

US troops jumpy in Iraq as attacks go on

REUTERS, Baghdad

A grenade attack killed three US soldiers guarding a children's hospital in Iraq and an ambush killed another, in fresh evidence that the deaths of Saddam Hussein's sons have brought no respite in the guerrilla campaign against American forces.

"Things are worse now," said Staff Sergeant Kenneth Maxwell, nervously fingering the trigger of his machinegun on an armoured vehicle in Saddam's hometown of Tikrit on Saturday.

"They used to just attack us, mostly at night. But now they are attacking us during the day with AK-47s and RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades), at any American soldiers they can find," Maxwell said, eyes alight under the baking sun.

In the hospital attack in Baquba, 30 miles north of Baghdad, residents said an attacker had hurled a grenade from the roof of the building on Saturday morning. Three soldiers of the 4th Infantry Division were killed and four wounded.

Hours later, one soldier was killed and two were wounded when their convoy was attacked near Abu Ghurib with small arms, rocket-propelled grenades and possibly an

improvised explosive device, the US military said in a statement.

The soldiers were with an engineer unit attached to the 3rd Infantry Division.

That raised to 48 the number of troops killed by hostile fire since Washington declared major combat over on May 1.

US officials blame Saddam loyalists for the attacks on American troops, and masked men have appeared on Arab television networks vowing revenge for the deaths of Uday and Qusay.

But many Iraqis resent the US occupation and link the violence to anger over the way US troops behave. Between 6,000 and 7,800 Iraqi guerrillas prowl the "Sunni triangle" west and north of Baghdad.

But the feared brothers' bloody fate does not seem to have broken the quickening rhythm of hit-and-run assaults.

The daylight attack in Baquba prompted US troops to seal off the hospital and bar people from leaving for the rest of the day, to the dismay of worried Iraqis with relatives inside.

"My wife and my baby boy are inside. I have a one-year-old daughter in house who needs her mother. We want the Americans to let them out," said one man, Mohammed Abdul Sattar.

"We all agree that we need to

US bulldozers began demolishing the villa in the northern city of Mosul where troops killed Uday and Qusay, along with two others thought to be a bodyguard and Qusay's teenage son.

The house belonged to a businessman with links to Saddam's family. US officials will not say if it was he who betrayed Uday and Qusay to claim \$30 million in reward money. Washington says it will pay -- and hopes others will be tempted by the \$25 million on offer to anyone who can pinpoint Saddam.

Hurriyat chief calls on rebels, troops to declare truce

AFP, Srinagar

The new chief of Indian Kashmir's main separatist alliance called Sunday for Indian troops and Muslim rebels to declare a truce to set the stage for talks between slowly reconciling enemies India and Pakistan.

Molvi Abbas Ansari told AFP that India and Pakistan should sit down as soon as possible to start resolving their dispute over Kashmir, which both countries rule in part and claim in full.

"It would be good if we have a ceasefire in Kashmir by both Indian troops and Kashmiri Mujahedin (rebels)," said Ansari, head of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference.

"A bilateral ceasefire at this point of time will help in creating a conducive atmosphere for talks between India and Pakistan."

Kashmir, in the throes of a 14-year Islamic separatist insurgency, has seen one-way ceasefires fail in the past.

In July 2000, Majid Dar, the field commander of Kashmir's largest rebel group Hizbul Mujahedin, announced a unilateral ceasefire. India responded by suspending operations against Hizbul.



PHOTO: AFP
South Korean president Roh Moo-Hyun (R) and New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark (L) arrive for the unveiling of the monument marking the 50th anniversary of the Korean War ceremony at the War Museum at Seoul on Sunday.

Veterans mark Korean War armistice at DMZ

AP, Panmunjom

Old soldiers from around the world, some in wheelchairs and many wearing combat medals, commemorated the 50th anniversary Sunday of the armistice that ended the Korean War.

More than 1,000 veterans gathered out of the rain in a tent in Panmunjom, the truce village in the Demilitarized Zone where the ceasefire was signed, ending three years of war that left up to 5 million people dead, injured or missing.

"The most difficult part of the war was what was left behind. Your buddies, people who didn't make it," said a tearful Fred Daniel Bertrand, who was a US Marine sergeant in the final year of the Korean conflict. The war pitted South Korea and a US-led United Nations force against North Korea, which was backed by Chinese ground troops and Soviet aid.

The ceremony was held near the Military Demarcation Line that separates the two Koreas, but there was little sign of activity on the Northern side, where a lone sentry stood guard. Veterans on the Southern side toured a military hut straddling the demarcation line, and took snapshots with the North as a backdrop.

The 1950-53 Korean War ended without a peace treaty, and tensions that simmered over the

decades have spiked again in the past year because of North Korea's suspected development of nuclear weapons.

"The North Korean nuclear program poses a very critical challenge," New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark said in a speech to the veterans. "The world community must make it very clear to North Korea that the development of nuclear weapons is provocative and unacceptable."

The morning ceremony at Panmunjom was timed to coincide with the hour that the armistice was signed: 10 a.m. local time on July 27, 1953. An evening ceremony was planned at the US military headquarters in Seoul to mark the time that the cease-fire took effect, 12 hours later.

Over the past week, North Korea has marked the anniversary with celebrations because its propaganda machine has always described the war as a victory for communist forces, rather than as the stalemate it was. Red banners recalling the North's "triumph" hang prominently in Pyongyang's main square.

In a reminder of the uneasiness that lingers along the world's most heavily armed border, the North's military used characteristically belligerent rhetoric Saturday to warn of the potential for a new war.



PHOTO: AFP
A group of rebel soldiers take position outside the Rustan's department store in the suburban financial district of Makati early on Sunday. A group of young officers accused President Gloria Arroyo's government of terrorism and corruption. Rebels planted explosives around the area where a hotel and a high rise apartment and commercial centers are located.

Old faces, old tactics resurface in new coup attempt in Philippines

AFP, Manila

The latest coup attempt to rock the Philippines looks suspiciously like a repeat of the coups that plagued the country for a decade -- complete with the occupation of the same shopping mall.

Once again, young officers, insisting they only want reforms, have taken arms against the government of a female president, accepting the administration of corruption and colluding with insurgent groups.

This time a group of up to 200 rebels are demanding that the administration of President Gloria Arroyo be replaced with a "National Recovery Program."

The "program" was apparently the platform of Senator Gregorio Honasan, a former army colonel

who led most of the bloody coup attempts in the 1980s.

Rebel soldiers openly distributed copies of the program with Honasan's name on it to journalists. The program has vague statements on fighting crime, corruption and terrorism, cleaning up the judiciary and reviewing the country's trade commitments.

Honasan was pardoned as part of a peace deal after which he entered politics. He has admitted advising the young officers but has denied that he is involved in the power grab, insisting he was not responsible for the mutineers adopting his platform.

However, Interior Secretary Jose Lima said: "We have very clear and strong intelligence reports that his involvement in this is deep so we are readying charges."

Iran agrees to tougher IAEA nuclear checks

REUTERS, Tehran

A senior Iranian official was quoted on Sunday as saying the Islamic Republic should agree to tougher inspections of its nuclear facilities to ease international pressure on the country.

In an interview with the state-run Iran newspaper, Iran's representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Ali Akbar Salehi said he hoped Tehran would take measures to satisfy international concerns about its nuclear ambitions before the IAEA's next board of governors' meeting in September.

Asked whether Iran should agree to international demands it sign up to the Additional Protocol of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) -- to allow more intrusive, short-notice inspections of its nuclear sites -- Salehi said:

"Right now, we are in a situation where we can use the Additional Protocol as a tool for solving the problems which have been created and to close the politicized case of our nuclear activities."

"With a positive attitude toward the Additional Protocol, we can take necessary advantage of it."

UN nuclear watchdog the IAEA in June reported a number of failures by Iran to declare its nuclear activities and is scheduled to report again on Iran in September.

Iran denies any intention to build nuclear weapons and insists its nuclear program is solely geared to electricity generation.

Salehi said he was hopeful that senior officials in Tehran would adopt a "proper and expedient policy" during the next month, which would allow Iran "to leave behind this problem."

Some hard-line commentators in Iran have said signing the Additional Protocol would be an insult to Iran's sovereignty and suggested Tehran should instead pull out of the NPT altogether.

But Salehi noted that by pulling out of the NPT, North Korea had placed itself "in a complicated situation."

"Not being actively present in international organizations or withdrawing from these organizations means that you want to dismiss yourself from the international community or confront the whole community which is not expedient for a country like Iran," he said.

"With a positive attitude toward the Additional Protocol, we can take necessary advantage of it."

The leader of the insurgency-torn northeastern Indian state of Manipur was ambushed Sunday by suspected separatists who killed two of his bodyguards, police said.

Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh was travelling from Manipur's capital Imphal to Wangjing, a town 28 kilometers (17 miles) outside the city, when assailants hurled explosives at his motorcade and opened fire with automatic weapons, police said.

"Two paramilitary troopers were killed in the ambush and another seriously wounded. The chief minister escaped unhurt," a police official told AFP by telephone from Imphal.

Security forces were immediately deployed to comb the area for the attackers.

Police said initial indications were that the assassination bid was carried out by the Manipur People's Liberation Front, an umbrella group of five separatist outfits.

Afghans fire rockets on Pakistani border post

AFP, Quetta

Afghan forces fired two rockets across the border at a Pakistani post in southwestern Baluchistan province but no casualties or property losses were reported, officials said Sunday.

Pakistani security forces lodged a protest with Afghan authorities in the southern Afghan border town of Spin Boldak over the attack late Saturday, they said.

"One rocket landed near the Shaukat post, just two kilometers (1.2 miles) east of the entry point" at the Pakistani border town of Chaman. Another landed in an open area near the border, a security official said.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, he said the rockets "caused no damage of any kind."

Attempt on Manipur minister: 2 killed

AFP, Guwahati

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UK minister met Kelly before his suicide

AFP, London

British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon had spoken with arms expert David Kelly sometime before his apparent suicide following a row between the government and the BBC over Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction, the defence ministry confirmed Sunday.

"The President categorically refused to allow anyone to discuss the issue of his uniform with the Opposition. The President said only he would decide about taking off his uniform when he thinks appropriate," a report indicated on Sunday.

Meekly submitting to the President's wish, the prime minister said he had already made public statements that the government would not discuss the uniform issue.

Fourteen ministers voted in favour of releasing members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, while nine opposed the move, aimed at appeasing Washington where Sharon is due to hold talks with US President George W. Bush on Tuesday, the radio added.

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