jet factory that he said helped defeat "a ruthless enemy."

Bush was careful not to declare the war over, and he cautioned that coalition forces still face serious risks. But he basked in the success of a military campaign that had stirred such fierce opposition, noting battlefield successes, Iraqi political prisoners freed, statues of Saddam Hussein torn down and a fledgling government being assembled.

"Now that Iraq is liberated, the United Nations should lift economic sanctions on that country," Bush said. The removal of sanctions, particularly on oil sales, could help finance the reconstruction of Iraq.

White House spokesman Scott McClellan said Bush would soon call for a UN resolution lifting the sanctions. That could be complicated by a requirement under previous resolutions that UN inspectors certify Iraq's banned weapons programs are dead.

The United States has not invited UN inspectors to return to Iraq. The UN Security Council has scheduled an April 22 briefing by chief UN weapons inspector Hans Blix.

UN diplomats, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Security Council members want a much better idea of what the UN's future role will be before agreeing to any suspension or lifting of sanctions.

After Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the United Nations imposed sanctions

that cut off investment and development in the country. Some oil sales were permitted to finance purchases of food and medicine.

Throughout his speech at a Boeing factory that assembles fighter jets, Bush used the past tense when referring to the Iraq war. "The quality of the workmanship that goes into the aircraft that you build here is one of the main reasons why we were successful in making the world a more peaceful place," he said.

"Just one month ago, the forces of our coalition stood at the borders of Iraq with orders to advance hundreds of miles through hostile territory against a ruthless enemy," Bush told about 1,000 Boeing workers and military personnel on the factory floor. "Today, organized military resistance has virtually ended; the major cities of Iraq have been liberated."

Bush used symbols of America's military might as the backdrop for his speech. The Boeing plant here assembles F/A-18 Super Hornet jets, the newest and most advanced strike fighters in the Navy's inventory. Thirty-six of the fighters are deployed to the Iraq region.

He walked the cavernous production facility before his speech, donning clear safety goggles even though manufacturing was shut down for his appearance.

Bush, a former Air National Guard pilot, peered into several of the half-finished machines, their wings not yet attached. Wires and hoses spilled from the forward fuselages, which are fused here to aft fuselages that are manufactured near Los Angeles by Northrop Grumman.

The planes can reach speeds of 1,330 mph and cost \$57 million each.

Before leaving for St. Louis and a long weekend on his Texas ranch, Bush signed a \$79 billion supplemental budget measure that will finance combat, reconstruction and domestic anti-terrorism efforts.

Bush signed the measure with no ceremony and no lawmakers present - the kind of treatment he reserves for bills he does not particularly like. He devoted just two sentences to the spending bill in his speech.

McClellan said Bush was concerned by what he viewed as the lack of latitude the measure gives him and the Pentagon in spending the money.

But the day brought multiple successes for Bush.

Washington and Pyongyang agreed to talks in Beijing as early as next week on North Korea's nuclear program, discussions to be attended by top Chinese officials as well. The inclusion of China marked a victory for Bush, who had rejected Pyongyang's demands for one-on-one talks.

Bush spoke early Wednesday morning with Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi about the North Korean crisis.

The White House also was heartened by the capture in Iraq of terrorist mastermind Abul Abbas. Bush had said last fall that Baghdad was harboring him.

Bush did not mention the capture, but said in his speech: "In Iraq, our coalition has now removed an ally of terrorists and a producer of weapons of mass destruction."

The president's visit here was his 10th to Missouri, which he barely carried in 2000 and which he has identified as vital to his re-election. There are only two

states he has visited more: Pennsylvania and Florida. The latter decided the 2000 election.

Bush planned no public appearances during his Wednesday-to-Monday trip to his ranch.

AFP adds: Lifting the UN sanctions imposed on Iraq more than 12 years ago, as proposed Wednesday by US President George W. Bush, may be easier said than done, given divisions within the UN Security Council.

"Now that Iraq is liberated, the United Nations should lift economic sanctions on that country," Bush told Boeing defense workers in Saint Louis, Missouri.

It is hard to see how that could be fully achieved until a new and internationally recognized government takes control over Iraq.

The Security Council members -- in particular the five permanent members -- were bitterly divided over the US-led invasion which toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein this month.

And they remain divided over the extent of the role the UN should play in the post-war reconstruction.

Asked to comment on Bush's remarks, the UN ambassador to the United Nations, John Negroponte, told reporters:

"I think we visualize some kind of step-by-step procedure with respect to post-conflict resolutions regarding Iraq and certainly one of the issues we're going to have to deal with early on is sanctions."

But he added: "If you're asking me do we have specific language or specific formulations to propose at this specific moment in time, the answer is no."



Ahmed, a six-year-old Kurdish boy, sits atop a file cabinet as his father and other employees of the Baba Gourgour oil refinery near Kirkuk, northern Iraq, sift through personal files on Wednesday. The offices were ransacked by looters in the wake of the power vacuum left by the collapse of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's regime. The 900,000 barrels-per-day Kirkuk fields were almost untouched during the US-led war on Iraq and some oil refineries may reopen as soon as April 19.

US has spent \$20 billion on Iraq War: Pentagon

REUTERS, Washington

The US military has spent \$20 billion on the war in Iraq and expects to spend \$2 billion a month to maintain thousands of troops there through the remainder of the current financial year ending on Sept. 30, the Pentagon said on Wednesday.

"The war has cost in the region of about \$20 billion so far," Defence Department Comptroller Dov Zakheim told reporters at a Pentagon briefing.

Zakheim said personnel costs in the month-long war have approached \$7 billion, combat operations slightly over \$10 billion and ammunition and equipment over \$3 billion.

"A rough estimate of the monthly cost of the war from here on out -- a really rough estimate -- is approximately \$2 billion" to maintain forces in Iraq, he added, stressing that combat operations were waning sharply.

The United States has not determined how long its forces will remain in Iraq as that country struggles to form a new government.

Zakheim spoke shortly after President Bush signed into law on Wednesday a \$79 billion package to pay for the war in Iraq, reward regional allies including Turkey and help struggling US airlines, a White House statement said.

The package, which Congress took up at the start of the war and pushed through in just three weeks, gave Bush the \$62 billion he wanted to meet war costs, but curbed the free rein he wanted over most of the funds. But lawmakers declined to give the pentagon major flexibility in spending the funds.

In addition to the actual Iraq war costs -- which include transporting more than 125,000 troops, hundreds of aircraft and dozens of warships to the region -- the Pentagon is spending up to \$1.2 billion monthly in the global war on terrorism sparked by the September, 2001, attacks on America, Zakheim said.



US Marine Lt. Col. Dustin McCoy, 3rd battalion 4th Regiment, of Normann, Oklahoma pushes back Iraqis leaving al-Rafidain Bank after foiling a bank robbery in Baghdad on Wednesday. Lt. Col. McCoy was the first US soldier to enter Baghdad April 9.

US to divide Iraq into separate sectors

AFP, Washington

US commanders will soon divide Iraq into separate military sectors assigned to the army, the marines and other coalition forces in response to rapidly shifting missions, senior Pentagon officials said Wednesday.

Even as the threat of all-out combat recedes, however, US troops were involved in clashes in the northern city of Mosul that have left 19 people dead over the past two days.

Iraqi witnesses said on both days that US troops fired into crowds, while US officers said their troops were returning fire at gunmen.

"I'm not prepared to judge on either site whether it's a lack of fire discipline that was the cause or what was the cause," said Major General Stanley McChrystal, the vice director of operations of the Joint Staff.

"I will say it highlights the complexity of the situation," he said.

Combat remains a possibility in some parts of the country as US or British forces spread out to areas that were bypassed in the fighting for Baghdad, McChrystal said.

US pushing Iraqis to get back to work in oilfields

AFP, Baghdad

With the war all but officially over, the US military was busy Wednesday getting Iraqis back to work in the nation's key Rumaila oilfield.

At the local school in Rumaila, more than 100 employees of Iraq's Southern Oil Co. turned out to get new employee identification cards from KBR, the US firm hired to help rebuild Iraq's ailing oil industry.

Texas-based Kellogg Brown and Root is owned by Halliburton, the US oil giant of which Vice President Dick Cheney was chairman until his election in 2000.

Men and women alike queued for hours in the hot desert sun after being previously vetted by UK forces who control the area and who have weeded out Baath party leaders and other loyalists to Saddam Hussein.

"We've had very much to rely on the information of the local community," said Captain Robert Nicholls, the British civil affairs officer who oversaw the screening process.

"Some of them were identified by their own admission and some by information from the locals," he told AFP in a passageway of the school, as the would-be employees were photographed and issued their new cards.

A computer with a digital camera was installed in a dusty passageway of the school, as KBR officials quickly entered their information and printed out the new laminated passes.

As one KBR man in a black T-shirt and arm tattoo tried to hang the card around the neck of an older woman in full conservative black Islamic dress, she recoiled before he touched her.

"Oh that's right," he said, handing her the pass instead. "You want to do that yourself."

The nearby Rumaila field produced 1.2 million barrels of oil per day before the last Gulf War in 1991, according to industry sources, and is the main source of income for this tiny town near Iraq's southern border.

But Iraq's oil industry has been hampered by neglect, two wars in little

more than a decade, and crippling UN sanctions slapped on the Baghdad regime after its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

"After the last war we were able to get Kuwait's oil back on line very quickly," said Steve Wright, a civilian employee contracted to the US Department of Defense. "In Iraq it's going to take a lot more work."

Many critics of the United States have charged that the war's real aim was to take control of Iraq's vast oil reserves, the second-largest in the world after Saudi Arabia.

The awarding of the contract to KBR gave the critics added ammunition, while the US administration said the firm was one of only a few with the expertise and security clearance to handle the work.

One KBR official said the cards would allow workers to get back to their jobs on Thursday. Two employees told AFP they were expected back at their posts later Wednesday within two or three hours of getting their cards.

"One o'clock!" said Ismail Taher

Ghafel, wearing his bright blue Southern Oil boiler suit and pointing at his watch. "One o'clock today, not tomorrow."

He took a drag on his cigarette and smiled. "I can't wait to get back to work," Ghafel said.

None of the KBR or US officials interviewed by AFP was able to say how much the workers would be paid but US Brigadier General Robert Crear, from the Army Corps of Engineers, said it would depend on their salary history and position.

Crear said the money would come from the Pentagon's Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, which is headed by retired US general Jay Garner and will lead the country until an interim Iraqi government is put in place.

He said that US special forces had gone into Iraq's southern oil fields before the war began on March 20 to defuse Iraqi explosives which he said had been intended to blow up wells but would not say exactly when.

Kurds oust Arabs from homes in Kirkuk

AP, Kirkuk

Years after they were dispossessed under Saddam Hussein, Kurds are taking what they say is rightfully theirs, evicting Iraqi Arabs and seizing their homes in northern Iraq.

"We're homeless," complained Sadi Qader Muhammad, whose family was ordered out of their four-room house by a group of Kurds in this largely Kurdish city. "For years, we've worked hard from morning until night, and getting kicked out of our home is the fruit of our labor."

The new Kurdish occupants took over the house in the days of confusion immediately after the April 10 collapse of Baghdad's authority in Kirkuk. They claim the land was theirs before Saddam evicted them in the 1980s.

"It was our land," said Khader Rashid Rahim, a trader who plans to move his wife and seven children to this house. "Years ago, three of my brothers were killed by Saddam's government. They took all of our property and forcibly moved us away."

Of all the legacies of Saddam's years of rule, none might be quite so difficult and explosive as his removal of ethnic minorities from oil-rich areas. Years ago, Saddam intensified a long-standing Baghdad policy of Arabization by evicting thousands of Kurds living in the northern cities of Kirkuk and Mosul and handing their property over to Arabs from other parts of Iraq.

An estimated 400,000 Kurds were displaced from Kirkuk. Many ended up in refugee camps and dedicated their lives

to retrieving their lost property.

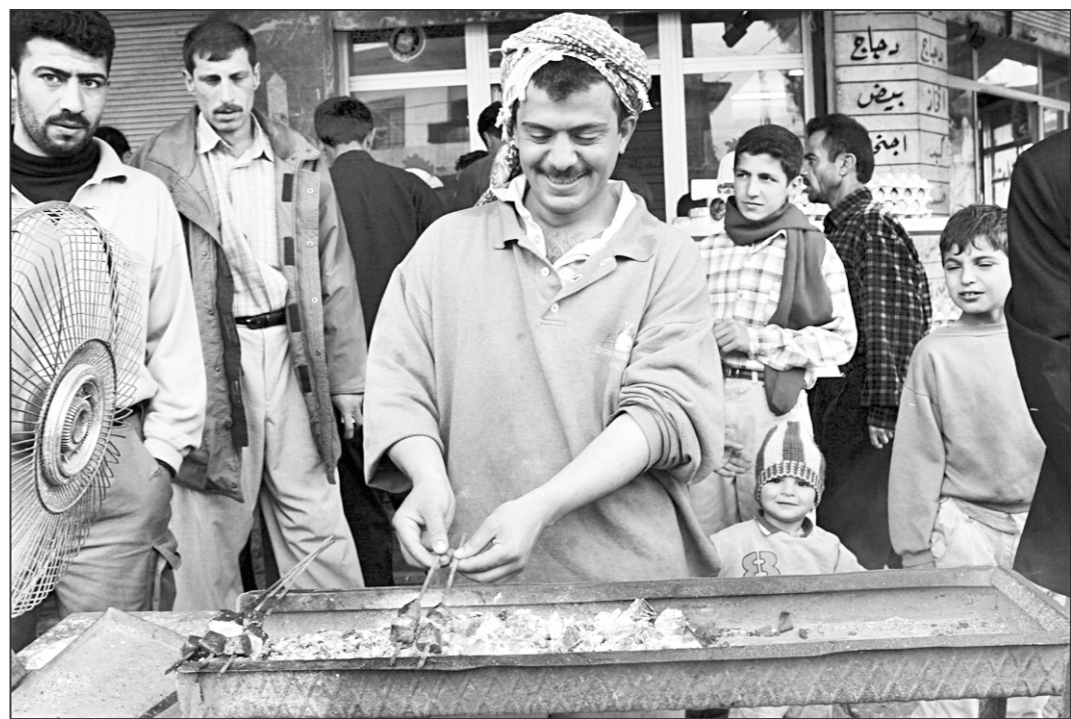
Longtime residents of Kirkuk say the neighborhood called Qadasia was once an agricultural district owned by Kurdish landlords. But the Arab residents of Qadasia, mostly civil servants who took advantage of cash incentives Saddam offered them to move here in the 1980s, say they had no idea the land had ever been owned by anyone.

"No Kurdish people were displaced from this neighborhood," said Seyed Aqel Musawi, a Qadasia neighborhood leader. "This was a no-man's land."

Kurds have long vowed to return to their lost lands and homes once Kirkuk was freed. Kurdish leaders have sought to assure the United States and Arab countries that the process of return will be a lawful one.

"We have always said that the right of return for the victims of ethnic cleansing is a sacred right," said Barham Salih, prime minister of the autonomous Kurdish enclave. "The return of displaced people has to be done through an orderly process, hopefully, an international process, that will take into consideration the rights of all the communities of Kirkuk."

But Arabs claim the Kurds have been taking the law into their own hands. Musawi - speaking at a noisy meeting of Sunni, Shiite and Christian Arab residents of Qadasia - voiced a litany of complaints, alleging there have been Kurdish reprisals against the Arab neighborhood.



Iraqis wait to buy grilled meat in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul on Wednesday. At least four people were killed by gunshots in Mosul, a hospital official and witnesses said, while the US admitted partial responsibility for a shooting incident the day before in which up to 15 people were killed.

You can get anything at looters' bazaar

AFP, Abu Ghraib

You can get anything you want in Abu Ghraib, a town in Baghdad's sprawling suburbs -- vegetables, fruit and poultry at the traditional market and everything else at the new looters' bazaar next door.

"Many people from Baghdad come here to buy what they need," says Ahmad Salah, seated and surrounded by stacked cages of placid white hens.

Just a few days ago, the name of this town was still synonymous with one of Saddam Hussein's most notorious prisons, but that changed with his overthrow last week.

The market here, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) to the west of the Baghdad city limits on the old road to Jordan, is known for its cucumbers, onions, potatoes, broad beans, oranges and lamb.