

# World watches, waits for peace in gulf

DHAHRAN, Saudi Arabia - A waiting world watched Baghdad and the bleak Arabian desert Wednesday — Baghdad for word on peace, the desert for news of all-out war.

American helicopters carted off hundreds of Iraqi prisoners after one action and Iraqi gunners zeroed in on a U.S. unit in another, killing one American and wounding seven.



A key French lawmaker said the Desert Storm allies would give Iraq until late Thursday to respond to a Soviet peace proposal or face a final offensive to drive its forces from Kuwait.

"Now, more than ever," said French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas, "the ultimate decision rests with Saddam Hussein."

Late Wednesday, Baghdad radio said Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz would travel to Moscow "soon" with the reply of President Saddam and the rest of the Iraqi leadership to the Soviet

plan, believed to call for an unconditional Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, coupled with vague assurances that Saddam could stay in power and the Palestinian question would eventually be addressed.

The U.N. secretary general, Javier Perez de Cuellar, described the initiative as a "historic opportunity," and U.S. ally Italy also endorsed it. House Speaker Thomas Foley said that if the withdrawal is unconditional, "I don't know how (President Bush) could fail to accept it."

Bush kept a public silence on the issue Wednesday, a day after describing the plan as "well short" of U.S. requirements. Although Bush did not elaborate on his objections, Republican House leader Robert Michel said, "We want to see conditions change."

Dismissing the alliance's strategy for an assault on Kuwait, Baghdad radio declared: "Their paper plans will be nothing when the ground battle starts."

Desert Storm commander Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf said the Iraqi army, under aerial bombardment for a month, was "on the verge

of collapse." Other senior U.S. officers added that they still expected a bloody fight.

"There's still a formidable force out there," one said.

British military sources said Iraqi troops were dispersing multi-rocket launchers and other artillery at the front in apparent readiness to take on the allies with chemical weapons.

Early Wednesday afternoon, a U.S. task force clashed with Iraqi forces south of the Saudi border, and the Iraqis called in artillery fire that killed one American and wounded seven others, the U.S. command reported. It said the Iraqi fire hit an American anti-aircraft gun and two Bradley personnel carriers. U.S. forces destroyed five Iraqi tanks, 20 artillery pieces, and captured seven prisoners.

A short time later, the command said, U.S. Army strike helicopters attacked a complex of Iraqi desert fortifications just north of the border, destroying 15 to 30 bunkers and leading 400 to 500 stunned Iraqi infantrymen to surrender.

As darkness fell, Army Ch-47 Chinook

helicopters were completing the task of ferrying the prisoners to a holding camp in northern Saudi Arabia, said command spokesman Brig. Gen. Richard Neal.

It was the largest roundup of prisoners yet by U.S. forces. The command did not specify locations or identify the U.S. units involved in the two actions.

The command also reported U.S. aircraft pounded an Iraqi armor concentration 60 miles north of the border and destroyed 28 tanks. B-52 bombers blew up an Iraqi Scud missile launch site.

The Desert Storm air fleet mounted 2,900 sorties against targets in Kuwait and southern Iraq on Wednesday, for a total of more than 86,000 in the 35-day-old war. British officers reported that a smoky haze over Kuwait, presumably from oil fires, obscured some targets.

More than four hours of bombing rocked Baghdad overnight, and the Iranian news agency said panicked residents "rushed to the streets to escape to the nearby villages."

## Pilots say Kuwait on fire; Iraqi tanks still formidable

**Editors Note: The following dispatch was subject to U.S. military censorship.**

AT AN AIRBASE IN SOUTH-WESTERN SAUDI ARABIA - U.S. combat pilots said Wednesday that Kuwait is already a burning, cratered battlefield, but that allied forces still face a formidable, dug-in Iraqi army with plenty of tanks.

F-111 pilots have been flying round-the-clock bombing missions to prepare the battlefield in Iraq and Kuwait for a ground offensive, and report that the allies have destroyed a significant part of the Iraqi war machine.

"The whole military establishment is burning," said Capt. Bradley Seipel, 34, of Virginia Beach, Va. As a weapons system officer of an F-111F fighter-bomber, Seipel directed some of the bombs that started the fires.

He and other airmen at this desert airbase for U.S. Air Force F-111 strike aircraft gave a bird's-eye view of what the battlefield will look like to allied troops moving forward in a ground war.

"It is amazing flying up there. You look at Kuwait, that whole area, it's just fire," Seipel said.

"It's like constant explosions, constant fires," said Capt. Mike Russell, 33, of Bradenton, Fla., the pilot on Seipel's jet. "It's just awe-inspiring night after night how we ripped them up."

The airmen with the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing (Provisional) have

been concentrating on tanks, artillery and Iraqi army reserves in their nightly missions in Kuwait and Iraq.

"This is a war and we're beating them bad," Russell said.

Russel and Siepel already have flown 100 hours dropping precision-guided bombs.

Their targets included Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's summer palace in his hometown of Tikrit; halting the oil flow into the gulf from an Iraqi-sabotaged offshore oil terminal near Kuwait City, and two dock buildings in Kuwait City stacked with ammunition.

"We're one small part of the picture and there are so many other people . . . that are just bombing them constantly," said Russell.

"It seems to me it's still a very target-rich environment, and I don't think we've come close to exhausting all the possible targets," said Lt. Troy Stone, 25, of Hemlock, Mich., an F-111F weapons system officer.

Capt. Brad Roberts, 29, of Boise, Idaho, Stone's pilot, said taking on an entrenched enemy is "the worst position you want to be in" but that superior allied armor "is going to help us a lot."

Several pilots said they favored delaying the ground war to save American lives by taking out more targets.

The airmen said Iraqi cities are dark because allied bombers have knocked out most of Iraq's power plants.

## Unconditional withdrawal

# Baker: Iraq will leave 'soon'

WASHINGTON - Secretary of State James Baker III declared on Wednesday that Iraqi troops "will leave Kuwait soon," but he steered clear of the question of Saddam Hussein's postwar future.

House Speaker Thomas Foley said it would be "extremely difficult" for President Bush to refuse an unconditional Iraqi withdrawal.

Baker, speaking at a luncheon for Denmark's Queen Margrethe II, renewed the U.S. demand that Iraq pull out of Kuwait "immediately, totally and unconditionally" and comply fully with U.N. resolutions. "Anything short of that is unacceptable," he said.

"One way or another, the army of occupation of Iraq will leave Kuwait soon," Baker predicted.

Foley, the top-ranking Democrat

in Congress, said lawmakers share the administration's concern about Saddam remaining "a serious problem in the gulf for years to come." But if Saddam agrees to an unconditional withdrawal, Foley said, Bush would have "a very difficult choice."

"I don't know how he could fail to accept it."

He said later that the question might be academic because there has been no indication Saddam is prepared to withdraw unconditionally, despite much discussion of a still-secret Soviet proposal on the subject.

Lt. Gen. Thomas Kelly, director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, noted that he and other officials had said a day earlier a ground war would be won "in short order."

"I should have said 'good order,'" he said. "I don't think it's going to be

any kind of pushover. . . . It's not going to be a snap."

One military official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said "We are in the eye of Desert Storm. There is something of a lull right at the moment." He added, "It suggests the machinery is in place and we are waiting for presidential orders."

"We want to stay on course with our military tack," said House minority leader Robert Michel, an Illinois Republican, "and not be delayed." "Even a cease-fire type of thing certainly would only play into Saddam's hands."

The Iraqi president was weighing a Soviet peace proposal, which was still secret but which Bush had dismissed on Tuesday as "well short of what would be required" to end the conflict.

## Albanian president promises new government

VIENNA, Austria - The president of Communist Albania, responding to unprecedented protests that toppled monuments to Stalinist founder Enver Hoxha, said Wednesday he would take direct control of a new government.

"I have decided to take into my hands the government and create a new government and a new presidential council," President Ramiz Alia said in an announcement broadcast nationwide on state television.

He said the country was "at a critical point," and appealed for the cooperation of opposition parties. "We must all of us work to get out of this situation," he added.

The change was "necessary for peace and democracy," Alia said,

appealing to Albanians to preserve calm.

Anti-Communist demonstrators in two cities toppled Hoxha statues Wednesday, unleashing decades of pent-up wrath against the late dictator.

Police, some with dogs, at first fired in the air in an attempt to keep thousands of people from a 30-foot-tall bronze statue that dominated Skanderbeg Square in the center of Albania's capital, Tirana, state television showed.

But then the police began to embrace people in the jubilant pro-democracy protest, witnesses said.

Sources in Tirana, who asked not to be named, said they also had heard

the Hoxha statue in the southeastern city of Korca came down. There was no official confirmation.

Ignoring police warning shots over their heads and smoke bombs thrown around the statue's stone pedestal, demonstrators surrounded the Tirana monument. Some scaled it and pulled it over with a rope, television reporters said.

Crowds punched the air with V-signs symbolizing democracy and shouted opposition slogans as two military helicopters hovered overhead, witnesses said.

There was no immediate reaction from Albania's Communist government or from opposition parties first founded in December.

## Soviet parliament blasts Yeltsin

MOSCOW - The Soviet parliament formally censured Russian leader Boris Yeltsin on Wednesday for urging Mikhail Gorbachev to resign, and Gorbachev's former foreign minister pleaded for peace in the "war of presidents."

The plea by Eduard Shevardnadze, in his first public remarks since his resignation as foreign minister last December, suggested the depth of the crisis in Soviet government. Shevardnadze quit after warning that the nation was heading toward dictatorship.

In a stormy session of the Supreme Soviet parliament, fellow lawmakers accused Yeltsin, the president of the Russian Federation and a frequent Gorbachev critic, of declaring a civil war and seeking more power for himself.

In a resolution adopted 292-29,

with 27 abstentions, they accused Yeltsin of defying the constitution.

The resolution said his statement on national television Tuesday was "aimed at replacing the lawful organs of state power. . . . It contradicts the constitution and aggravates the situation in the country."

Shevardnadze, who spoke at the opening of a non-governmental foreign policy association he heads, told reporters that if destabilization continues, dictatorship or a civil war is still possible.

He urged Yeltsin and Gorbachev to meet to resolve their differences because "this war, a war of parliaments, a war of laws and now a war of presidents, must be ended."

"Everybody must think of the country, the people, the fate of de-

mocracy in the Soviet Union and the world," Shevardnadze said.

In his resignation speech last December, Shevardnadze blamed the military and the Communist Party's Old Guard for Gorbachev's shift away from reform. He said Wednesday that the Soviet crackdown in the Baltics, which occurred after his resignation, "confirmed that my fears were not baseless."

Yeltsin seemed to blame Gorbachev alone for the nation's ills.

In his televised interview, he proclaimed that Gorbachev "has led the country to a dictatorship, giving it a pretty name: presidential rule."

He went on to say: "I am in favor of his immediate resignation, with the power being transferred to a collective organ, the Federation Council."

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