



# 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 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 from the latest spate of explosions 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 smaller 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 Tareq 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 enemies."

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 we 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 neighborhood known as the "City of the People," tears and rage gripped grieving relatives who buried 14 people killed Wednesday when an air strike 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

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."

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

## 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.

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.

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.

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