

Iraq releases hundreds of Kuwaiti hostages

Former Kuwaiti hostages reached freedom by the truckload late Thursday, chanting "USA! USA!" and American troops arrived in Europe for their first hot showers and cold beer in weeks.

In Baghdad, Iraq's official media pleaded for national unity and ominously vowed that dissidents "will pay."

Opponents of Saddam Hussein claimed that the rebellion had spread to the Iraqi capital and Iraqi refugees said an uprising in southern Iraq continued, despite the execution of more than 400 dissidents.

Iraq released trucks and buses filled with Kuwaitis to Red Cross officials.

A Bush administration official in Washington estimated the number of released Kuwaitis at 800 to 2,000. As the trucks rolled into the southern Iraqi town of Safwan, the Kuwaitis chanted "USA! USA!"

Kuwait said Iraqi troops abducted 30,000 Kuwaitis during its 6 1/2-month occupation of the oil-rich emirate.



Gian-Battista Bacchetta, head of the Red Cross delegation in Kuwait City, said 29 of about three dozen Western journalists missing in southern Iraq may be released Friday.

Allied and Iraqi commanders meeting under Red Cross auspices also discussed the release of 63,000 Iraqi prisoners of war.

In Iraq, Saddam struggled to put down rebellions that broke out after he was forced to withdraw from Kuwait. For the first time since the unrest began, official government media made direct reference to the threat.

An editorial in the government daily Al-Iraq warned of division and disintegration and said "antagonists were trying to dismember Iraq and strike at its national unity."

Another government newspaper, Al-Thawra, threatened:

"Everybody who tries to undermine the security of the revolution is a traitor and a mercenary. . . . All of them shall regret it. They will pay."

In Syria, a Shiite opposition leader, Ayatollah Mohammed Taqi Madaressi, said rioting had spread to Baghdad's al-Thawra and al-Shu'lla districts.

Madaressi claimed government forces had been evicted from 14 cities and towns from Basra to Khanaqin, on the Iranian border.

Kurdish guerrillas claimed they had seized three towns on the main highway linking the mountain province with Baghdad. They said they have captured 650 soldiers in recent fighting.

In allied-occupied Safwan, refugees told Associated Press correspondent Edith Lederer that forces loyal to Saddam had executed more than 400 opponents Wednesday, but protests to oust him continued in southern Iraq.

With Western journalists asked by the government to leave Iraq, the reports could not be confirmed.

The Pentagon said about 5,000 troops a day will return to the United States during the next few days.

They include members of the 1st Cavalry Division of Fort Hood, Texas, the 82nd Airborne Division of Fort Bragg, N.C., and the 101st Airborne Division of Fort Campbell, Ky.

Marine Lance Cpl. Brian Little was allowed to return early to Little Rock Air Force Base in Arkansas because his mother needed surgery.

He had two immediate priorities:

"See my mom and get drunk," said Little, 22. Alcohol is banned in Saudi Arabia, where Little had been stationed since August.

"How sweet it is!" said Gen. George Lee Butler, commander of the Strategic Air Command, shortly after 21 SAC members arrived home Wednesday at Offutt Air Force Base.

A monument was erected outside Hurlburt Field, Fla., base of an AC-130 Spectre plane that went down in the Persian Gulf with 14 crew members.

Kim Walters and her husband, Capt. Dixon Lee Walters, 29, were to celebrate their 10th anniversary on April 10. "I think the most painful thing is knowing I will never be able to put my arms around him again or hold him ever again," said Walters, of Navarre Beach.

More than 150 soldiers from the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) stepped off C-141 transport planes at the Rhein Main Air Base in Germany. One soldier bent down to touch the ground and gave a triumphant yelp.

British troops will begin returning home this weekend and the withdrawal will be completed in about two weeks, Prime Minister John Major said.

Congress applauds Bush; prods for more weaponry

WASHINGTON - Congressional leaders on Thursday applauded President Bush's bid to seize upon the momentum of military victory with a fresh attack on America's domestic needs, but prodded him for the legislative weaponry to match that battle cry.

"I am fully in support of the president's notion that we should address our attention to some of these critical national domestic issues," said House Speaker Thomas Foley, D-Wash. "I welcome his interest and support."

The highway and transportation bill could be voted on in the House by May, Foley said. But, he said, "We haven't got the crime bill yet" from the administration, "so it is a little hard to make a prediction on that."

"Some of these things are very contentious and very controversial," said House Minority Leader Bob Michel, R-Ill., citing the difficulties the administration was having getting Congress to approve more money for the savings and loan bailout. But Bush can win "if we simply have a steady hand at the keel," Michel said on NBC's Today show.

Presidential spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said Bush's call to act on his agenda within 100 days was "a goal (for) an effort to get our legislation passed. We think it's good to have a public deadline that holds our feet to the fire as well as theirs."

Bush used his Wednesday night speech to state again his interest in education, saying he wanted to "expand choice" for citizens. Congress was waiting for the administration to flesh out its proposals.

Bush has announced a national energy program, but Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said he was still waiting for the actual legislative plan.

The Democratic-controlled Congress appeared headed toward another showdown on the civil rights legislation Bush mentioned in his speech. A House subcommittee plans to approve next week the same bill Bush vetoed last year, while the administration has re-submitted essentially the same legislation Congress deemed inadequate last year.

First U.S. ground troops to gulf head for 'mother of all parties'

DHAHRAN, Saudi Arabia - The first U.S. ground troops deployed in the Persian Gulf crisis headed home Thursday in jubilant spirits, looking forward to home cooking, soft beds and delayed Christmas celebrations.

"The mother of all parties is about to begin," said Spc. 4 Brannon Lamar of Columbia, S.C.

Elements of the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, which arrived in Saudi Arabia 210 days ago as President Bush's original "line in the sand," got the green light from Bush to head back to Fort Bragg, N.C.

An additional 900 soldiers were in the first group to leave and were due home Friday afternoon.

More than 100 men from the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) began the exodus of American forces earlier Thursday, to be followed by more than 14,000 others over the next week.

Back on Aug. 8, paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne arrived in 120-degree heat at 1 p.m. in Dhahran aboard a TransAmerica flight. Soldiers had painted their faces with camouflage and had their rifles loaded, prepared to go into battle immediately.

— 66 —
The mother of all parties is about to begin.
Spc. 4 Lamar of Columbia, S.C., stationed in Saudi Arabia

— 99 —

No one knew if the Iraqi army would follow up its lightning conquest of Kuwait with a drive south into Saudi Arabia. Paratroopers joked darkly about being "speed bumps," a light infantry force deterring the full force of Saddam Hussein's tanks.

When the 100-hour ground war began Feb. 24, the brigade was already at work.

It was the first U.S. ground force in Iraq, crossing the border more than 16 hours before the offensive started from a point due south of Baghdad and about 200 miles west of Kuwait.

Working with the French 6th Light Armored Division, it secured the

westernmost flank of the coalition offensive without suffering a single casualty. It helped capture over 1,500 prisoners from Iraq's 45th Division and drove deep into Iraq to cut supply lines and escape routes.

The blitz was so quick and the surrender so great that most paratroopers never had to fight. That did not diminish the brigade's accomplishments in the eyes of the soldiers, who endured months of heat, flies, desolation, austere living conditions and other hardships.

"It's like studying for a test I never got to take. We were in our seats and had the paper in front of us, but we got an A and passed the test without having to take it," said Cpl. Baxter Morrison of Fayetteville, N.C.

Brig. Gen. Richard Timmons, 48, of McLean, Va., assistant division commander for operations, was aboard the first flight to arrive in Saudi Arabia and on the first plane to take members of the 82nd home.

"We were President Bush's original 'line in the sand,'" Timmons said. "This war will be memorable not so much for the intensity of conflict. What will be significant is the U.S. military's professional excellence."

Gorbachev receives approval for Soviet Security Council

MOSCOW - President Mikhail Gorbachev won legislative approval Thursday for eight of nine nominees to his new Security Council, an inner cabinet that will tackle defense, foreign policy and economic problems.

The powerful body will have a distinctly hard-line makeup, with only one recognized reformer, former Interior Minister Vadim Bakatin, among its members.

Gorbachev also blasted the six republics that are boycotting the March 17 nationwide referendum on holding the Soviet Union together, saying their refusal to participate was "illegal and unlawful." The country's top prosecutor warned separately that anyone trying to prevent the vote would be imprisoned.

In approving eight of his nine nominees to the Security Council, the Supreme Soviet legislature handed Gorbachev another victory in his continuing bid to revamp the government's executive branch and strengthen his personal power. Legislators gave Gorbachev approval in November to create the Security Council, which

will advise him daily on domestic and foreign affairs.

Bakatin, who was removed as head of the Interior Ministry last year and replaced by hard-liner Boris Pugo, returned to the inner circle of the Soviet leadership.

Communist Party conservatives had pressured Gorbachev to remove Bakatin, and one hard-line deputy questioned why the reformer was nominated to the Security Council when "his actions led to the collapse of the Interior Ministry."

Gorbachev dismissed the criticism, saying he had planned to return Bakatin to the leadership and praising his "potential."

The Supreme Soviet legislature also confirmed Pugo, Vice President Gennady Yanayev, Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh, KGB chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov, Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov and Gorbachev's special Middle East envoy, Yevgeny Primakov.

All but one are ethnic Russians. The exception is Pugo, a Latvian who

served as head of the KGB in his native republic.

The legislature failed to confirm Gorbachev's chief of staff, Valery Boldin, to the council, although his name will be submitted to the lawmakers again.

Gorbachev said he had "absolute trust" in Boldin, who has been his aide for 10 years.

Boldin, 55, has been described by some well-placed Soviet sources as a behind-the-scenes player who controls the paperwork in Gorbachev's office. He is reputed to be aligned with hard-liners and has played a key role in Gorbachev's turn away from reform.

Boldin previously was head of the powerful general department of the Communist Party Central Committee and worked for 12 years at the party newspaper Pravda, specializing in agriculture.

The Security Council will function as an inner cabinet, handling the defense, economy, environment and "security from the point of view of stability."

ASUN

Continued from Page 1

Sen. Pam Kohlmeier, who also co-authored the bill, said the students appointed to the committees did not have to be of those orientations or backgrounds but had to have knowledge of those perspectives.

ASUN President Phil Gosch had concerns about the proposal's constitutionality. "To have a racial perspective, you have to be of that race," he said.

Gosch said the bylaws did not present a strict quota system, but they characterized the exclusion of an individual based on race, which is

why the Student Court declared the original committees unconstitutional. He also has expressed concern that such a proposal would be against NU Board of Regents policies against discrimination that ASUN must adhere to.

"It doesn't require that they discriminate," he said of the proposal, "it just asks them to."

Richard Wood, University of Nebraska vice president and general counsel, disagreed with Gosch.

"It's a recommendation only," he said. "It's not binding. I don't see a problem with that."

Senators plan to introduce the reworded bylaws at ASUN's next meeting.

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