

Diplomacy dwindles as allies hammer gulf

DHAHRAN, Saudi Arabia - Marine gunners hammered away at Iraqi defense lines Tuesday and allied ships swept the gulf's waters for menacing Iraqi mines as the desperate days of diplomacy dwindled down toward an all-out assault on Kuwait.



Moscow gave Iraq another day or two to accept a secret Soviet peace plan, a plan President Bush was already dismissing as "well short" of U.S. requirements.

A Soviet mediator urged the Desert Storm allies to delay the long-expected ground war, or risk bearing "a great responsibility in history." An Iranian mediator said he was sure Iraq's bottom line would be simple: An Iraqi pullout from Kuwait in exchange for a U.S. pullout from Saudi Arabia.

A senior Baghdad official told the Iraqis more than 20,000 Iraqis have been killed, a Tehran newspaper reported.

"We're totally prepared to do whatever is necessary," said the man in overall charge of supplying the troops, Lt. Gen. Gus Pagonis. "We're ready to go."

Mines sown at the northern head

of the gulf will complicate any allied plan for an amphibious landing by the 15,000 Marines aboard a flotilla of some 30 ships.

A dozen minesweepers from the U.S., Saudi and European navies crisscrossed the sea Tuesday in the hunt for thousands of mines believed planted by the Iraqis.

In one incident early Tuesday, a British frigate spotted and marked a floating mine, and divers from a U.S. cruiser were lowered by helicopter into the water to blow it up, a news-pool dispatch said.

The 600-foot-long helicopter-assault ship USS Tripoli remained on duty Tuesday after its crew patched a

20-foot gash blown in its hull by a mine Monday. But the billion-dollar U.S. guided-missile ship Princeton was pulled out of action and sent to a gulf port for damage assessment.

The Princeton's port rudder was jammed and its port propeller-shaft seal was leaking, the U.S. command said. Unconfirmed reports also said it suffered hull damage and cracks in its superstructure.

Marines opened up artillery fire Tuesday on Iraqi bunkers and troop concentrations across the Kuwaiti-Saudi border, south of the Al Wafra oilfield, a pool report said. At least seven secondary explosions were

reported, indicating a hit on ammunition and field stores.

In an incident Monday, the Iraqis dropped 20 to 30 artillery shells on a U.S. unit at the front, wounding one American, the U.S. command said. It did not identify the unit.

The U.S. command Tuesday reported one plane newly lost in the attacks in Kuwait and southern Iraq. The status of the pilot of the A-10 "tank killer" was unknown.

The U.S. command has been reluctant to estimate overall Iraqi casualties, but one senior military source Tuesday said he believed the Iraqi military has suffered "horrendous casualties."

Proposal 'inadequate'

Bush dismisses Soviet peace plan

WASHINGTON - President Bush on Tuesday dismissed a Soviet proposal for ending the war in the Persian Gulf as "well short of what would be required." The Pentagon declared its readiness to fight a ground war against Iraq and predicted victory "in short order."

Defense Secretary Dick Cheney told Congress that any pause in the war would allow Saddam Hussein to regroup his army, which has been weakened by relentless air strikes.

"A cease-fire, a pause of some kind, would in fact be very dangerous from the standpoint of U.S. and allied force," Cheney said.

Washington was abuzz with speculation that a ground war was imminent. "The general expectation is it's not far off," Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I., said as he left a White House meeting between Bush and congressional leaders.

The president was quoted by his spokesmen as telling the lawmakers, "I obviously cannot say exactly when a ground operation might commence. What I can say is, our preparations are on schedule."

The Pentagon played the same tune. "We are ready now (for a ground war) if the leadership decides that's what they want to do," said Lt. Gen. Thomas Kelly, director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Of the Iraqi forces, Kelly said: "They will be defeated in short order if we initiate a ground campaign."

Marlin Fitzwater, the White House

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Lt. Gen. Thomas Kelly
Joint Chief of Staff director of operations

press secretary, said, "We're assuming that the war will have to be prosecuted to the end. We are moving along that course. . . . That's where the planning is taking us."

The administration stepped back from its announced willingness to help rebuild Iraq after the war. "We are not about to pay to rebuild Iraq," Bush told the lawmakers.

"It's a rich country, if they'd just use their resources wisely," Bush said, according to one participant.

After a day of silence about Moscow's proposal to end the war, Bush declared it was inadequate.

"There are no negotiations. The goals have been set out," Bush said at a picture-taking session with the congressional leaders. "There will be no concessions."

Bush sent a cable Monday night to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev specifying U.S. objections to his pro-

posal. "I've been frank with him on this."

The president said Gorbachev had asked that details of the plan be kept secret, and Bush pledged not to divulge the contents. Gorbachev had given the plan to Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz on Monday and requested a speedy reply.

The administration defended Gorbachev's right to discuss peace with Iraq. However, Fitzwater characterized Gorbachev's offer as a matter between Moscow and Baghdad and said Washington would not be bound by any such agreement.

Nor was there any guarantee to Gorbachev that a ground war would be delayed while he talked with Iraq, Fitzwater said.

House Speaker Thomas Foley, D-Wash., said he did not believe Bush had rejected Moscow's plan outright, but was waiting to hear Iraq's response.

"He's not rejecting, he's not accepting it," Foley said. "I think they're waiting for the reaction to the Soviet offer by the Iraqis."

Rep. David Obey, D-Wis., said Bush told the lawmakers the Soviet proposal "had stripped out all of the conditions that the Iraqis had included in their statement on Friday."

House Minority Leader Robert Michel, R-Ill., said, "I don't see that anybody's optimistic, because frankly the conditions are still there. We don't want to be in any negotiating position at all."

Russian Federation president calls on Gorbachev to resign

MOSCOW - Boris Yeltsin made an unprecedented televised appeal Tuesday for the resignation of Mikhail Gorbachev, accusing the Soviet president of sacrificing reforms in a drive for personal power.

Yeltsin has been a strident and frequent critic of Gorbachev, but never before called for him to step down. The attack seemed certain to exacerbate the enmity between the two men and to heighten the Soviet political crisis.

"I warned in 1987 that Gorbachev has in his character a tendency to absolute personal power," Yeltsin said. "He has done all that and has led the country to a dictatorship, giving it a pretty name: presidential rule."

As president of Russia, the largest Soviet republic, Yeltsin enjoys immense personal popularity but has had difficulty parlaying that into the kind of political power Gorbachev wields. Gorbachev has run the Soviet Union for nearly six years, but has been widely criticized for the failing economy and the increasing disorder in Soviet society.

Yeltsin's nationwide broadcast was a first for the Soviet Union: Never before had an opposition leader been granted so much time on state-controlled television.

His remarks came after most government offices closed but prior to peak viewing hours. There was no immediate reaction from Krem-

lin spokesmen.

In the broadcast, Yeltsin said his biggest mistake since becoming president of the Russian Federation parliament last May was placing too much trust in Gorbachev's promises of economic and political reform.

The heart of Yeltsin's argument was that power should be shifted from the central government, led by Gorbachev, to the 15 Soviet republics.

"I distance myself from the position and policies of the (Soviet) president. I am in favor of his immediate resignation, with the power being transferred to a collective organ, the Federation Council of the republic(s)," he said.

The Federation Council, consisting of the Soviet president, vice president and heads of the republics, was created at Gorbachev's initiative.

Reformers' fears of a shift toward a harder line were heightened in December by the resignation of Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, who warned of a coming "dictatorship."

Yeltsin, 60, has quit the Communist Party and recently has been under attack by hardliners. His aides say opponents have collected enough signatures in the Russian parliament to call for a special session at which they are expected to press for a vote of no-confidence.

Show of strength

IRA: Attacks can be anywhere

LONDON - The Irish Republican Army bombing of Victoria Station has reminded the British that the IRA can randomly attack almost anywhere, as it did in the 1970s at pubs, shops and railroad stations.

Some analysts believe the intention is to subject London to the disruption and security checks that are part of life in Belfast, capital of the British province of Northern Ireland.

"In the IRA there's a feeling that events in Northern Ireland have been contained somewhat and most British people dismiss news of things happening there," said Ian Geldard, a researcher at London's Institute for the Study of Terrorism.

"But when they come over here and attack in London in particular, they are bringing the war right to our doorsteps," Geldard added in an interview.

The bomb that killed a 36-year-old civil servant and injured 40 people at Victoria Station on Monday was the IRA's first lethal attack on a crowded, purely civilian target in an English city since the 1983 bombing of Harrods department store.

That attack, which killed five people

including an American, and injured 91, was immediately recognized by the IRA as a public relations blunder.

The outlawed organization, which seeks to end British rule in Northern Ireland, apologized and said there had been a mistake.

In contrast, the bombing at Victoria was a textbook success from the IRA's viewpoint of publicity, disruption, and stretching police resources in the midst of a security alert against Iraqi-inspired terrorist attacks.

The IRA blames the civilian casualties on the police, saying they ignored a telephone warning hours after another explosion at London's Paddington station.

Hundreds of thousands of commuters were delayed or stranded later Monday with the closure of all 12 of the capital's main railroad stations.

On Tuesday, five British Rail stations, including London's busy Charing Cross, were closed during peak periods as police checked bomb hoaxes and reports of suspicious packages.

In Belfast, the IRA frequently uses bombs, fake bombs and hoax calls to disrupt business in the city center. It has also complained that police some-

times decide not to evacuate buildings despite bomb threats.

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