

# U.S. ships hit mines; allies await order

DHAHRAN, Saudi Arabia - On call and on edge, U.S. and allied troops awaited the fateful "go" order Monday along the northern front.

American gunners pounded Iraqi positions with artillery fire. Iraqi mines afloat in the Persian Gulf damaged two U.S. Navy warships. And Air Force rescue helicopters plucked a downed pilot to safety from deep inside Iraqi-held territory.

"We are prepared to attack if necessary... tomorrow," said Brig. Gen. Daniel Gazeau, deputy commander of the French contingent.

The allies were ready, too, to defend against any Iraqi pre-emptive attack aimed at disrupting their plans.

"Most of us believe he will try it," said Marine Col. Carl Fulford. "What option is left to him at this stage?"

At the command's daily news briefing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the Marine general reported that partly cloudy weather Monday cut into the number of Desert Storm air sorties, reducing them to 2,400 in 24 hours.

Almost 1,000 missions were flown against the Republican Guard and other Iraqi units in Kuwait and southern Iraq, where air strikes are "softening up" the dug-in defenses in advance of a U.S.-led ground assault.

A recent change in air tactics was giving American warplanes greater success against Iraqi armor and other targets, a U.S. military source said.

"We're not experiencing too many misses. We're really having a field day taking out his tanks and artillery," the source said, without elaborating on the new techniques.

**"We are prepared to attack if necessary... tomorrow."**

*Brig. Gen. Daniel Gazeau, deputy commander of the French contingent in the gulf*

The lost plane was an Air Force F-16 fighter whose pilot bailed out 40 miles inside Iraqi-held territory, Neal said. The spokesman did not specify whether the plane went down in Iraq or Kuwait, and said it was not immediately known whether the jet was shot down or had a mechanical problem.

Monday's marine-mine explosions, the first time U.S. vessels have struck Iraqi mines in the war, came as dozens of warships crowded farther north in the gulf in preparation for a possible U.S. Marine amphibious landing.

A news-pool dispatch from the USS Tripoli said sleeping crewmen were jarred awake by a mine blast at 4:30 a.m. as the helicopter assault ship led a minesweeping operation off the Kuwaiti coast.

The explosion ripped a 16-by-20-foot hole in the forward starboard hull, 10 feet below the waterline, and flooded several compartments, the report said.

About three hours later, the USS

Princeton, a 1-year-old, \$1 billion Aegis missile cruiser struck another mine about 10 miles away, Neal reported.

Because that blast damaged one of the Princeton's propeller screws, the technology-laden ship was operating at 50-percent power, Neal said.

Four sailors on the Tripoli and three on the Princeton were slightly injured, Neal said. He said both ships remained "fully mission capable."

The pool report said the Tripoli sat dead in the water after the explosion, while work crews struggled to shore up the hole and pump out compartments on three decks. The Tripoli normally carries up to 2,000 combat-ready Marines, but military officials indicated it might not have had a full complement on board.

On the ground, the close-quarters skirmishing of the weekend died down. But U.S. artillery fire and attack helicopters kept the Iraqis off balance along the front lines, the U.S. command reported.

Late Sunday, Marine Cobra helicopters struck six Iraqi armored personnel carriers, destroying two, it said.

In Baghdad, air raid sirens sounded late Sunday and early Monday, and bombs fell on the outskirts of the city, but Iraqi officials said damage was light, Associated Press correspondent John Rice reported from the Iraqi capital.

An Iraqi military communique derided the allied air war in what sounded like an effort to goad the U.S.-led coalition into a ground confrontation.

**U.S. Warships Strike Mines**

**USS Princeton**  
Type: Aegis missile cruiser  
Displacement: 9,460 tons, full load  
Length: 566 feet  
Crew: 358  
Commissioned: Feb. 11, 1989

**USS Tripoli**  
Type: Amphibious assault ship  
Displacement: 18,000 tons, full load  
Length: 600 feet  
Crew: 686  
Commissioned: Aug. 6, 1966

Source: Jane's Fighting Ships

The infographic includes a map of the Persian Gulf region showing the locations of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the U.A.E. A red box on the map indicates the area where ships were hit by mines. A scale bar shows 400 miles and 400 km. A globe inset shows the 'Detail area'.

"The cowards continued to send their aircraft to strike from a distance," the communique said. The Defense Ministry newspaper, Al-Qadissiya, added that the Iraqi army is ready to make Kuwait "a killing zone and a graveyard for all the invaders."

Last Friday, Iraq's five-man ruling Revolutionary Command Council announced a Kuwait pullout plan with conditions attached, including a U.S. military withdrawal from the region, forgiveness of Iraqi foreign debts and an Israeli pullout from

occupied territories.

That proposal was rejected by Washington and its allies, which demand an Iraqi withdrawal without preconditions. The Soviets also dismissed Iraq's counter-demands, but pursued continued diplomatic contacts.

After Monday's Moscow meeting, the Soviet president's spokesman, Vitaly Ignatenko, said Gorbachev had presented Aziz with "a concrete plan for settlement in the Persian Gulf through political means."

## Assaults from land and sky best hope, government says

WASHINGTON - The Bush administration said Monday a Soviet peace proposal will not slow down the Persian Gulf war, declaring the best hopes for driving Iraq out of Kuwait "are in the conflict in the air and on the ground."

White House press secretary Marlin Fitzwater said, "We are on course. We have heard nothing to change our course."

President Bush said, "A lot of interesting things (are) happening. I don't want to talk about them."

The president wrapped up a four-day vacation at his seaside home and returned to the White House to meet with his war advisers. Fitzwater said Bush wanted "an update, a status report from everybody on where we are."

He said Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh called Secretary of State James Baker but did not reveal the contents of Moscow's peace plan. "The foreign minister said he'd prefer not to discuss it over the phone and he would send us a cable." Asked why Bessmertnykh would not talk about the plan on the phone, Fitzwater said simply, "It's the way he chose to do it."

The president, during a brisk walk earlier on the beach in Maine,

brushed aside questions about Moscow's proposal.

"I have nothing to say about the Soviet matter. I'm not going to discuss that at all... so put your notebooks away," the president said, striding briskly on the sand under a bright, sunny sky.

Fitzwater refused to say if Bush had decided on the timing of advancing the war from air strikes to a potentially bloody ground conflict. "It happens when it happens," he said, adding that no one should assume a ground war would be held off while Moscow's peace initiative was pending.

The administration has fueled expectations that a ground war will begin soon. On Sunday, Bush said he expected the war to end "very, very soon." The administration does not expect a protracted ground conflict, expressing confidence that it will be "very violent, very quick."

Asked if Bush had decided when to begin a major ground battle, Fitzwater said, "I can't say and I won't say. We won't be announcing decisions made or not made... Suffice it to say we've had extensive discussions. They have a specific plan that they've been working on from the beginning."

## Working for peace Gorbachev proposes plan to Iraq

MOSCOW - President Mikhail Gorbachev presented a secret peace plan to Iraq's foreign minister on Monday, and the Iraqi envoy immediately left for Baghdad to present it to Saddam Hussein.

Soviet officials, who are racing against the clock in what appears to be the final days before a major ground offensive in the gulf war, say they expected a quick response from the Iraqi president.

The Gorbachev plan "envisages political measures which we believe were accepted with interest and understanding by the Iraqi side," according to Vitaly Ignatenko, a spokesman for the Soviet president.

Ignatenko said Gorbachev planned to contact U.S., British, Italian, French and Iranian leaders to fill them in on his plan.

Gorbachev's peacemaking efforts followed a week of Soviet contacts with nearly every major player in the

month-old war. The Soviet Union has supported U.N. efforts to oust Iraq from Kuwait, but has grown apprehensive about the extent of destruction to Iraq, a former Soviet client.

Both Iraq and the United States have warned that fighting will continue and possibly escalate if nothing comes of the contacts. U.S.-led forces were threatening to launch a ground war within days, possibly hours.

President Bush's spokesman said the Soviets gave no advance notice about the plan and hadn't disclosed its contents yet.

"We intend to continue to prosecute the war," Marlin Fitzwater said at Bush's vacation home in Maine.

Aziz told reporters before departing Moscow for Tehran en route to Iraq that his 3 1/2-hour meeting with Gorbachev was "important," "cordial" and "objective."

"We decided to follow up those talks," he added.

Aziz will return to Moscow "very soon" after discussing the plan with Saddam and his Revolutionary Command Council, Ignatenko said.

He called the proposal "a concrete plan for settlement in the Persian Gulf through political means." He added that it was "fully in line with the Soviet position that there should be an unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait."

Ignatenko refused to divulge contents of the plan and it was not clear what he meant by "political means."

But the German newspaper Bild, citing unidentified sources in Moscow, said the Soviet peace plan demands Iraq's unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait and would bar any punitive actions against Saddam. The plan also calls for negotiations on the Palestinian problem, and declares that Iraq's government and borders would not be tampered with, the newspaper said.

## Bomb blasts London train station

LONDON - A bomb exploded at Victoria station during morning rush hour Monday, 45 minutes after a caller claiming to represent the IRA warned of bombs at all of London's train stations, police said. One man was killed and 40 people were wounded.

The explosion at 7:46 a.m. sent screaming commuters running from the train terminal, some trailing blood across the concourse. Rush-hour rail traffic was halted for hours as police searched on their hands and knees for clues.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the blast at Victoria, one of London's two main train stations.

The warning was delivered by a man with an Irish accent who said: "We are the Irish Republican Army. Bombs to go off at all mainline stations in 45 minutes," said Scotland Yard's anti-terrorist chief, Commander George Churchill-Coleman.

It came less than three hours after

a bomb exploded at Paddington station, the city's other main station. Only a dozen employees were on duty, and no one was injured.

Churchill-Coleman said the call was only one of a number of threats following the Paddington explosion, and that the others "transpired either to be false or malicious." Iain McGregor, deputy chief constable of the British Transport Police, said his department gets half a dozen bomb threats a day.

Churchill-Coleman said the warning was passed to the British Transport Police, who already were searching all the main railway terminals when the blast at Victoria occurred.

The bomb, which was hidden in a trash can on the concourse, "was quite deliberately intended to maim and kill," he said.

British Rail Chairman Robert Reid said the caller's timing may have been a deliberate attempt to make his warning appear to be a hoax.

**London Bombs**

The map shows the River Thames flowing through London. Key locations marked include Hyde Park, Buckingham Palace, and Parliament. Two stations are highlighted: Paddington Station and Victoria Station. A scale bar indicates 0.5 miles and 0.5 km. A 'Map detail' inset shows the River Thames area with a 10-mile and 10-km scale.

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