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"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition

New York: Today, mostly cloudy, isolated showers. High 63. Tonight, sprinkle early. Low 51. Tomorrow, partly sunny. High 61. Yesterday, high 40, low 35. Weather map is on Page S2.

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ONE DOLLAR

U.S. AND BRITISH TROOPS PUSH INTO IRAQ AS MISSILES STRIKE BAGHDAD COMPOUND



A heavily guarded compound close to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs beside the Tigris River in Baghdad burned after it exploded in a fireball last night as bombs and missiles hit. Tyler Hicks/The New York Times

In Iraqi Capital, Sirens Precede Two Direct Hits

By JOHN F. BURNS

BAGHDAD, Iraq, March 20 — A second wave of air attacks tonight against the strategic heart of the capital had all the eeriness and sudden, devastating power of modern high-technology warfare.

The precision-guided bombs and missiles made at least two direct hits on a large, domed edifice beside the Tigris River. The building, possibly the Planning Ministry, exploded in a fireball and a series of secondary explosions that lighted the night sky.

After the initial early morning bombardment, which hit targets mostly well away from the center of the city, quiet prevailed over Baghdad all day.

The city's streets were virtually deserted apart from clusters of security men posted outside government buildings and the compounds of Saddam Hussein and his associates, many of them seated on plastic chairs and rickety bedframes, armed only with Kalashnikov rifles and the unenthused, lethargic, resigned look of men who knew that standing guard outside buildings likely to be struck by American air attacks placed them at mortal risk.

The stillness lasted well into the night.

Then, suddenly, across a panorama of a sprawling city as brightly

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INSIDE

U.S. Adviser to Be Lobbyist

Global Crossing has hired Richard Perle, an adviser to the Pentagon, to help overcome opposition to its sale to a foreign venture. PAGE C1

Countdown From 64

Top-seeded Arizona and Oklahoma advanced as the N.C.A.A. basketball tournament got into full swing. SPORTSFRIDAY, PAGE S1

Today's Sections

Starting today, coverage of domestic security, Iraq, and related subjects will appear daily in a new section, A Nation at War, beginning on Page B1.

To accommodate the production of that section, complete metropolitan and sports reports appear back to back in a shared section, as they did in the months after Sept. 11, 2001. By flipping over The Metro Section, bottom-side up, readers will find the sports pages in the accustomed sequence, starting with S1.

G.I.'s and Marines See Little Iraqi Resistance

By STEVEN LEE MYERS

WITH THE THIRD INFANTRY DIVISION, Southern Iraq, Friday, March 21 — The desert is strewn with broken hulks of tanks and trucks, half buried in sand, the detritus of the Persian Gulf war of 12 years ago. Now, not far inside Iraq, the destruction from the new war is already apparent.

Two Iraqi border posts lay in twisted ruins, destroyed by a shattering barrage of artillery fire from the Kuwaiti side as the Army's Third Infantry Division, thrusting to the west of American marines and British forces, opened a ground campaign intended to help drive Saddam Hussein from power.

Farther north, the charred shell of an Iraqi command post continued to burn early this morning, casting an eerie glow through the silver, sand-screened moonlight. As the first of some 20,000 soldiers from the Third

Division poured across the border, Iraqi resistance was light.

A tank and three Bradley fighting vehicles attacked the compound earlier Thursday evening. Three Iraqis died in a truck inside, the first confirmed casualties of the Army's campaign. The first two border posts turned out to be empty, their soldiers having fled.

American soldiers gathered the dead, placing the bodies in black bags and leaving them beside the road before moving on. They also collected the dead soldiers' belongings, one officer said, so that word could be passed to their families.

The first tank platoon of Charlie Company encountered and destroyed two Iraqi T-72 tanks. "I came up over a ridge and saw a T-72 and fired," said Sgt. Melvin L. Green. "I saw the turret pop off. My wing man hit the other."

There were no immediate reports of any American casualties along the desert frontier, producing a swelling

of relief and jubilation at the point of farthest advance early today. (Guidelines imposed on journalists traveling with the military prohibit reporting on many details of operations, including locations.)

"Honestly, I never thought I'd be back," said Maj. Michael D. Oliver, the operations officer of the Third Battalion, 69th Armored, who fought in the 1991 Gulf war and whose companies led the breach across the border in this one.

By early today, with holes in the fences and berms that once separated Kuwait and Iraq, thousands of American soldiers crossed a wide swath of the border in what commanders called an efficient, successful operation.

Those crossing included marines from the First Marine Division, who entered Iraq after a barrage of artillery fire, much of which was directed at Safwan Hill, the only elevated ter-

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Jon Mills/British Ministry of Defense, Via Associated Press

American soldiers wore gas masks as they crossed the Kuwaiti desert and headed toward Iraq yesterday. Iraqi use of chemical or biological arms would be likely to slow but not stop the invaders, experts say.

Wave of Protests, From Europe to New York

By JOHN TAGLIABUE

PARIS, March 20 — Leaders and protesters around the world today condemned the start of war in Iraq, with President Jacques Chirac of France warning that it "will be fraught with consequences for the future."

In Russia, President Vladimir V. Putin called for an immediate halt to the American-led assault, saying, "This military action cannot be justified in any way."

Regardless of whether their governments supported or opposed the war, hundreds of thousands massed at protests across Germany, France, Spain, Italy and Britain. In Berlin, an estimated 40,000 demonstrators streamed past the United States Em-

bassy and through the Brandenburg Gate, waving banners that read, "Stop the Bush Fire" and "George W. Hitler."

In the United States, the antiwar demonstrations were generally smaller, but thousands descended on military bases or blocked roads and bridges to voice their opposition. Chanting "Peace Now," some 5,000 people demonstrated in Times Square in New York.

The wave of global protest began even as the first missiles were hitting Baghdad, with tens of thousands in Melbourne, Australia's second

city, bringing traffic to a standstill. In the Middle East, demonstrations were scattered — a crowd of only 1,000 in Cairo, for instance — but more vociferous protests were expected on Friday, the day of Muslim worship.

In France, the American Embassy and consulate buildings, just off the Place de la Concorde in Paris, were heavily guarded as tens of thousands of demonstrators assembled, chanting antiwar slogans. The National Assembly briefly suspended its session in symbolic protest.

In Madrid, about 40,000 people packed the Puerta del Sol tonight in protest at the Spanish government's support for President Bush. Fliers that called for a boycott of

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U.S. REPORTS TALKS URGING SURRENDER

Rumsfeld Cites Signals Some
Iraqi Troops May Give Up

By ERIC SCHMITT
and THOM SHANKER

WASHINGTON, March 20 — Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said today that allied officials had held secret talks with members of Iraq's elite Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard about defecting or surrendering.

"Vowing that Saddam Hussein's 'days are numbered,' Mr. Rumsfeld said he was encouraged by signs that the threat of an all-out American attack was prompting many Iraqi military units and their commanders to consider a cease-fire or giving up.

Hours after American forces attacked a bunker where Mr. Hussein was believed to be meeting with senior officers, United States intelligence officials said there were indications that the individual on a videotape released after the assault was Mr. Hussein, although no final analytical conclusion had been reached.

But Mr. Rumsfeld sounded certain of victory. "There's no question that the people of Iraq and the people of the region have to know that his days are numbered — he's not going to be there," he said.

"We are in communication with still more people who are officials of

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Surprise Strike at Outset Leaves Urgent Mystery: Who Was Hit?

By ELISABETH BUMILLER and DAVID JOHNSTON

WASHINGTON, March 20 — Intelligence officials had long been frustrated in their attempts to track Saddam Hussein's erratic movements. Then, on Wednesday, according to senior government officials, Iraqi informants produced a lead. The Iraqi leader, and possibly his two sons, were said to be in a private house built over an underground bunker in southern Baghdad.

What happened next, one senior administration official said today, "has created one of the great mysteries of the first day of the war — did we hit anyone and if so, who did we get?"

Tonight, officials were still holding out hope that one of the American 2,000-pound bombs and nearly 40 Tomahawk cruise missiles, each carrying 1,000 pounds of explosives, might have struck Mr. Hussein or one of his sons, Qusay and Uday. "It may take days," the official said, "to sift through it all."

Today, the mystery deepened as intelligence agencies monitoring Iraqi communications detected a sig-

16 DIE ON COPTER

First Casualties Among
Allied Forces Come in
Crash in Kuwait

By PATRICK E. TYLER

KUWAIT, March 20 — Supported by relentless artillery barrages, American and British armed forces pushed from Kuwait into the Iraqi desert today as cruise missiles pounded the heart of Baghdad.

The missiles struck an area of Iraqi government buildings on the banks of the Tigris River, sending plumes of black smoke into the sky above a deserted city.

As the Pentagon expressed satisfaction with the results of the early stages of the war, the first American and British casualties were reported. Military officials said 16 American marines and British royal commandos were killed when their CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter crashed in Kuwait. No further details were immediately available.

The American and British advance into southern Iraq today followed a raid on Baghdad by stealth fighters and an attack with cruise missiles intended to destabilize the Iraqi government by killing Saddam Hussein. American intelligence officials were trying to determine tonight whether any Iraqi leaders had been hit by this first strike of the war. The Pentagon suggested that some senior Iraqi officials might have been killed or wounded.

From land bases across the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean and from aircraft carriers at sea, American and British warplanes flew through moonlit skies to strike targets, including radar and artillery positions, in southern Iraq.

The attacks today, while substantial, fell short of the all-out bombardment promised by the Pentagon as the most effective means to force a quick surrender. It appeared that the Pentagon was still exploring the possibility that Mr. Hussein might be ousted without a fight through the defection of the his elite units.

Donald H. Rumsfeld, the defense secretary, said there was still time for the Iraqi Army to surrender and avert an American attack "of a force and scope and scale beyond what has been seen before."

The attack today was authorized by President Bush at the conclusion of a meeting in the White House situation room on Wednesday morning, a senior White House official said tonight. At the meeting, according to the official's account, Mr. Bush spoke in a video conference with Gen. Tommy R. Franks, head of the United States Central Command, who was at an air base in Saudi Arabia, and other commanders who were scattered across the region.

The president asked each commander whether they had everything they needed to win, and whether they were comfortable with the war plan. At the end of the meeting, the official said, Mr. Bush gave the go-ahead to the commanders to be-

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