



# IRAQ INVASION

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Smoke billowing from burning oil trenches covers the sky over Baghdad at dusk 27 March 2003. A fresh wave of deadly US and British air strikes pounded Baghdad as coalition forces closed in on the Iraqi capital in their bid to remove President Saddam Hussein from power.

## Baghdad blitz continues

AFP, Baghdad

Coalition aircrafts continued to pound Baghdad relentlessly Friday overnight, a day after Iraq claimed that more than 350 civilians had been killed in the first week of the war, and accused the United States of cluster bombing civilians.

The Iraqi capital was bombarded throughout Thursday and into the night, with successive raids leaving columns of smoke billowing from several spots inside the city of five million and on the outskirts, an AFP correspondent reported.

There were no reports of any casualties but the targets could not immediately be clearly identified.

A correspondent for the Al-Jazeera pan-Arab satellite network quoted Iraqi military officials as saying a Baghdad hospital had been bombed and added the city's main telephone exchange was also targeted.

Iraqi Health Minister Umid Medhat Mubarak told reporters in Baghdad Thursday that more than 350 people had been killed and 3,650 wounded since the United States and Britain launched the war to topple Saddam on March 20.

He said the figures were "approximate" but that women, children and the elderly accounted for most of the victims. He said coalition forces had used cluster bombs on civilians in Baghdad and Iraq's second-largest city, Basra.

Human Rights Watch has reported extensive previous use of cluster bombs by US forces in

Afghanistan and the 1991 Gulf War. The bombs unleash hundreds of tinier munitions that disperse over wide areas.

Iraqi civil defence chief General Hatem Ali al-Khalaf said raids on the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala to the south had killed 13 and wounded 56.

A major battle was looming near Najaf as a massive column of Iraqi forces reportedly headed south to confront advancing coalition troops.

Iraqi authorities took reporters to the south Baghdad neighbourhood of Yussufiyah, where officials said eight people were killed and 44 wounded in a US-British raid Wednesday which they claimed hit a residential block.

Saddam was later shown on television chairing two separate meetings reported to have been held on Thursday. The first included Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan, Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and other top officials.

The second was with members of the ruling Baath party, which the television said had issued a statement vowing to "inflict maximum material and human damage among enemy ranks."

Defense Minister Sultan Hashem Ahmed vowed that Baghdad would not be taken, while acknowledging that US forces were nearing the city limits.

"We will not be surprised if the enemy surrounds Baghdad in five or 10 days but he will have to take the city. Baghdad cannot be taken by the Americans or the Britons as long as the citizens in it are still

alive," he said.

As many as 1,000 US paratroopers landed in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq to open a new front as US armour moved into position for the final push on Baghdad.

Meanwhile, in the neighbourhood known as the "City of the People," tears and rage gripped grieving relatives who buried 14 people killed Wednesday when an airstrike hit apartment complexes.

At the US Central Command briefing centre in Qatar, Brigadier General Vincent Brooks said no US or British aircraft targeted that area, and added that their pilots had come under Iraqi anti-aircraft fire at the time.

"We think it's entirely possible that this may have been in fact an Iraqi missile that went up and came down or, given the behavior of the regime lately, it may have been a deliberate attack," he said.

Senior US officials quoted by the Washington Post said the war could last months and needed massive reinforcements.

Bad weather, dangerously long supply lines and a feisty resistance by Iraqi forces "has led to a broad reassessment by some top generals of US military expectations and timelines," the paper said.

US President George W. Bush, after meeting with British Prime Minister Tony Blair at Camp David, said the war would last "however long it takes to win."

## US lawmakers blast White House

AFP, Washington

A small but increasingly vocal contingent of Democratic lawmakers opposed to the US-led invasion of Iraq accused the White House of stifling dissent by those who oppose the war.

"What we're beginning to see is a concerted attempt to attack anyone who dissents," Congressman Sam Farr said at a press conference called on Thursday by a handful of Democratic politicians who feel that the war against Iraq is misguided.

Even among legislators in the Republican party, "there are consequences to pay if you don't go all with the administration's leadership," Farr said, arguing that Republicans who voted against the White House budget proposals have been threatened with the loss of coveted committee seats.

"Where are we going? Healthy dissent is as American as apple

pie," Farr said.

The California congressman added that he saw a certain irony in the alleged White House pressure tactics, noting "our troops are fighting for (Iraq) to be able to have freedom of speech."

Another Democrat, Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas, said alleged efforts by US leaders to hush the voices of dissenters extend even to other countries traditionally allied with Washington, citing in particular Mexico and Canada.

"I think we are making a very dramatic mistake to isolate long-standing allies on the basis of their sovereign decisions not to proceed in a coalition on the war in Iraq," she said.

With respect to street demonstrations in this country, Jackson Lee said: "We are doing a great disservice by maligning and disrespecting and accusing protesters of being filled with communist ideas."

## Jubilant Kurd fighters cross N Iraq frontline

REUTERS, Near Chamchamal, Iraq

Hundreds of jubilant Kurdish 'peshmerga' fighters poured across what had, just hours before, been an Iraqi frontline on Friday, saying Iraqi forces had retreated toward the oil hub of Kirkuk.

Scouts returning from a night in the hills above Chamchamal, a town in the northern Iraqi enclave controlled by Kurds opposed to President Saddam Hussein, said they had met no resistance and believed government forces had fled.

US warplanes last pounded the hilltops above Chamchamal on Wednesday, and Iraqis left behind mortars and machineguns in their bunker positions.

"We have sent around 300 peshmerga fighters across the front so far," said senior Kurdish commander Mam Rostam.

"It appears the Iraqis have gone back to Kirkuk. They have defence

lines there, the so-called belt around Kirkuk," he added.

He could not confirm peshmerga accounts of five bodies found in one position near the frontline, which collapsed on Thursday.

Lieutenant Nauzad, a turbaned peshmerga clutching a rifle and sleeping bag, said he had seen no Iraqi troops during his night behind the lines.

Oil-rich Kirkuk, 20 miles west of Chamchamal, is of huge strategic importance in the US-led assault to overthrow Saddam, launched nine days ago.

The breakthrough at Chamchamal was the first such development along the frontline separating government troops from Kurdish fighters protecting the northern enclave.

Reporters were allowed to drive around one mile across the frontline on to heights overlooking Chamchamal.

The advance followed increasing US activity in the region in what is seen as the start of a new northern front.

US paratroopers landed in northern Iraq overnight, with Washington putting the force at 1,000-strong from the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

Reuters reporters in the northern city of Sulaimaniya said on Friday they saw six US Humvee off-road vehicles full of soldiers carrying heavy machineguns apparently heading toward Halabja, where a group of radical Islamic fighters are based.

The military significance of the collapse of the front facing Chamchamal is unclear. No clashes were involved and peshmerga commanders have vowed not to launch an assault of their own on Kirkuk and Mosul to the northwest.



PHOTO: AFP

: A South Korean anti-war demonstrator kicks riot police during a demonstration in Seoul, 28 March 2003, against the deployment of 700 South Korean troops to Iraq. Anti-war protesters rallied outside the National Assembly building where deliberations on the troop deployment were taking place, as lawmakers delayed the vote calling for more debate amid feared public backlash.

## Saddam's top guns



**Uday Hussein**  
Saddam's elder son, Commander of the Fedayeen militia.



**Qusay Hussein**  
Saddam's younger son, who oversees all of Iraq's security organisations.



**Taha Yasin Ramadan**  
Vice president, Prime Minister, Commander of the Army.



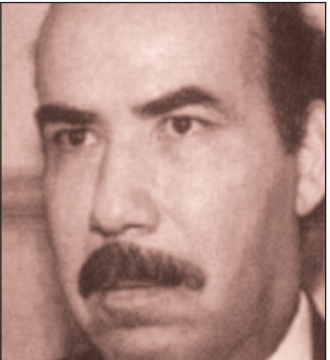
**Tariq Aziz**  
Deputy Prime Minister, the only Christian in the leadership.



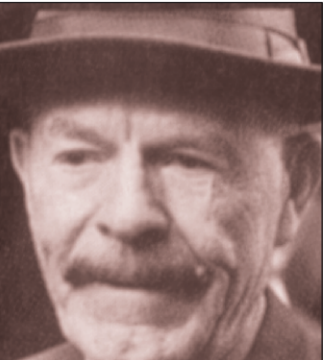
**Mohammed Hamza al Zubaidi**  
Former head of the northern bureau of the ruling Baath Party.



**General Sultan Hasim Ahmad**  
Defence Minister, managed to avoid numerous military purges; negotiated cease-fire terms after first Gulf War.



**Barzan Ibrahim Hassan al Tikriti**  
Saddam's half-brother, former head of foreign intelligence, presidential adviser.



**Issat Ibrahim**  
Vice Chairman, Revolutionary Command Council.

## Washington hawks under fire

THE TIMES, Washington

British and American intelligence badly miscalculated the level of resistance that coalition forces would encounter in Iraq, with analysts predicting that troops would reach Baghdad in days and defeat President Saddam Hussein in a matter of weeks.

As thousands more US soldiers began deploying in the Gulf for what could be a campaign lasting months, there were growing questions in London and Washington over the failure to anticipate the stubborn resistance being encountered.

At the start of the war British military officers were confident that the southern city of Basra would fall quickly, that the Shia Muslims in the south would rise up against Saddam and that there would be token resistance on the road to Baghdad. "The intelligence assessment seriously underestimated what to expect," one Whitehall source, who briefed Downing Street on the dangers before the war, said.

His advice was largely ignored, even though Saddam was openly making careful preparations to

defend himself. He armed and trained irregular forces, bribed tribal leaders and used propaganda to portray the looming war as an attempt by America to conquer the country and steal its oil.

It is understood that British intelligence had been receiving reports from inside Iraq. It strongly suggested that the regime was weak and would topple if pushed, particularly in the southern city of Basra, which is the area allocated to the British forces.

Part of that assessment was based on the uprisings of 1991, when thousands of Shias rebelled against Saddam and were brutally suppressed by his forces.

British government sources admitted Thursday that there had been a "general expectation" on both sides of the Atlantic that "the Iraqi people would revolt against Saddam as they had in 1991" or at least that there might be coup "within the higher echelons" of the regime.

One foreign intelligence source, with good first-hand knowledge of Iraq, said that this analysis was flawed. He insisted that the Shias may hate Saddam, but that they have no love for the Americans and

British, who let them down 12 years ago and whose motives today are greeted with suspicion.

"The Shias of the south fought hard against Iran for eight years during the Iran-Iraq War. They were Iraqis first and Shias second. There is a strong nationalist feeling in Iraq and Saddam is an expert at exploiting it," he said.

Much of the blame in London was directed at Washington. Most of the shared US-British intelligence is said to have been about troop movements and whether Saddam possesses weapons of mass destruction. There are now doubts about the veracity of at least some of this information.

"Plans have been driven by US intelligence," a Whitehall source said. "But we have been aware for some time that they rely, perhaps too much, on radio intercepts and satellite photography."

The Foreign Office is believed to have been concerned at the credence attached in Washington to information from Iraqi exiles with political connections to the Bush

Administration. They widely predicted that the Iraqi Armed Forces would defect as soon as the war broke out.

Criticism is also growing within Washington against hawks in the Bush Administration. They were supremely confident that America's overwhelming military might and its tactic of "shock and awe" would cause the Iraqi military to buckle and leave the regime's hierarchy isolated. Toby Dodge, an expert on Iraq at Warwick University, said that much of this assessment had been based on wishful thinking by the neo-conservatives, who lacked first-hand experience of modern Iraqi society and politics.

Reports in Washington suggested that intelligence analysts at the CIA and the Pentagon did warn the Administration of the dangers of expecting a quick victory in Iraq, but that the warnings were ignored by the White House and the Pentagon.

This view was confirmed by leading hawks in the Administration in the run-up to the war. Only weeks before the offensive was launched, Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defence

Secretary, complained privately that senior Pentagon officers were being far too cautious.