

WAR BEGINS



PATRICK BAZ/AFP

OPENING ATTACK: An explosion is seen over Baghdad at dawn today as part of a strike aimed at crippling Saddam Hussein's regime. The attack specifically targeted him, his son and other Iraqi senior leaders.

MISSILE ATTACK TARGETS HUSSEIN, OTHER LEADERS

War marks the end of America we knew

"Lord knows there's got to be a better way." — Edwin Starr, from War

COMMENTARY



LEONARD PITTS JR.
lpitts@herald.com

And so it begins. A surgical strike against a "target of opportunity" as these words are written. Perhaps more by the time they are read. We stand upon the very doorstep of war.

And, just as critically, upon

the doorstep of change. Because these events represent more than just the end of peace. They are also the end of the America we have known. For better or for worse, a new nation will be born here. And it will be different from the one it supersedes. For the first time in its history, the United States has claimed for itself — and now puts into action — a doctrine of preemption, the right to hit first any nation we suspect of hostile intent. In an era when nuclear, chemical and biological weapons might easily fall into the hands of stateless religious

▶ PLEASE SEE PITTS, 6A



'Now that conflict has come, the only way to limit its duration is to apply decisive force.'

— PRESIDENT BUSH

90 minutes past deadline, Bush orders strikes on key sites

BY MARTIN MERZER AND DREW BROWN
mmerzer@herald.com

WASHINGTON — War erupted late Wednesday as the United States launched cruise missiles at Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and other "leadership targets" in Baghdad, officials said.

The strike was aimed at crippling Hussein's regime and specifically targeted him, his son and other senior leaders of the Baath Party and Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council, according to a senior Bush administration official.

The attacks were an attempt to behead the Iraqi leadership without risking the civilian deaths and destruction that a full scale war would

inevitably produce, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. President Bush spoke to the nation late Wednesday and described the action as the opening salvo in an operation to "disarm Iraq and to free its people."

U.S. intelligence operatives had been in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq for weeks tracking the movements of senior Iraqi officials, according to the administration official.

The isolated attacks — far less massive than the strike many thought would ignite the war — came after a lengthy meeting between President Bush and his national security advisors that began around 4:20 p.m.

▶ PLEASE SEE IRAQ, 6A

INSIDE

MYSTERY DISEASE PROBED IN U.S. CASES

Health officials said Wednesday that 11 suspected cases of a mysterious flu-like illness have emerged in the United States, while medical investigators continue to puzzle over how the illness spread in a Hong Kong hotel, 12A.

SENATE REJECTS OIL DRILLING IN ALASKA

The Senate on Wednesday narrowly rejected oil drilling in an Alaska wildlife refuge, rebuffing the Bush administration on a top energy goal, 3A.

ARAFAT NAMES 1ST PRIME MINISTER

Yasser Arafat on Wednesday named his longtime deputy, Mahmoud Abbas, as the first Palestinian prime minister, a move that cuts into Arafat's broad powers, 3A.

A REWARD FOR COLOMBIANS

1.000 Millones de Pesos más... Visa de los Estados Unidos

U.S. Department of State / U.S. State Department / U.S. State Department

SOLICITUD PARA VISAS DE INMIGRANTE Y REGISTRO DE EXTRANJERO

PART I - BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Si usted suministra información que permita el rescate de los tripulantes norteamericanos del avión accidentado en Caquetá, usted y su familia inmediata podrán recibir 1.000 millones de pesos más visa de los Estados Unidos.

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The U.S. government is trying to lure prospective Colombian tipsters holding information about the whereabouts of three kidnapped defense contractors. It is distributing thousands of leaflets that show the tempting backdrop of a Miami skyline, a soaring American Airlines jet and a coveted U.S. visa. Plus the promise of lots of cash. Story, 3A

At least 35 arrested in crackdown on Cuban dissidents

BY NANCY SAN MARTIN
nsanmartin@herald.com

More than 30 Cuban dissidents have been arrested in what analysts describe as the largest crackdown on the opposition movement in recent times.

The arrests began Tuesday night. By Wednesday afternoon, at least 35 people — primarily, independent journalists and librarians — had been taken into custody.

Some analysts linked the timing to the impending war in Iraq, when news of the arrests in the United States and elsewhere is likely to be overshadowed, if not ignored.

The librarians are private citizens who have turned their homes into reading rooms where Cuban citizens can read unauthorized, so-called "counter-revolutionary" literature. Among them are books by Martin Luther King and Vaclav Havel, and *Animal Farm* by George Orwell.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher described the arrests as "an appalling act of intimidation" and called on the international community and the United Nations Human Rights Commission, in particular, to condemn the action and demand immediate release of the detainees.

▶ PLEASE SEE DISSIDENTS, 2A

▶ CUBAN AIRLINER BELIEVED HIJACKED FLOWN TO SOUTH FLORIDA, 2A