



IRAQ INVASION

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Urban battle in Baghdad

Nightmare awaiting US forces

AFP, New York

US troops closing in on Baghdad should fear a house-by-house, street-by-street battle for the Iraqi capital more than anything else, military experts have warned.

US military leaders have given away little of their plans for Baghdad. Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman General Richard Myers said at the weekend he did not like to use the word "siege" and the operation would be different from any operation of its kind seen in past conflicts.

But with so much international opposition to the war by US and British forces, experts said the invaders cannot afford a to copy Russian tactics in Chechnya that saw its capital reduced to rubble.

"It's not easy to win a street-fight without destroying the street, and the US Army is aware of this," said John Ferris, a professor of military history at the University of Calgary in Canada.

"The last thing on Earth they are going to do is to go into Baghdad against what they think is going to be stiff

resistance. They're only going to do that if they have no other option."

In a policy document on urban warfare released last September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff highlighted the strategy of the ancient Chinese commander Sun Tzu: "The worst policy of all is to besiege walled cities."

Everything will depend on how many Iraqi forces remain loyal to President Saddam Hussein in and around Baghdad, said Ferris.

"If he is able to call on the equivalent of three or four divisions of Republican Guard plus whatever loyal civilian auxiliaries he has, I find it hard to believe that the Americans are going to be able to avoid inflicting massive civilian casualties and massive damage on the city of Baghdad," he said.

The main problem for US and British forces who have been harassed in southern Iraq has come from paramilitaries and militias, which indicates that the best-equipped forces are being held back for the fight for Baghdad.

Dean Nowowiejski, a former army

officer and teacher at the West Point army academy, now an analyst at the Brookings Institution, said US forces have to expect that Saddam will surround himself with his most loyal forces.

"Then it becomes problematic. And you've come down to the very basic question about how much death and destruction has to be inflicted before the regime collapses."

Ferris said the British-led operation to take the southern city of Basra could become a test for the forces that take on Baghdad.

"The British are trying to recalibrate the tactics they used in Belfast to Basra. If it works, and judging purely by television reports so far it seems to have done well in this test-case, they will then believe they have learned a technique that could be feasible for Baghdad," said the military historian.

But after facing stiffer resistance than expected in southern Iraq and with little concrete sign that Saddam's regime is collapsing, the US government has started preparing its people for a long war.



British soldiers walk past a dead fighter around the parameters of Basra technical college yesterday. Coalition forces are still battling for the control of the strategic southern Iraqi port city of Basra. PHOTO: AFP

Annan warns all sides would lose in war

REUTERS, Kuwait

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said on Thursday that he saw no chance of an immediate cease-fire in the US-led war in Iraq and warned all sides that they would end up as losers.

"If you are asking me whether I see any immediate possibility of a cease-fire, I do not see that," he told the Qatar-based al-Jazeera satellite television in an interview.

"I wish we could say that there is such a possibility for an immediate halt and that a call by the Security Council could lead to that, but I don't see the matter that way," Annan said.

"I have always said that war is a human catastrophe and everyone will

emerge a loser. I am pained by all that has happened," he said. His comments were dubbed into Arabic from English.

Annan said he could not say how long the war would last and reiterated that the legitimacy of the US-led war was questionable. Washington and London failed to persuade the Security Council last month to sanction an invasion.

"I have made it clear that we would have preferred a peaceful solution and not to be forced to see what we see happening today," he said.

He said that warring sides should take care of civilians according to international human rights conventions.

Annan denied Iraqi charges that the

withdrawal of UN staff from Iraq shortly before the war had allowed the invasion to take place. He said his teams would return and work with the Iraqi authorities as soon as the situation allowed.

Before the war, 60 per cent of Iraqis lived off rations from the UN oil-for-food program and aid officials have warned of a humanitarian crisis unless deliveries of food, water and medicines resume soon. The United Nations has identified over \$1.0 billion of aid supplies that could reach Iraq by mid-May.

"As soon as the circumstances change, the United Nations will return and work with the Iraqi authorities and people who are responsible for their land," Annan said.

Is Baghdad ready for the big offensive?

RAGEH OMAAR, BBC correspondent

As I drive around the city, I do not get any sense of enormous defensive positions, tanks out in the streets, or huge military encampments.

There are no checkpoints and no curfews. Baghdad is still an open city. However, there might be large numbers of forces secreted away within the city.

Certainly the Iraqi authorities are exuding an enormous amount of self-confidence.

A few days ago, I asked the Iraqi minister of defence which Republican Guard positions were being hit and how badly, but he did not reveal much.

What he did say was that the Iraqis had learned lessons in the first Gulf War. They were not going to leave their troops massed in their thousands, waiting to be picked off by Apache helicopters like sitting ducks.

The minister of defence also said they had taken measures to have their divisions broken up into small units that could be deeply dug into the city in the event of urban warfare.

Now, as a British journalist, I'm not going to be allowed to visit Iraqi forces and take pictures of them to verify what he says.

But to a certain extent I believe him. The Iraqis have had a year to prepare for this war. They know how their whole military collapsed in Kuwait the first time, and they will not let that happen again.

So it could be that what the B-52s are doing on the outskirts of Baghdad is simply pounding empty sand and

empty buildings. I do not know.

What I do know is that we have seen evidence of small units of 10 to 15 men scattered throughout the city.

It is clear that the defence of Baghdad goes down to the very basic unit of the neighbourhood. It is not one large army defending a whole city.

The local officials who lead the units - be they from the ruling Ba'ath party or from the army - know their neighbourhoods extremely well.

This is one of the advantages the Iraqis will have if it comes to house to house fighting.

The US and Britain have not had diplomats on the ground in Baghdad for 12 years now, so their intelligence may be out of date.

However, there will be disadvantages for the Iraqis regarding urban warfare.

They have technologically inferior weapons, and they are open to surveillance from the air. If water, electricity and supply routes are cut off - if it turns into a classic siege - it will be very difficult for the Iraqi military, as well as for the Iraqi people.

It is hard to tell what the citizens of Baghdad really think of the war because this is a very controlled society. From what I have seen though, I think that people are genuinely afraid of the consequences of a siege of Baghdad.

There are likely to be more civilian casualties, particularly if the coalition forces try to minimise their own losses by continuing bombardments. What is certain is that the longer the war goes on, the more the people of Iraq are being affected.

Rebuilding post-war Iraq

US, Britain at odds

WASHINGTON POST, Washington

The Bush administration and Britain, its closest ally in the war against Iraq, may be headed for a collision over Iraq's interim leadership and the role of the United Nations after the ouster of President Saddam Hussein.

Prime Minister Tony Blair, seeking to broaden international influence over Iraq amid widespread fears that the Americans will exert unbridled control, believes the United Nations should lead a gathering of Iraqis to select interim leaders and shape the country's postwar administration.

Blair, who has begun seeking support in Europe for broader UN engagement, sees it as a way to add legitimacy to the remaking of Iraq and prove the value of the world body, which was damaged by the bitter fight over the war. He said Iraq "should be run for the first time in decades by the Iraqi people."

Senior UN officials consider the British idea a useful bridge and a modest way to begin developing a meaningful role in Iraq beyond humanitarian relief. But as one U.N. staff member put it yesterday, "Even on that, the Americans have more or less signaled to us, 'Forget about it.'"

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell will focus on the debate over postwar Iraq today with European counterparts who want to prevent the United States from dominating the politics and economics of a changed Iraq. He said he would seek further opinions in coming days and that no decisions would be made today.

"I think there is a consensus that says the United Nations has a role to play,"

Powell told reporters traveling with him on his brief European trip. "What we have to work out is exactly the nature of that role and how the U.N. role will be used to provide some level of endorsement for our actions, the actions of the coalition in Iraq."

"No one's earning great points in Washington by saying we have to work closely with the UN," said one US official involved in postwar planning.

After meeting with President Bush yesterday, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer told reporters that he believes the US administration would support the establishment of a special UN representative in Iraq to coordinate UN activities. But the extent of the proposed envoy's responsibilities remained unclear.

The State Department favours a central role for the United Nations and other international partners in Iraq after a period of US military occupation. Opponents, doubtful about the UN's abilities and wary of constraints on US action, are prominent in the Defence Department and White House.

In debating UN tasks, officials make a distinction between relief and reconstruction. Indeed, the administration is eager for help from aid agencies that have permanent mandates to help refugees and vulnerable children, for example. US officials worked closely and quietly with the UN World Food Program to take over Iraq's essential nationwide food distribution system.

Leaders of prominent US-based aid organisations have appealed to Bush to turn the humanitarian operation over to a UN coordinator. They contend a U.N.

umbrella would shelter governments and independent organisations that want to help, but will not report to US military authorities.

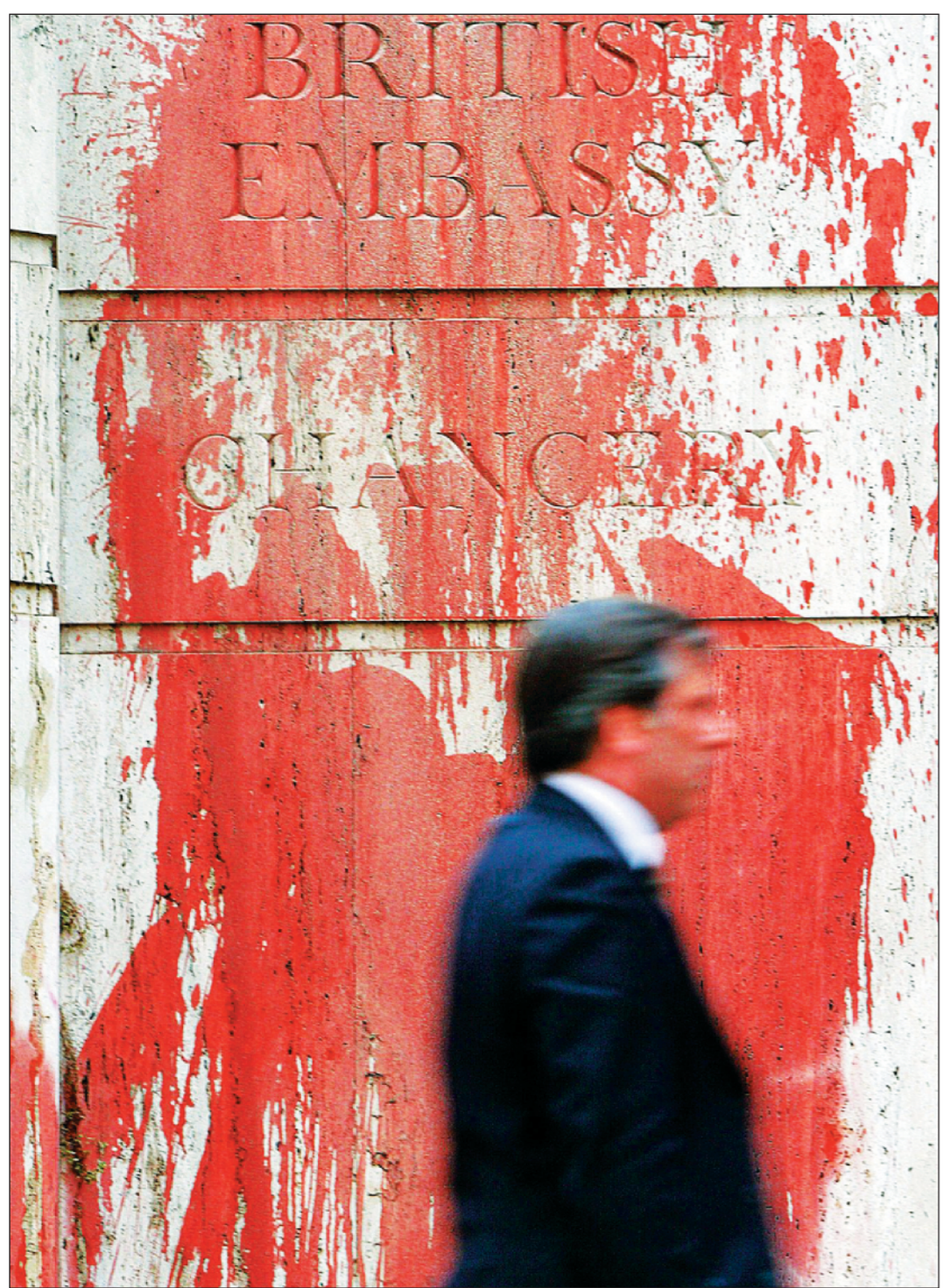
"To have the UN in charge would not only use its expertise to the fullest, but it would allow a broader multilateral coalition," said Kenneth Bacon, president of Refugees International. "There are a number of European agencies that will find it very difficult to work on relief if they think it's being directed by the United States."

UN executives, in fact, do not want full control over Iraq after Hussein falls. They agree with officials in the State Department and Defence Department alike that such a mission is beyond the organisation's capabilities, whether measured by staffing, funding, administrative efficiency or the political unity that would be required.

"We're not looking for this role. We have a job to do on the humanitarian front. That's where our energies are focused," said UN Undersecretary General Shashi Tharoor. "There is no doubt that we are better equipped and more experienced for some tasks than others."

Asked, after recent meetings with US officials, what the Americans want to control, one UN staffer said, "As of now, everything."

Until now, important players in the Bush administration have envisioned making their own selections to an interim administration that would gradually take control of the country from US military commanders. The makeup of the authority remains a matter of debate.



Students and workers threw red paint on the wall of the British embassy in Rome after they rallied against the US-led war in Iraq. PHOTO: AFP

Iraqi families denounce US tank attack

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Injured Iraqi civilians said how the bus they were travelling on was attacked "without warning" by US troops.

Bassem Hawky, 38, told reporters he lost his right arm when a US tank fired on a bus carrying himself and his family earlier this week. Mr Hawky's 10-year-old son lost both arms in the alleged attack and is now fighting for his life.

He said his wife, mother and five children and about 20 other passengers were in the bus when it came under fire. They were on their way from Hillah in central Iraq to Najaf, where they live, after a visit to relatives.

"We saw a column of US tanks and when we got close to the first tank,

which flew the American flag, it fired on us without any warning," he said, speaking at the Hillah Hospital where his son is in the intensive care unit.

"That Bush has no mercy, faith, or humanity," he said.

The Hawkys are among dozens of Iraqi civilians whom medical personnel at Hillah Hospital say have been wounded or killed this week.

Dr Haidar Abbas Hantoush said 40 civilians have been killed and another 260 injured since Monday. All were victims of bombings of civilian areas by the allied forces, he said.

"So far we have no shortage of medical supplies, but if this continues for a few more days, we will run short of

drugs, antibiotics and surgical instruments," he told The Associated Press.

The alleged attack on civilians came to light on Tuesday, when Iraqi officials said US Apache helicopters attacked a neighbourhood in Hillah - 55 miles south of Baghdad - killing 33 people.

The US Central Command in Doha, Qatar, said it was investigating the incident and insisted no Apaches could have been involved.

Hillah, which lies on the Euphrates River near the ruins of ancient Babylon, is believed by the US-led coalition to be home to a camp for Saddam's Fedayeen, a loyalist militia used to combat internal unrest and, in recent days, harass American and British forces.

Amnesty angry over cluster bomb use

AFP, London

International human rights watchdog Amnesty International warned Wednesday that the use of cluster bombs will lead to the indiscriminate killing of civilians, the day after the bombs were suspected of killing 33 civilians in central Iraq.

On Tuesday at least 33 civilians including many children were reportedly killed and around 300 injured in US attacks on the town of al-Hilla.

"Amnesty International is particularly disturbed by reports that cluster bombs were used in the attacks and may have been responsible for some of the civilian deaths," the organisation said.

"The use of cluster bombs in an attack on a civilian area of al-Hilla constitutes an indiscriminate attack and a grave violation of international humanitarian law," it said.

"If the US is serious about protecting civilians, it must publicly commit to a moratorium on the use of cluster weapons. Using cluster munitions will lead to indiscriminate killing and injuring of civilians," the organisation added.

On Tuesday, an AFP correspondent at Hilla south of Baghdad saw what seemed to be the parts of cluster bombs peppered over a large area. Hospital officials and witnesses said 48 civilians had died in US-British bombardment of the area since late Monday.

There was no independent confirmation of the death toll.

New York-based Human Rights Watch, in a report days ahead of the start of the current conflict, said cluster munitions dropped in the 1991 Gulf War were to blame for the deaths or injuries of more than 4,000 civilians after the fighting ended.