

Secretary of State: 'Tough times' ahead

WASHINGTON - Secretary of State James A. Baker III warned Wednesday of "many casualties, great hardships" ahead in the war against Iraq as the Bush administration said ground warfare was almost a certainty.

"The military actions now under way necessarily involve many casualties, great hardships, and growing fears for the future," Baker said. "Tough times lie ahead."

At a White House briefing, presidential press secretary Marlin Fitzwater said there probably will be a ground war, inching beyond President Bush's statement on Tuesday that he was "skeptical" the war could be won solely

through the bombing campaign.

Bush declined to say a full-scale ground offensive would be required. But Fitzwater said, "It's no secret that at some point it probably will require ground forces to reach our final conclusion of getting Iraq out of Kuwait."

Rep. Dave McCurdy, D-Okla., new chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said Wednesday, "I don't think it has gone on long enough to convince anyone it is time to commence the ground phase."

House Minority Leader Robert Michel, R-Ill., said, after a briefing for lawmakers by Defense Secretary Dick Cheney and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell, that members of Congress "feel good that there seems to be no rush" to a ground war. He added, "I'm just confident that General Powell feels the same

way."

At the private briefing, Cheney and Powell showed lawmakers satellite photos of damage to Iraqi buildings, bridges and military installations. Sources said one photo showed gaping holes made by Tomahawk cruise missiles in the center and at the ends of Saddam Hussein's presidential palace in Baghdad.

At a bill-signing ceremony, Bush gave an upbeat assessment of the allied coalition's progress in the three-week-old effort to compel Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait.

"Things are going darned well over there," the president said.

"I feel very confident that this matter is going to resolve itself and it's not going to take that long and it is going to be total and complete."

The president's audience was composed of lawmakers and several disabled veterans, on hand to see Bush sign a measure to compensate veterans suffering from certain diseases suspected to have been caused by exposure to the herbicide Agent Orange in Vietnam.

His comment came as Cheney and Powell prepared to leave Thursday night for a visit to the gulf to assess the readiness of U.S. forces for assaulting the entrenched Iraqi army.

They are to return late Sunday and brief Bush early next week.

Baker used the occasion of an appearance before the House Foreign Affairs Committee to stress that the costs of the war against Saddam's forces will mount.

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Gulf War Roundup Wednesday, Feb. 6

In another day of nonstop aerial ballistics, the United States shot down at least two fleeing Iraqi jets and Iraq blasted the sky with intense anti-aircraft fire.

In Jordan: King Hussein appealed for a cease-fire in the war, which he says is destroying Iraq.



In Iran: Iran's official news agency said Iraq's southern cities came under allied air and missile fire and more Iraqi planes took refuge.

In Iraq: Iraq announces it is severing diplomatic ties with the United States, Britain, France, Italy, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Republican Guard still effective despite air attacks, analysts say

WASHINGTON - Round-the-clock bombing of Iraq's Republican Guard has seriously afflicted Iraq's top military unit, but it remains an "effective fighting force," Pentagon military analysts said Wednesday.

"We've not annihilated any of their primary war-fighting capabilities," says one senior military officer. "It's going to be a tough nut to crack."

In military parlance, the 150,000-member Guard constitutes Saddam Hussein's "theater reserve," a strong force located well behind front-line troops, to be swung into action as needed as a ground battle progresses.

And since Guard units make up Iraq's best-trained and best-equipped force, they are a crucial target before any ground campaign is launched.

But assessments of the damage done by the air campaign to the units have been conflicting.

In Saudi Arabia, Gen. Michel Roquejeoffre, commander of the French forces in Operation Desert Storm, was quoted as saying he believed allied air strikes had reduced

Republican Guard effectiveness overall by about 30 percent.

Another French official had said earlier he thought the Guard remained about 95 percent intact, but Roquejeoffre said his assessment referred not simply to casualties among the Guard but to the overall impact on its supplies, weapons and command structure.

Military officers at the Pentagon said that although hundreds of the force's tanks and artillery pieces had been hit during the past three weeks, the force was well dispersed over hundreds of square miles. The Guard has had six months to beef up its supplies and remained dug in in a complex system of concrete bunkers.

"The Guard has been seriously affected, but they remain an effective fighting force," said one senior military officer with access to intelligence reports of the progress of the war.

Air Force officers have stated they hope to destroy 50 percent of Iraq's

forces before a ground offensive is launched and pilots in Saudi Arabia have boasted of their many successes during the air campaign.

But officers from the Army and Marine Corps have rejected as over-optimistic any assessments that bombing is forcing Iraq's top-line forces to wilt.

"A pilot may claim to have put a hole in a tank, but it's hard to assess exactly what damage has been done" by photos, said an Army officer familiar with such reports.

At the U.S. military briefing in Riyadh on Wednesday, Marine Brig. Gen. Richard Neal said, "We're dropping a lot of ordnance on the Republican Guard, not just to lower their morale but also to destroy their tanks, their artillery, their logistical sustainment capability, their built-up areas. We're out there to destroy the Republican Guard."

But he declined to quantify the damage, saying only "I think we're experiencing good success."

Gorbachev wishes to hold country together

MOSCOW - Mikhail Gorbachev made a surprise television appearance Wednesday night to express his determination to hold the country together and urge full participation in the Kremlin's referendum on the union.

"All my convictions are based on preservation of the union," the Soviet president said, sitting at a desk to deliver a 15-minute address at the beginning of the evening newscast.

"The Soviet Union is a superpower," he said. "Huge efforts were made to make it so powerful, and we could lose it very quickly."

It was Gorbachev's clearest declaration to date that he will not let any of the 15 republics secede. While acknowledging that areas were brought

into the union by force, he said the fate of all now depends on remaining in a common economic system.

"Everybody should understand that we are deciding the destiny of our state," he said. "The U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet (legislature) should make sure every citizen expresses his opinion."

Gorbachev said the March 17 referendum "is the first in the country and itself is a great accomplishment. Everybody should take part."

At least five republics — Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Georgia and Armenia — have scoffed at the referendum and reject Soviet law in their territory.

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Gorbachev

scheduled alternative votes, of which Gorbachev said: "It's completely clear that such attempts are legally invalid." He did not say whether authorities would try to block the votes.

All 15 Soviet republics have proclaimed greater control of their own

affairs and many have demanded recognition by the Kremlin before they sign Gorbachev's proposed Union

In apparent response to those concerns, Gorbachev said: "The main thing in the concept of the renewal of the union is, above all, sovereignty of the republics, (which are) subjects of a federation that ensures the right of each ethnic group to self-determination and self-government."

He also said, however, that secession would be disastrous for any republic.

"Separatism will doom people and destroy their lifestyles," Gorbachev said. "Those who secede will doom themselves to failure."

Economic woes

Persian Gulf war strains Arabian countries

MANAMA, Bahrain - The gulf war is straining the social fabric of the Arabian Peninsula, woven over centuries by Bedouin tribes who created desert kingdoms in this ancient, oil-rich land.

After the weapons of war are put away, analysts say new battlefields likely will surface — in mosques, universities, the halls of government and possibly the streets.

The cost of waging war against Iraq already cut deeply into oil profits and threatens rising unemployment.

Money woes may force Saudi Arabia to borrow on the international money market for the first time since the 1950s.

What remains to be seen is whether

the struggles already under way will lead to change in traditional autocratic governments.

"The walls of the kingdoms have been breached," said Shahram Chubin, a Middle East expert at the Graduate Institute for International Affairs in Geneva. "I don't think you can keep people in the dark after this type of blinding event opens their eyes."

No one expects the gulf states to suddenly embrace democracy. But a loosening of Islamic tradition is foreseen.

"The secret is bringing more people inside the tent," Chubin said. "If they don't, these governments will have problems."

Already, tensions have surfaced in the region that sprawls atop 60 per-

cent of the world's total oil reserves. The arrival of hundreds of thousands of Western soldiers on their sands also played a part. Cable News Network beamed Western ideas and values as well as war news into homes in the region.

"You watch that stuff and after a while you can't help thinking like an American," one government official said. "It's dangerous in this society."

In November, 50 women drove 15 cars around the Saudi Arabian capital Riyadh to protest a government ban on women driving.

In the following days, Saudi Arabia and Oman announced their governments would form consultative councils, or shuras — a small step, perhaps, away from absolute monar-

chy. Western diplomats said the United States has a hand in the Saudi move.

Most recently, a shaky cease-fire between Kuwait's ruling family and pro-democracy activists appeared to be near collapse.

After Iraq's Aug. 2 invasion, the two sides agreed to shelve their disagreements to free Kuwait. Opposition members now allege the ruling family has reneged on its promise to bring back Kuwait's parliament, which was banned in 1986.

"The rulers think that everything will return to normal when they get back Kuwait," said Ahmed al-Rabi, an opposition leader and former member of parliament. "They don't realize our people have changed. This war is changing everything."

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