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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

April 16, 1991

FACT SHEET

On April 7, under Presidential directive, Operation Provide Comfort was launched to meet the humanitarian challenge unfolding in Iraq and to help alleviate the conditions of the refugees.

Reports from the field indicate that almost 400,000 Iraqi refugees, most of them Kurds, are massed at the Turkish border and 400,000 displaced persons are on the Iraqi side of the border. International organizations report that nearly 1,000,000 Iraqi civilians, mostly Kurds, have entered Iran, and as many as 500,000 more are moving toward the border. In addition, approximately 30,000 Shiite Iraqis have moved into Iran and approximately 30,000 are in occupied southern Iraq.

TURKEY/NORTHERN IRAQ

The United States and other Coalition partners stepped up their relief efforts for Kurdish refugees yesterday as the European Command established forward Humanitarian Service Support Bases at Diyarbakir and Silopi, Turkey. These bases are located near the Iraqi border and will provide more immediate access to the hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees stranded in the mountains of northern Iraq and southern Turkey. Diyarbakir will be the primary staging point for continued airdrops by U.S. and British C-130 and French C-160 aircraft, and Silopi will serve helicopter and truck delivery operations. Supplies are being transferred from Incirlik by air and truck convoy to the forward bases.

Allied nations have flown 198 missions and air-dropped more than 1,345 tons of relief supplies since Operation Provide Comfort began on April 7. Supplies include Meals Ready to Eat (MREs), water, foodstuffs (milk, sugar, flour, salt and tea), tents, blankets, clothing (field jackets), ground sheets, sleeping bags, tarp rolls and baby food. The USS San Diego, a Sixth Fleet supply ship, has begun off-loading bulk food items at the port of Iskenderun, Turkey, for transport to the forward bases at Diyarbakir and Silopi and subsequent disbursement to refugees. Three ships from the Marine Amphibious Readiness Group, with approximately 3,000 Marines onboard, have arrived and are preparing to join the operation. Additional Navy and Marine helicopters have come ashore and have begun air supply missions.

- more -

Stocks of bulk and canned food have begun moving from U.S. and European supply centers. Twenty deliveries of bulk food such as rice, beans, canned vegetables and fruit, flour and baby food totaling some 500,000 pounds have begun arriving in Turkey by air, ground and sea. Four ships from the Military Sealift Command (MSC) -- the USNS Sirius, USNS Rigel, the World Lynx and World Freedom -- carrying bulk food are expected to arrive in Turkey within the next few days.

Clothing and shelter requirements have been identified and these materials are presently being moved from the U.S. to Turkey by the Defense Logistics Agency. Shelter items include some 1,400 tents, 570,000 blankets, 20,000 sleeping bags, over a million bath towels, almost 60,000 sheets, 100,000 pillowcases and 86,000 shelter halves. Clothing includes over a million pairs of pants, 40,000 skirts, almost 300,000 ponchos and about 120,000 pairs of gym shoes. Total tonnage of relief supplies currently en route except by MSC is as follows: MREs - 1,257; blankets - 591; tents - 287; bulk food - 1,455; medical supplies - 838; clothing - 94; mixture of food, blankets, etc. - 606.

Allied medical teams have arrived at the forward operating bases and are already providing basic first aid to refugees and U.S. forces.. Medical forces will be divided into 12 separate mobile medical teams to provide a more flexible response for refugees in various locations. Medical supplies expected to arrive at the forward bases over the next few days include 150,000 hospital blankets, 16,000 each of various types of vaccines, 50 bottles of chloroquine, 500 cases of ringers lactate and 130,000 oral rehydration packs.

Forces Involved in Refugee Relief Operations in the North:

1,936 U.S. Permanent Party at Incirlik AB, Turkey
2,840 Additional U.S. personnel
3,000 From 3-ship Marine Amphibious Readiness Group
(USS Guadalcanal, USS Austin, USS Charleston)

7,776

90 U.K.
121 French

7987 Coalition

U.S. Units Currently Involved in Operation Provide Comfort:

- 61st Tactical Airlift Squadron, 8 C-130s, Little Rock, Arkansas
- 37th Tactical Airlift Squadron, 11 C-130s, Rhein Main AB, Germany
- 302nd Tactical Air Wing (Res), 3 C-130s, Peterson AFB, Colorado
- 86th Tactical Fighter Wing, 8 F-16s, Ramstein, Germany
- 81st Tactical Fighter Wing, 12-A-10s, RAF Bentwaters, UK
- Strategic Air Command Detachment, 7 KC-135
- 552 Aviation Warning and Control Wing. 2 E-3, Tinker AFB, Oklahoma
- Helicopter Support Squadron Four Det, 3-CH-53s, Sigonella, Italy
- Echo Company, 502nd Aviation Regiment, 8 CH-47s, Aviano AB, Italy
- 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit 12 CH-46, 3 UH-1, 4 AH-1, 4 CH-53, Marine Corps Air Station, New River, North Carolina

SOUTHERN IRAQ

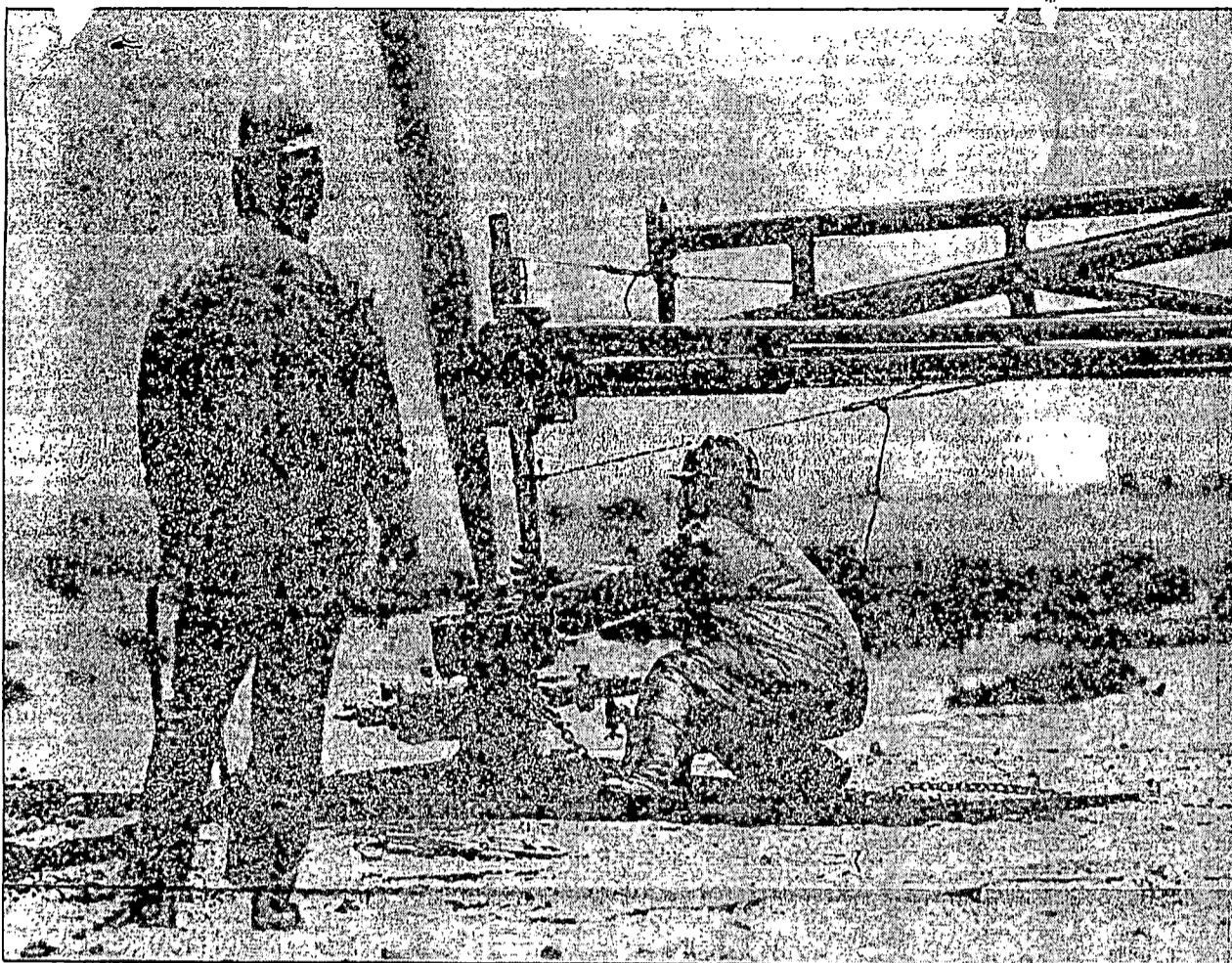
U.S. forces are implementing U.S. Central Command policy not to abandon any refugees who desire to come into the demilitarized zone during the withdrawal process. This includes transporting refugees to the temporary relief sites, if necessary. To ensure that refugees do not suffer in the transition of coalition forces from southern Iraq, several days of provision of food and water have been provided to resident and refugee populations desiring to remain in Iraq. An estimated 30,000 people are currently being assisted in coalition-occupied southern Iraq.

We have provided humanitarian assistance in southern Iraq since February 28. To date, U.S. CENTCOM forces have provided over 500,000 meals, distributed one million gallons of water, treated thousands of Iraqi patients, and evacuated over 350 Iraqi civilians for treatment at U.S. or Saudi hospitals. U.S. forces drilled a well in Safwan for use by civilians, which is producing 30,000 gallons of water a day.

IRAN

The International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have been actively involved in Iran since before the beginning of the refugee influx. The United States and the international community are providing assistance through U.N. and international relief organizations. We are in touch with Iranian officials through our protecting power, Switzerland, and we are considering ways we may be of further assistance.

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Brian Krause, of Houston's Red Adair Inc., guides a capping device into place over an oil well in Kuwait's Greater Burgan Oil Field, as co-worker Bert Ballard watches.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Fighting the Great Balls of Fire

The Rough-and-Ready Texans Take On Kuwait's Oil Well Blazes WPOST
4-1-91

By Lee Hockstader
Washington Post Foreign Service

GREATER BURGAN OIL FIELD,
Kuwait, March 31

You approach an oil well fire cautiously, and with the wind at your back.

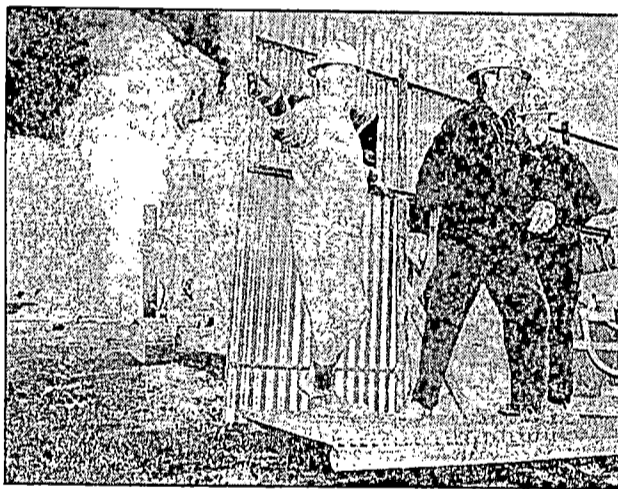
The flames shoot up to 150 feet high and burn at temperatures nearing 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit, hot enough to melt steel. They produce a roar like a jet engine and can be so brilliant that you have to squint at them up close.

If you're smart about it, which is to say if you're experienced, you carry a 10-foot-tall corrugated tin heat shield, wear flame-retardant cotton long johns beneath coveralls, keep your pockets empty and leave as little skin exposed as possible. Otherwise, your face and arms begin to burn about 40 yards from the flame and the keys in your pocket get so hot that they print little red welts on your thigh.

About 20 yards from the wellhead, where the desert sand is so hot that it shimmers and turns to glass, the rubber soles of your shoes get gummy and start to melt.

The firefighters who get that close tend to step lively, but even that's not a sure bet. One of the most experienced hands in the business, Ace Barnes of Houston's Boots and Coots Inc., burned his feet last week—and not for the first time in his career.

"I tried to get the doctor to let me lay around a little longer, but he wouldn't let me," Barnes drawled. But in a more serious moment, he added: "We don't take any chances with these fires. We may take



The Boots and Coots Co.'s Boots Hansen, left, Ace Barnes and Joe Carpenter ride a cranelike contraption used Saturday in an unsuccessful attempt to put out a well fire.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

some calculated risks, but we don't take any chances."

Barnes, a 62-year-old Texan, is one of the tiny fraternity of oil firefighters that has descended on Kuwait in the past month. Nearly all Texans, they are short on formal education but make up for it with years of experience in oil fields.

Most of them have worked in nearly every continent under nearly every kind of condition, in desert and jungle, in winter

and summer, traveling on an hour's notice and killing oil fires every which way. They've been handsomely paid, celebrated as latter-day American heroes and lavished with publicity.

Some may even have thought they'd seen just about everything an oil patch could throw at them. Until Kuwait.

"It's bad, that's all you can call it. It's a mess," said George Hill, a strapping

firefighter with Joe Bowden's Wild Well Control Inc. of Houston ("24-hour service. Oil well fire blowout specialists").

"When Joe first came back from his inspection tour, it's all he ever could refer to it. We saw pictures, we saw a little video footage he had, and you get to talking about it and all he could call it was a mess. I thought he'd lost his mind, I thought he'd lost his ability to converse—you know, his vocabulary. . . . But that's all you can say: It's a mess. They had to work hard in seven months to destroy all this."

Hill, 39, who has fought oil well fires and blowouts for 20 years, has seen a thing or two. He's traveled the world (although not to its most glamorous corners), has a habit of referring to all men as "hands" (as in, "these oil wells are as different as people, hand") and wears his scars from oil fields and "wine shops" the way military men wear ribbons.

If Hill and his fellow Texans are a little awed by the spectacle all around them on the Greater Burgan Oil Field, they are also in their element. Virtually all of them grew up near oil fields, worked as roughnecks during high school and graduated (or didn't) to take a job in the Texas oil industry. Fighting oil well fires, said Hill, "is kinda what you call at the top of the heap. . . . This is it as far as I'm concerned."

But there's another incentive too, as the plentiful assortment of gold Rolex watches and large diamond rings attests.

Roughnecks working on the Kuwait oil fires will earn \$1,000 a day. More experienced hands like Hill will probably pull down quite a bit more. Brian Krause, a 35-year-old engineer with Red Adair Inc. of Houston, the world's most famous oil

See FIREFIGHTERS, D4, Col. 1

Photo Copy Preservation

The Web of Destruction

The Greater Burgan Oil Field, which starts about 25 miles south of Kuwait City, is the world's second largest, after one in Saudi Arabia. It contains about 55 billion barrels of oil—about twice the total U.S. reserves—in an area that would fit easily inside Rhode Island.

This sprawling expanse of flat desert, beautiful in its way, helped make the tiny emirate one of the world's most modern and wealthy nations. It was the prize that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was after when he invaded Kuwait last Aug. 2. And it was the prize that President George Bush was determined not to let him have.

Within four or five days of the invasion, Iraqi soldiers and engineers started to fan out across Kuwait's oil fields, packing most of the 1,080 working wellheads with C-4 plastic explosives.

It was an enormous undertaking, and the Iraqis carried it out with an extensive bureaucracy and deft engineering. American experts hired by the state-owned Kuwait Oil Co. to supervise restoration of the nation's oil industry estimate that it took 1,000 troops and 30 to 40 engineers to plan and execute the destruction. Nothing was left to chance. And the results bore out the Iraqis' planning.

Larry Flak, a 35-year-old Houston engineer who is assembling and coordinating the vast firefighting force for the Kuwait Oil Co. here, speaks with a mixture of disgust and something approaching professional admiration about the systematic destruction.

"They knew very much what they were doing," he said the other night as he sprawled in shorts and a T-shirt on a sofa in the lounge of Ahmadi House, a small hotel that is now headquarters for Flak and his firefighters.

Flak has been able to piece together the method and chronology of the destruction from physical evidence left strewn in the desert, interviews with Kuwaiti resistance members, intelligence reports and reams of documents and notebooks left behind by the Iraqis when they fled in the face of the United States-led advance.

Some of the most revealing notebooks were found at Ahmadi House, where the Iraqis masterminded the destruction of the Burgan oil field. The room where they were found used to belong to the Iraqi petroleum engineer in charge of blowing up the oil fields. That room is now occupied by Flak.

Apocalypse Now

The result is an environmental super-catastrophe that a United Nations official has likened to the 1986 Soviet nuclear disaster at Chernobyl.

Teams of international health and environmental experts are shuttling into Kuwait City, and most issue vaguely apocalyptic statements on their way out that conclude that no one has the slightest idea what the long-term health and environmental impact will be.

The burning wells pour acrid black smoke into the sky that blots out the sun during the day for miles around, depending on the wind's direction. At night, the fires light the horizon with an orange glow that is at once ghastly and strangely beautiful.

The fires and gushers themselves are not the greatest challenges facing Flak and the teams he is organizing. Rather, the sheer scale of the disaster is posing logistical obstacles that no one had ever considered.

Flak started planning his strategy in October, when almost no one believed that the worst-case scenario could come true. There wasn't much financial backing; it seemed foolhardy to begin buying equipment and organizing manpower when none of the wells had yet been set afire.

But when Flak arrived in Kuwait just after the liberation, the enormous size of the task was apparent. The Iraqis, in carrying out the Mother of All Lootings in Kuwait, had stolen much of the Kuwait Oil Co.'s equipment, including more than 100 large trucks, 30 bulldozers and 40 to 50 front-end loaders. Flak had to start from scratch, rounding up heavy equipment and transportation from all over the Arab world and the West and scrounging what he could from the desert in the meantime.

Then there was the problem of manpower. Would there be enough expertise to tackle the problem, and how quickly could food, lodging and tools be available for them?

"There are 100 people qualified to do this in the whole damn world, and they've got to be the best," said Flak. "We've got machinists working 24 hours a day, guys who are wizards at coming up with different geometries to fit a particular conflagration, like dentists coming up with capping

Fighting the Oil Fire

FIREFIGHTERS, From D1

firefighting firm, said he fully expected to get very rich in Kuwait.

The firefighters and roughnecks have transformed this tiny corner of the Arab desert into a little slice of Texas, complete with steak-and-potato diners, a small army of pickup trucks and a nonstop stream of good-natured drawing banter.

Also imported from Texas is a fierce and not particularly friendly competition. The three firefighting firms here—Red Adair's, Joe Bowden's and Boots and Coots—have never worked a job together before. In their different-colored coveralls—red for Adair, yellow for Bowden and white for Boots and Coots—they're as easily distinguishable as rival football powers. And that's the way they like it.

Adair is the 78-year-old oil firefighting legend played by John Wayne in the 1969 movie "Hellfighters." Even though he hasn't shown up in Kuwait yet, his company is "the biggest name—and the biggest target."

"I don't want to run Red and them down, but we're way ahead by just scrounging stuff," said Bowden, whose firm scored a publicity coup last week by being the first to plug a gushing well. He considers the other two firms, which are bigger and better-known, a bunch of prima donnas.

There is also fierce rivalry between Adair's firm and Boots and Coots. Both Boots Hansen and Coots Matthews worked for Adair until 1977, when he fired them abruptly after more than 25 years of fighting blowouts and blazes side by side.

The two set out and started their own firm, which was quickly in keen competition with Adair's. For years, Hansen and Matthews sent Adair a thank-you letter every Dec. 6, the anniversary of their firing.

But the three seem to have left their rivalry outside the fences of the Kuwait Oil Co. drilling yard, a compound just on the edge of the oil field and within easy sight of about a dozen raging fires. The Texans are using the drilling yard as a shop and staging ground, and the place is full of welders and machinists grinding pipes and tubing and rigging booms and bulldozers.

This is not high-tech work, and there are few rules to follow. Every fire; every shattered wellhead is a new problem awaiting a makeshift solution fashioned with the benefit of common sense and engineering.

"There are no books or anything like that," said Hansen, 64, who served as a World War II submariner in the Pacific and never went to college. "You just got to know what to do and get the job done. Everybody wants to do it—they call up and say they know how to use explosives or whatnot."

Putting the fire out is the easy thing, the Texans say. That's like blowing the burner out on your stove while leaving the gas on full blast. It's capping the well—shutting down the gusher of oil—that takes some know-how and a gift for improvisation.

"When you quit working on a well and you've killed it, you've accomplished something that only a very few people in this world can do," said Barnes. "My wife says it builds my ego up."

What's certain is that the cost to Kuwait—or to Iraq, if it can be forced to pay for the cleanup—will be astronomical. The lost oil alone is estimated at 6 million barrels a day, worth at least \$100 million in lost revenues to Kuwait. And fighting the fires will cost at least \$1 million daily, perhaps a great deal more.

"It's history in the making, man. It's unbelievable, the magnitude of the operation," said Hill of Joe Bowden's firm. "I don't believe we'll ever see it again in our lifetime."

In other instances, the wellheads were badly damaged and the structures of above-ground valves and pipes were destroyed. In still others the explosions ruined the wellhead but failed to ignite the oil, leaving black geysers shooting into the air at a rate of 40,000 barrels a day and pooling into petroleum lakes up to four feet deep, and spreading daily.

"They were better oil field engineers than they were soldiers," said Raymond Henry, 47, the top firefighter in Kuwait for Red Adair. "If they were as good at combat as they were at destroying oil fields, they'd still be fighting."

They actually did experiments see how they could best blow up wellhead, what positioning amounts of explosives worked best, he said. "They started wiring the well in the first week they arrived. In December, they blew up six wells here in the Ahmadi area as experiments see how best you could do it."

"They put in a command structure of three levels to make sure they got done right, so that even if one backed out there was a fail-safe. They had an extremely systematic way of going about it."

The engineering and explosive work was similarly painstaking, Flak said. The Iraqis used electric wiring running like spokes from detonation hubs in the midst of the oil fields electric detonating caps in the surrounding wellheads. As a backup system, they wired nonelectric detectors connecting the wells directly to each other. The effect was a fire system that resembled a great spider's web, all connected to 30 to 40 pounds of C-4 plastic explosive packed with sandbags around the base of each gushing wellhead.

The Iraqis even dug thousands of shallow trenches for the wiring so that tanks and other armored vehicles could roll through the oil fields without severing it.

"Saddam saw it as a weapon," said Flak. "It was like, 'Well, they won't know I'm out of Kuwait 'cause they know I'll set the fields on fire.'"

When Operation Desert Storm began with the air war Jan. 16, the Iraqis blew up 60 wells. Then, just days before the ground offensive in February the destruction began in earnest.

Flak, who is in Houston planning strategy with a top Kuwait Oil Co. official, remembers watching the reports of new fires come in.

"We were monitoring intelligence reports from satellites," he said. "Every two hours a satellite would pass over Kuwait and we'd get a new report, and in the last few days even time there was a new report they'd gotten more wells."

"Saud [Al-Nashmi, the Kuwaiti official in charge of damage control] and I were almost sick to our stomachs. We just sat there listening to the tally—250, 300, 350, 400, 450, 500..."

The plastic explosives did their work effectively. Between 500 and 600 of the wells were ignited, including the discovery well drilled in 1938 which today is one of the largest blazes. In about two-thirds of the explosions, the wellheads were blown completely off, sparking roaring orange infernos that John Pomfret, an Associated Press reporter, has described as "tornadoes from hell."

In other instances, the wellheads were badly damaged and the structures of above-ground valves and pipes were destroyed. In still others the explosions ruined the wellhead but failed to ignite the oil, leaving black geysers shooting into the air at a rate of 40,000 barrels a day and pooling into petroleum lakes up to four feet deep, and spreading daily.

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Said Hill: "Them hands really got at

THE WASHINGTON POST

eventually. He refuses to assemble more teams for the time being, while equipment, food and lodging remain in short supply.

The greatest hold-up is water. Huge amounts will be needed to fight the fires, and so far only a trickle is available. Kuwait's water supply was sabotaged by the retreating Iraqis, who blew up distillation and desalination plants as they fled the country. To combat the oil well fires, Kuwait Oil Co. has hired Bechtel Corp., the California engineering and construction giant, to rig the pipes that usually carry oil to the ports to work in reverse, sucking water from the Persian Gulf and carrying it 10 miles inland.

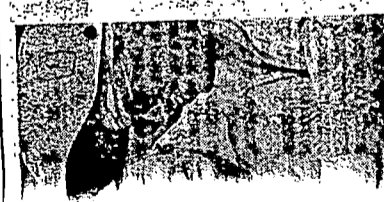
When the system is in place, it will produce great volumes of water—up to 15,000 gallons per minute in certain areas of the oil field—and fill up plastic-bottled "bagons" in the desert 20 feet deep and 40 times larger than a football field.

But right now, everything is in the preparation stage. The firefighters, improvising with scrounged and jury-rigged equipment, have managed to stanch a dozen gushing oil geysers, but have yet to extinguish a fire.

There are predictions that it will take anywhere from a year to five years before all the fires are out. "I don't think it's fair to ask me how long it's going to take until we get everything in place in a month's time," said Flak, insisting for the only time in a two-hour conversation.

What's certain is that the cost to Kuwait—or to Iraq, if it can be forced to pay for the cleanup—will be astronomical. The lost oil alone is estimated at 6 million barrels a day, worth at least \$100 million in lost revenues to Kuwait. And fighting the fires will cost at least \$1 million daily, perhaps a great deal more.

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Joe Bowden, left, and Raymond Henry in Kuwait.

different tooth every since firefighters, machinists, pumping experts, expert welders who do in three days. We'll see experts, heavy machinery who can put a cement to within an inch of

ive undertaking, involving 20 firefighters and skilled workers, many of them ally as TWING—Third units from India, Pakistan and Egypt.

moderate them all, Flak is camp for 1,000 men and considered the kitchen the Bayan Palace where feature it was sacred by

the work has proceeded at three firefighting teams a fraction of the 15 to 20 experts to have working

Duke Upsets UNLV, to Meet Kansas in NCAA Final—D1

Weather

Today: Sunny. Rather chilly.
High 56. Low 38. Wind 12-25 mph.
Monday: Possible shower.
High 58. Wind 8-16 mph.
Yesterday: Temp. range: 35-47.
AQI: N/A. Details on Page C2.

The Washington Post

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SUNDAY, MARCH 31, 1991

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Prices May Vary in Areas Outside
Metropolitan Washington (See Box on A2)

\$1.25

U.S. Troops Witness Iraqi Attack on Town in Horror, Frustration

By Nora Boustany
Washington Post Foreign Service

SAMAWAH OIL REFINERY, Iraq—U.S. soldiers at this northernmost observation post deep inside occupied Iraqi territory watched in horror and frustration on Thursday as Iraqi troops loyal to President Saddam Hussein attacked the town of Samawah, about a mile across the demarcation line.

Republican Guard troops fired tank rounds into a hospital, used Soviet-made helicopters to strafe the town and shelled hundreds of civilians huddled in dry

ditches near a railway track south of the line marking the northern edge of the area occupied by coalition forces. Green flags, the insignia of the Shiite Muslim rebel forces, which had fluttered on top of a white onion-shaped water tower, were gone.

The next day, all the U.S. troops could do was receive the wounded civilians. There were at least 40, mostly women and children, victims not only of shelling—random barrages meant to kill and terrorize—but of shootings at point-blank range.

"It's very hard sitting here, not being

able to do what we can," said Army Lt. Thomas Isom, 26, of Miami. "We have shown more discipline in the last four days than in the whole war. If they asked for volunteers, there is not a man here who would not go north to finish the job.

"There isn't a soldier here who does not want to finish it. They hate this," he said, expressing the torment felt by many American servicemen who, amid a declared peace in the Persian Gulf War, must sit passively as they watch enemy Iraqi troops kill trapped civilians.

The accounts of the soldiers, stationed on the rim of the Euphrates Valley—about

150 miles from the Kuwaiti border and near the tip of the 200-mile long sector held by coalition troops—confirmed gruesome tales of refugees and Iraqi deserters who have fled toward the Kuwaiti border over the past week from a brutal government crackdown on central and southern Iraqi towns.

An 18-month-old girl was "shot with a pistol in her chest, up close enough for a powder burn," said Capt. Daniel Miller, 29, from Toledo. A man, shot in the head, arrived with a bullet embedded in his jaw.

"We have had little kids brought to us, shot in the back, and women," said Isom,

enraged by the experience of watching troops loyal to Saddam attack Samawah as part of a campaign to crush a Shiite revolt that erupted March 4 following the end of the gulf war.

Among those treated were adults with severed limbs, two or three small children with their hands and fingers blown off, according to Sgt. Dickson Figueroa, 27, a medic. Miller said an 8-year-old girl had metal fragments in her back.

Survivors from Samawah told the Americans that most males above age 12 who

See TROOPS, A20, Col. 1

U.S. Troops Watch Iraqi Attack on Town in Horror

TROOPS, From A1

were still in the town when the loyalist troops attacked were killed. Some managed to escape, sneaking out from Bedouin camps on the western edge of the railroad to the 55-mile stretch through the desert to the southbound highway.

Drawing parallels with the tactics of the German Gestapo security forces in Nazi Germany, Miller and Isom explained the action of Republican Guards taking over Iraqi cities: "They come if the town is unclean, meaning it is not pro-Saddam. It is defiled by the rebels," said Miller. Continued Isom, "If you are not them [the Republican Guards], you are unclean, and the only way to clean you is to kill you."

"We cannot comprehend how soldiers can behave like that, go in and kill everyone over 12," said Isom. "These men are not soldiers. It is almost like genocide."

Late Friday, as a blazing red sun set behind the barren desert landscape west of Samawah, resistance fighters and distraught young men were wandering aimlessly away from their hometown, scavenging for water and food.

Abbas Musa, 25, a resistance fighter, headed out amid a cluster of men staggering by the side of the dirt road. "They burned our homes. Please find us a solution. We are dead men here. We will commit suicide if we cannot reach Safwan and leave Iraq," he pleaded.

"Our children were slaughtered in the streets. When they saw a child running, they shelled. We are waiting for the mercy of God. They were dumping explosive charges from helicopters on the arcaded souk near Kabir Street. They spewed out flames like fountains," he said.

"What happened in Kuwait is now happening in Iraq," said Musa's cousin, Abed, a high-school student. "Find us a solution. We are dying."

Another young man complained bitterly, "Allied planes were hovering above, but they did nothing. Our fate is unknown. We are in the throes of a catastrophe. We have no rights but famine, poverty and executions in the streets. What is our future?"

Sabbar Abbas said he preferred to be a prisoner of troops in the allied coalition that defeated Iraq in the gulf war than to remain in his present condition. "We want to be free, if only for one day," he said.

Haidar Qazem Ghali, an Iraqi deserter from Najaf who had turned himself in to allied forces as a POW, stood up in the back of the truck, leaned over and asked, "Can we know what is at the end of the road for Saddam? So we can still have a drop of hope after we have left our families behind. Is there a solution?"

The battle for control of Samawah, one of the last Shiite rebel strongholds to fall in the Euphrates River sector, raged for three days until the town fell Thursday.

Resistance fighters tried to hold their ground with rifles and small machine guns against loyalist troops who pounded their positions with



American medic tends to eye injury of Iraqi girl as her mother comforts her.

artillery and advanced into town with heavy armor. "They were out of ammunition and outgunned. You don't fight tanks and artillery with rifles," said Miller, commander of infantry troops of the Army's 3rd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, Soviet-made H-18 helicopters firing rockets were used against Samawah residents. "We could have used our own helicopters to take them out," he remarked. "We could hear them come over our heads."

"It increased in intensity for the big push. There was a mounting crescendo of small-arms fire. Then they shelled it through the night from batteries just north of the river. It was over by about three in the afternoon," said Miller.

Recalled Isom, "several hundred people were living in the fields, in the ditches. They were shelled. We saw it. People were living there in tents and tarps."

They fired at the hospital twice. We were watching them shell the train station and other small houses. This was simply designed to kill civilians or terrorize them, which it did. It did not have a military purpose, just artillery impacts on large concentrations of civilians.

"You could see the concrete coming out of the roofs. They shoot at a target until they hit it, and then they move to something else."

Pointing to a distant bridge, Isom said, "There were hundreds of people living in the underpass. When the shelling started, they flooded to us. We had to be careful to tell them this place is not permanent."

The soldiers at the oil refinery said that at one point, 3,000 people came to hide in their midst. When U.S. soldiers tried to distribute food, leftovers from their own meals, they were almost mobbed.

Women dressed in black chadors swarmed around a medic, begging for medicine. They complained of hunger, headaches and stomach

pains and said they did not want their men who had fled or been taken prisoner to return because Saddam wanted to kill them.

The oil refinery of Samawah was one of the first targets hit by allied forces in the air war that began Jan. 17 and was hit repeatedly by U.S. B-52s and British Tornados. Giant rusting oil tanks were squashed and crumpled like old shoes, black pools of drying, sticky oil stained the caked earth. Gaping craters gouged the grounds.

An unexploded 500-pound bomb dropped by a Tornado was stuck in the sand, as children played a few feet away. All along the highway to the Kuwaiti border, men continued

to turn themselves in to allied forces as prisoners of war.

"There cannot be anything more miserable than this," said Abed Mutaleb, 25, from the back of a truck carrying POWs. "Our future is black. We are in a lamentable situation and just looking for hope," said the young man, who had been training to become a teacher.

Others were more despairing. "If you don't take me, just shoot me," one deserting Iraqi officer told Sgt. Scott Dixon of Provo, Utah. The officer said his family had been killed.

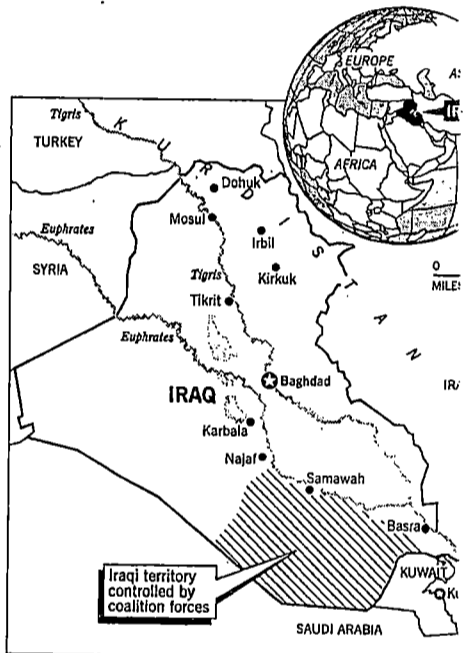
At checkpoint Zulu, where a steady flux of about 6,000 refugees a day had tapered to 673 by Friday evening, Staff Sgt. Jonathan Santy described how a father had brought his four sons to be taken as prisoners in order to survive.

"The father and the sons cried. You think you had seen it all. But when you see this every day, you go through a roller coaster of emotions. If I had my choice, I would let all these people go to another country. I do not want to think about what may happen if they go back to Iraq," Santy said. "Some of these are really super people. Doctors, teachers, scientists fleeing the regime. If Saddam remains in power, these people will be destroyed. I don't see Saddam letting these people live, do you?"

As the deadline approaches for the signing of a formal cease-fire that would permit their departure, many American soldiers are agonizing over the fate of people they have met, and fear that villagers they have helped will be punished when they are gone.

"If we leave, will they live?" asked Isom, as women clutching children giggled shyly and asked for medicine and water in the narrow passageways snaking through the refinery.

A 52-year-old oil surveyor who



spoke some English begged for cigarettes to help him through the night. "I am very tired, I came here in the middle of the night with six children and a wife," he said. "I go with you to America. To hell with Iraq."

When asked in Arabic what had happened in Samawah, the man broke down in tears. He spat on the ground, cursed Saddam and took an Iraqi five-dinar bill and tore it to shreds. "Go see the tragedy in Samawah," he yelled. "The Americans are against us, you know."

A friend, standing nearby, complained, "The world has science. We are carrying men for the crimes of one."

Meanwhile, Miller looked on the Iraqi refugees. "Some adults is one thing. But see the little children, sitting crying and bleeding, you have to take care of them."

There is little he can say to free Kuwait, it was not Iraq. That's the way it is."

From Vietnam To Iraq: The Great American Syndrome Myth

By Richard A. Brody and Richard Morin

THE VIETNAM syndrome is dead? cry the hired guns of the right and left. And from these well-stirred rhetorical ashes now arises a new, more aggressive and more muscular vision of America's smart bombs and 100-hour ground wars.

Call it the Iraq syndrome. This new view sees America with large across the face of the world. Mohrball "kinder and gentler." What the country wants, these neo-Rambo argue, is a restructured and decidedly more assertive U.S. foreign policy—the perfect chaser to the near-perfect war that marked America's full recovery from the malaise of Vietnam.

In fact, there never was a Vietnam syndrome. Nor will history likely record an Iraq syndrome. Contrary to the conventional wisdom currently under construction, this country's big win in the gulf has not occasioned a sea-change in American public opinion on foreign policy, just as the Vietnam War did little to alter the public's fundamentally cautious view of the military as a policy tool.

As a characterization of American public opinion toward foreign policy, the Vietnam syndrome argues that after 1975 the American public turned inward, against intervention, against the use of force to protect vital interests of the United States. Or more succinctly, in the words of Jov S. Zalkheim, a former deputy undersecretary of defense in the Reagan Administration, the syndrome entailed "... a reluctance to engage in any overseas operations and to provide the wherewithal to do so."

It is more than a quibble to point out that, since long before Vietnam, Americans have been reluctant to support overseas military operations. George Washington warned in his farewell address of the dangers of "overgrown military establishments" and foreign alliances, and those fears have endured to this day.

In 1941, for example, Americans were deeply divided over the question of whether we should oppose Japan militarily; many strongly believed that the war in Europe was that continent's business not ours. Similarly, in the spring of 1963, the vast majority of the public rejected the notion that U.S. troops should be used to oust the Castro regime in Cuba.

In fact, it is this determined reluctance on the part of Americans that prompted the Eisenhower administration to push for tactical nuclear weapons as a means of countering the Soviet conventional threat in Europe, thus hoping to avoid the politically indecipherable necessity of sending U.S. troops overseas.

America does not like to put its youth in harm's way. Not surprisingly, Vietnam did nothing to change that preference. Nor has Iraq produced huge majorities eager to volunteer America for duty as the world's cop.

President Bush may wax semi-deloquent on our principled de-

See SYNDROME B2, Col. 1

Richard Brody is professor of political science at Stanford University. Richard Morin is director of polling at The Washington Post.

The Syndrome Myth

SYNDROME, From B1

fense of a tiny (albeit oil-rich) country overrun by its much larger neighbor, but his admiring public expresses no interest in the United States becoming the protective big brother to every bullied small country around the globe.

Quite the opposite. A new Washington Post poll found that fewer than a third of 3,015 persons questioned recently said they would support using U.S. troops to defend South Korea if that nation were invaded by North Korea. A similarly small proportion supported sending in the marines to thwart any attempted Chinese invasion of Taiwan. And only about one in four said they would support using U.S. troops if the Soviet Union used military force to stop independence movements in Lithuania or other Baltic states.

That snapshot of public opinion, taken at a time when Americans continued to reel in a gulf-induced giddiness, also found that six out of 10 persons surveyed didn't want the United States to take a more active role in world affairs generally. True, three out of four also expect the United States now will be more willing to use military force to resolve international squabbles in a way favorable to U.S. interests—but that is a prospect that more than half of those polls acknowledged worries, not elates, them.

Similarly, a poll released last week by the bipartisan Americans Talk Issues foundation reported that most Americans believed the United States should not work alone but with the United Nations and other countries to keep the international peace.

The historical reluctance to commit American troops to foreign wars that re-

emerged during the Vietnam War does not, however, preclude support for war once fighting has begun, at least at the outset. Like World War II and Korea, Vietnam began with large majorities of the public and political elite agreeing that war was the right policy under the circumstances. In a word, the onset of the three wars, like many crisis situations before and after, "rallied" public support.

Looking at what causes Americans to rally around their president tells us much about what really shapes public attitudes on foreign policy. Under the threat of a breakdown in international order, the public appears bewildered; its support for policy and policymakers tends to be determined less by a personal judgment of the likely success of policy than by the reactions of politicians, pundits and other opinion leaders. Two conditions are thus necessary and sufficient to arouse public support: The first is public uncertainty about the crisis events; the second is consensus among opinion-makers in support of presidential actions in dealing with the crisis.

If one or both of these conditions are absent, a crisis will not rally public opinion. When both conditions are absent, the "anti-rally" effect can be dramatic. In November 1986, the revelations of the Iran-contra dealings, the policy that sought to respond to public frustrations over the holding of American hostages, cost President Reagan about 25 percent of his public support. This dramatic drop was caused by public certainty that exchanging arms for hostages was wrong and ineffective combined with attacks on the policy by a bipartisan elite.

Wars, of course, are usually more complicated phenomena with respect to their effect on public opinion. For one thing, they tend to last longer than other foreign policy crises. In a war the public has time to become less dependent on the standard opinion molders for its views. Media attention to war increases public knowledge of the situation and, with that, its capacity to judge the handling of the war as a matter of public policy.

This is to say, public support during war is informed by perceptions of policy success or failure. Public awareness of the stalemate of arms in Korea and the failure in Vietnam eroded support for those wars and for Presidents Truman and Johnson. The length of the wars also provides time for the elite consensus to break down. The emergence of dissent among the political elite during Korea and Vietnam accelerated the slide in public support.

But there is no evidence that Vietnam produced a fundamental change in the way in which Americans form their impressions about foreign policy and the desirability of using military power as a policy instrument. On the contrary, the favorable public reaction to the military interventions in Grenada and Panama fits right in with historical patterns of response.

It remains one of the ironies of the Panama invasion that a big majority of Americans told Gallup polltakers two months before Bush sent troops south that they would disapprove of any effort to overthrow Panamanian leader Manuel Noriega. Yet just days after the invasion—after it became clear that our intervention had been successful—Gallup reported that an equally large majority said they approved of Bush's decision to topple Noriega.

Americans may be reluctant to go to war but they are, in the main, not opposed to

war as an instrument of foreign policy. And like any policy instrument, support for war increases and decreases with the impression that it is being used in the right way.

Consider, for example, the trend in support for Bush from July 1990 to the most recent polls. In the weeks before the Aug. 2 invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, Bush's "handling of his job as president" was approved by about six Americans in 10. The onset of the gulf crisis added about 12 percentage points to the president's support in most national polls. During August and early September, three Americans in four expressed their approval of Bush.

The first month of the crisis was a typical "rally" situation: News about the gulf was dominated by stories about the deployment of U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia, the bringing of other nations into the region in opposition to Iraq. Senate and House leadership was openly supportive.

On Sept. 14—six weeks into the crisis—Bush addressed a joint session of Congress. House majority leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) gave a Democratic "response" considered to be generally supportive of the president. At the same time, however, reports of concerns expressed by Democratic and Republican members surfaced.

Hearings began and cautious criticisms were voiced by Democrats including Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.). As chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Nunn is the kind of spokesperson to whom the public looks for opinion leadership. But these cautious voices did not get much attention.

The pace of criticism then picked up and the elite consensus began to crumble. By Sept. 20, criticism was an important theme in press reports. Also during mid-September, the gulf coverage became routinized. Other stories—notably those about the deficit and the bipartisan compromise that failed on Capitol Hill—contributed to

Bush's rapid decline in the polls. But the decline did not continue; during the balance of 1990 Bush's support gradually returned to its pre-crisis level.

The trend in approval also shows a second rally in mid-January, coinciding with the start of the air war on Jan. 16. As is typical, the rally was fueled by public uncertainty, in this case about whether the build-up was sufficient and whether the air war would achieve its goals. Virtually overnight, about 20 percentage points were added to President Bush's support; now eight Americans in 10 approved of the president.

Moreover, after the fractious debate in Congress ended with majority support for the use of military force, a new bipartisan consensus in support of the war option formed, and criticism of the president's policy all but disappeared. Of course, the actual success of the air war and the stunningly swift victory after the ground war began were not lost on the public.

In the face of the current levels of public support, how can we maintain that nothing has changed? Currently the breadth of support for the president is without precedent, but the processes by which the American people formed their collective impression of how well George Bush is handling his job are quite familiar.

Indeed, the public appears to be arriving at its judgment of Bush in a manner identical to the way in which the public reached its judgments of every president since FDR. This does not mean that the president must lose support over the balance of his term. It does mean that the public will change its opinion in accord with the strength or weakness of the economy and other indications of policy success or failure—whether at home or abroad. Neither this nor future administrations should be misled that a mandate for an aggressive foreign policy has emerged from the victory in the gulf.

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Iraq: Despotism Amid the Ruins

Saddam Clings to Control of a Society Shattered by Battle p. A19
WPST 3-9-91

By Glenn Frankel
Washington Post Foreign Service

LONDON—Iraq is emerging from a relentless battering by allied forces and a bloody internal uprising as a shattered nation. Its economy and infrastructure are crippled; its civilian population is devastated, yet its despotic ruler still clings to power.

With hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees in flight from their own government, President Saddam Hussein is holding on with the same ruthless tenacity that loyalist forces who survived the Persian Gulf War have shown in crushing Shiite Muslim and Kurdish revolts against him and slaughtering suspected rebels and their families.

Western relief workers and journalists have described scenes of destruction and killing that echo the horrified, emotional accounts of fleeing Iraqis.

"Everything is destroyed," Jean-Louis Macheron, of the French aid group Pharmaciens sans Frontières (Pharmacists Without Borders), told the Reuter news agency after a visit to the southern city of Karbala, one of many demolished centers of Shiite insurgency. "In the streets, you only see cars with coffins in them."

In a country that remains closed off to most foreigners, hard figures and firm intelligence are impossible to come by. But using sketchy information provided by aid workers, journalists and other witnesses, as well as by Western diplomats and intelligence sources, it is possible to begin to assess the amount of damage done to Iraq as well as to analyze how Saddam has maintained his grip on the country.

Senior U.S. military officials have said that up to 100,000 Iraqi soldiers may have died during the gulf war—as many as 60,000 to 80,000 in the air campaign, plus another 15,000 to 25,000 in the ground offensive. U.S. officials caution that these estimates are, at this point, just guesses. Iraqi officials have estimated that 7,000 civilians died during the air campaign.

Thousands more have died by Iraqi hands in the Shiite and Kurdish rebellions. Estimates by opposition groups of those killed during the month-long civil warfare in southern Iraq range anywhere from 30,000 to 100,000. The fighting in the Kurdish north is so



Iraqi refugees watch as planes parachute relief supplies in Turkey.

fresh that no reliable estimates have yet emerged.

The pattern of the revolt was similar in both places. Rebels would move into lightly guarded cities, free political prisoners, then mete out retribution against security officials and alleged collaborators. In the southern city of Nasariyah, witnesses said, the rebels hanged the mayor in the town square after gouging out his eyes and cutting off his nose. Others were reportedly decapitated.

Government buildings were destroyed and warehouses looted. Anything that symbolized Saddam's rule—from public records centers to posters of the Iraqi leader—was defaced or obliterated.

The loyalist Republican Guard counterattacked with equal brutality and much greater firepower, witnesses said, using artillery and heavy armor and lobbing shells into civilian residential areas. In Samawah, American troops across the cease-fire line watched the slaughter in disbelief as wounded men, women and children struggled through their lines. At one point, patients with catheters and intravenous tubes still attached to their bodies limped through the lines after shells hit their hospital.

Huge portions of the Iraqi population are now on the move. Turkish officials estimated yesterday that more than 300,000 Kurds and other refugees had crossed into Turkey, with many thousands more waiting to enter. Iran said Sunday it has admitted 300,000 Kurds, is preparing to process an-

other 100,000 and believes a million more are en route.

In southern Iraq, about 40,000 refugees have fled to camps inside Iran. Another 15,000 to 25,000 who crested into American-occupied territory now face the prospect of again coming under Saddam's rule when allied forces pull out.

At the U.S.-run refugee camp near Səwan on the Kuwaiti border, refugees are threatening to throw themselves under tanks to force the Americans to take them to Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. The Bush administration, responding to such pleas, pledged Sunday that Iraqi refugees in the U.S.-occupied zone in southern Iraq would be given sanctuary if they requested it.

The damage to Iraq's infrastructure has been massive. Ahmed Chalibi, a banker and spokesman for Iraqi opposition groups who is familiar with internal Iraqi data, estimates that 80 percent of the country's electricity generating stations and 75 percent of its oil refining capacity has been destroyed, along with its entire telecommunications network and 52 major bridges. Roads, railways and factories have all been devastated, as have every airfield and the country's main port facility at Basra.

Iraq's own estimate of \$100 billion in damage is not far off the mark, according to Chalibi, who assessed total damage to infrastructure at \$60 billion, plus \$20 billion in lost oil revenues and \$9

debts. In a statement Friday in Geneva, the International Committee of the Red Cross warned of "a public health catastrophe of immense proportions" due to the shortage of clean drinking water because of the destruction of Iraq's water purification plants. It predicted a "dramatic increase" in potentially fatal diarrhea among malnourished children and the growing risk of epidemics as spring temperatures rise.

Looking at the scale of destruction, many analysts had predicted the imminent fall of Saddam. As late as March 27, President Bush said: "It seems unlikely he can survive. I don't know how long it will take. People are fed up with him. They see him for the brutal dictator he is."

But less than two weeks later, Saddam's hold on power seems secure—at least for the short run—and he has routed the rebels even though much of his army's heavy equipment was destroyed in the war and many of his soldiers fled or defected. Nonetheless, Western intelligence sources say Saddam has been able to rely on a hard core of 40,000 to 50,000 Republican Guard troops, centered around Baghdad and his home base of Tikrit. Those troops were used to put down the Shiite uprising, then were quickly transported north to fight the Kurds.

Drawing a parallel with Nazi Germany, British military historian John Keegan noted that by mid-1944, Hitler had lost two-fifths of his army in Normandy and Russia yet still managed to suppress three simultaneous uprisings by Polish, Slovak and French resistance forces—confounding those who believed his army near collapse.

"What they forgot is that if the will of a dictator holds and his homeland remains intact, he can piece together a new army out of what appears to be a ruin," Keegan wrote in the Daily Telegraph. "That is just what Hitler did. That is what Saddam has done."

The other factor in Saddam's success was political, Iraqi analysts say. The Shiites and Kurds together account for nearly 80 percent of Iraq's population of 18 million, but they were never able to win support from the Sunni elite that forms the base of Saddam's power.

To the contrary, according to an informed Iraqi political scientist, even those Sunni military commanders who are disenchanted with Saddam's government were prepared to put down the uprisings because they saw the revolts as a threat to Iraq's future as a unified country and to their own survival.

The Kurds have also posed a conundrum for other Iraqis. Despite Kurdish protestations that they sought democracy and political autonomy, many Iraqi Arabs distrust the Kurds and consider them a separatist movement more interested in autonomy than in toppling Saddam. Even at the height of the Kurdish rebellion, Iraqi sources maintain, Massoud Barzani and other Kurdish leaders conducted negotiations on autonomy with Saddam's emissaries.

Now that the army's commanders have crushed the Kurds, some believe they will turn their attention to Saddam himself. But while the infrastructure of Saddam's elaborate network of informers has been weakened, many Iraqis still fear his power and his reach. Some believe the regular army will remain on the sidelines.

Saddam's short-term strategy appears clear, Iraqi analysts say. By accepting U.N. terms for a permanent cease-fire Saturday, he hopes to rid Iraq of foreign intervention, end economic sanctions and begin rebuilding his damaged power base. By reshuffling his cabinet, making vague promises of multi-party democracy and offering conditional amnesty to his foes, he hopes to lessen popular pressure on his government at home.

But few in Iraq view the government's concessions as anything other than window dressing designed to help protect Saddam until he feels strong enough to assert total control. And analysts warn that the myth of Saddam—his aura as a survivor and his reputation for

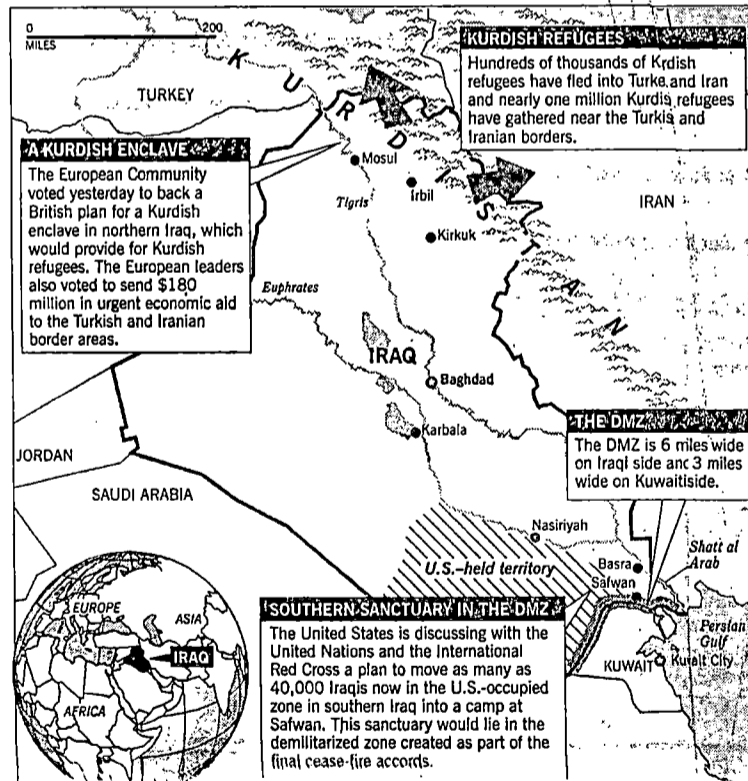


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U.S. Troops in Gulf Set Sights on Home

By Rick Atkinson
Washington Post Staff Writer

KHARJ AIR BASE, Saudi Arabia, March 31—It's 2 a.m. on Easter morning and Lt. Col. Randy Bigum is driving home from work. He noses his F-15C fighter off the taxiway and back toward "the stadium," an immense, horseshoe-shaped concrete berm that shelters some of the 100 planes parked along the busy flight line here.

Raising the canopy and climbing from the cockpit, the squadron commander eventually wends his way to the plywood warren that houses his flight operations center. With a smile and a shrug, he sums up the evening's mission, a three-hour combat patrol north of Baghdad: "Boring."

Behind him, Capt. Tom Dietz, credited with shooting down three Iraqi fighters during Operation Desert Storm, concurs with an echo: "Boring."

Based on interviews conducted throughout the region over the past month, the several hundred thousand U.S. servicemen and women still serving in Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait appear largely to see the intensifying debate over the proper U.S. role in the insurrections being attempted in Iraq as remote, abstract and secondary to the more vital interest of going home soon.

Whether seen from a cockpit 20,000 feet over Baghdad or from this still-bustling base an hour southeast of Riyadh, many soldiers, sailors and airmen seem offended by loyalist Iraqi troops' attacks on Shiite Muslim and Kurdish civilians—and utterly disinterested in retaliating or stepping further into the potential quagmire of Middle Eastern politics.

The prevailing sentiment can be seen in soldiers' T-shirts that read, "If I Were An Iraqi POW, I'd Be Home By Now," or the "Free Kuwait" signs on which the name of the liberated emirate has been crossed out and replaced with the phrase, "U.S. Servicemen Trapped in Saudi Arabia."

Airmen here have lampooned a new safety slogan—"Not One More Life"—by scribbling on their billet doors, "Not One More Day."

"Should we get involved in the Kurdish rebellion?" Lt. Col. Robert Purple, the base commander here said this afternoon. "The world can't make up its mind, so why should a serviceman at Kharrj want to? . . . We're in 'Desert Calm,' waiting for political acts by the United Nations and others."

Some soldiers stationed along the Euphrates River Valley express frustrated outrage at the steady stream of wounded or hungry women and children fleeing south from southern Iraqi cities attacked by forces loyal to President Saddam Hussein in a bid to crush rebels there. A number express regret that Saddam's forces were not completely pulverized before President Bush imposed a cease-fire Feb. 28.

But it seems the majority of the troops simply want to leave the desert before yet another holiday passes at home without them. Few have a detailed grasp of the politics of Iraq's civil strife; at most U.S. bases, news is both skimpy and stale by the time it reaches the troops.

Many only know, as one pilot here put it Saturday, that "it's taking the United Nations longer to draft the peace than it took us to win the war."

Bigum's 53rd Tactical Fighter Squadron has been among the Air Force's busiest before, during and after the Persian Gulf War. Both Iraqi

fighters destroyed two weeks ago were downed by his squadron, which tallied eight other air-to-air kills during the war.

Current operations, however, consist of flying 90 minutes north, patrolling Iraqi air space and then flying 90 minutes south.

Bigum's pilots can see many Iraqi army helicopters operating against the rebels but are under orders only to shoot at high-performance jets; pilots interviewed appear to have no appetite for intruding into the fight below.

Of his Easter patrol, Bigum said: "The only interesting thing is watching the oil fires in Kuwait. It looks like a giant birthday cake."

Bigum said he has urged his pilots and support personnel not to let complacency cause accidents. "But it's hard to keep them as focused on the mission as we were" before the fighting ended, he admits.

More than 4,000 Air Force personnel still live in these vast tent cities, only a 20 percent reduction from the wartime peak. Commanders are trying to give their troops more time for quick excursions to Riyadh, Bahrain or some of the local attractions, such as a dairy farm billed as the world's largest. Predictably, the troops have invented some of their own entertainments, such as the First Annual Sand Trout Fishing Tournament, held today in a bone-dry irrigation ditch.

"Everybody here is a volunteer—not to come here, but to be in the service. They all took an oath," said Purple, the base commander. "Sometimes you have to remind them of the oath they took."

"At some point you have to say to yourself, 'I'm in Saudi Arabia, this is as good as it's going to get, and I'm here for the indefinite future.' And you've got to come to peace with yourself."

Iraqi Deserters, Civilians Turn to Americans for Help

By Nora Boustany
Washington Post Foreign Service

NEAR SAFWAN, Iraq, March 24—"I want to be prisoner," Abdel Jawad Jassem told an American officer here after walking through the desert from Basra.

Until this morning, Jassem was an Iraqi soldier. But he deserted, he said, because his commanders in Basra threatened to kill him if he did not fire at homes in that southern Iraqi port city.

"If I go back to Basra, they will execute me because I deserted. I was born there. I did not want to shoot at my people," he said, holding up a yellow military identification card.

Jassem was one of hundreds of Iraqis who have fled to U.S.-held territory to escape fighting that has raged for three weeks between loyalist troops and insurgents in several cities and towns in southern Iraq.

Speaking sadly of a rebellion they now say has been crushed, civilians carrying injured children milled about with the soldiers who had refused to fire on them, asking medical treatment and refuge of American troops manning positions here.

One Iraqi deserter said, "If you don't take me, just shoot me," according to Sgt. Scott Dixon, a National Guardsman from Provo, Utah, who questioned arriving Iraqis in rudimentary Arabic.

Dixon said all of the Iraqi soldiers arriving at his checkpoint "are really traumatized" and want a one-way ticket out of Iraq.

"It's not like we have to chase them up and down. They sort of show up," said Lt. Col. Michael Deegan, 42, of Boston. He said some Iraqi soldiers who were "visibly shaken and very, very afraid" told him that they were chased by a tank division. Some of them had been injured.

Eighteen deserters had showed up at Deegan's position by this afternoon, and 12 more were at

another checkpoint farther west. About 60 are arriving each day, he said, and 251 smiling prisoners were driven from Safwan to Saudi Arabia today aboard trucks with a U.S. military escort.

As two Iraqis approached slowly from the direction of Basra, one of them, Hamad Jabbar Ali, 27, said: "I am a soldier. The Republican Guards are looking for us. They want to execute us."

In fact, Ali later explained, he had not been a soldier for 2½ years—not since he and his companion, Ali Nayef Duheiry, deserted and joined the Iraqi resistance. The two men claimed that the resistance was made up mainly of army deserters.

Soldiers and civilians fleeing Basra said efforts there by insurgents to break free from the rule of President Saddam Hussein had been crushed, despite an attack by rebels with machine guns against troops at the Sheraton Hotel on Saturday.

After weeks of fighting, the town of Nasiriyah, about 110 miles south of Baghdad, also has fallen under the control of Iraq's Republican Guard, according to dozens of refugees who said hundreds of families had abandoned their homes and camped in the relative safety of the wilderness.

"The resistance is finished," said Amira Hamid, 30, a mother of eight who fled here during the night by boat and van from Tannuman. Located across the Shatt al Arab waterway from Basra, Tannuman was the last stronghold of Shiite Muslims seeking to overthrow Saddam, she said.

"We crossed the Shatt [toward Basra] in tourist boats," Hamid said, holding two of her eight children in the back of a van she hired for 60 Iraqi dinars—\$180 at the official exchange rate. "People are leaving and loading up their belongings on boats, and then finding their way out of Basra by car."

Refugees from Nasiriyah claimed government troops had fired four Scud missiles at their town and that hundreds of victims were lying in the streets. Mohammed Hassan Abdi said he

scooped up a 6-month-old child lying next to its dead mother, but that the baby later died.

The refugees' claims could not be independently verified.

Guardsman Dixon said one father brought his 4-year-old child, suffering from third-degree burns, to be treated by U.S. doctors.

Because of the limited medical facilities at the U.S. military checkpoints inside Iraq, the most seriously injured Iraqis needed to be evacuated to hospitals, Dixon said, but "the military system won't med-evac civilians. Our system can't handle it. This kid has serious injuries and there is not a lot that can be done. They really need the Red Cross," he said. Some wounded civilians have, however, been flown out from other areas.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is waiting for an invitation from the Iraqi government to enter areas ravaged by the Persian Gulf War and subsequent fighting between troops and rebels.

As they struggle to cope with the aftermath of their swift victory over Iraq in the Gulf war, some U.S. troops say they are still wary of the Iraqi troops positioned farther up the road to Nasiriyah. They keep a careful eye on their adversaries, even tracking their movements at night through thermal sights.

"From this position, I can see shooting every night going across the road. I can see them, but I can't go chase them," one U.S. officer said.

Spec. Joseph McGee, 22, used the sights on his Bradley Fighting Vehicle to observe Iraqi positions only a mile away.

He said the most unusual thing he had spotted in the last few days was a busload of men and women who stopped to change clothes before heading in his direction. "Soldiers got out, changed clothes and tried to get through the checkpoint. We took them as POWs, and sent the women on their merry way," he chuckled.

Plugs

By Garry Trudeau

"Hey, Stormin' Norman! You've just annihilated the fourth largest army in the world! What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to crack open a Diet Pepsi."

It was the mother, father and next of kin of all product placements — too insanely great to be true. And yet there it was. Clearly visible on the table directly in front of the commander in chief during the historic cease-fire ceremony was a lone can of Diet Pepsi.

As the official pool photo of the event was beamed around the world to thousands of newspapers, Pepsico executives were jubilant. It was the biggest coup since the live pictures of U.S. troops watching the Super Bowl in front of a Pepsi machine.

For Pepsi, it was the culmination of a hugely successful campaign to associate its products with the winning side in the gulf war. True, Pepsi had enjoyed a regional edge over its chief competition for some time. In the late 60's, Coca-Cola had been expelled from the Arab world after opening a bottling plant in Israel. Pepsi, meanwhile, had shrewdly detoured the Holy Land and gone on to build 24 plants in the future war zone alone.

So when country called, Pepsi had the infrastructure. With plants cranked up for 24-hour production, Pepsi began producing 12 million cans a month as part of an exclusive contract with U.S. forces. Coke could only look on with horror.

But surely the CINC (commander in chief) could requisition any beverage he wanted, including The Real Thing? Did the presence of a Diet Pepsi can signify an actual preference on the part of "God," as he is affectionately known to his troops?

When pressed, Pepsi executive Barry Holt was circumspect. "We think we have a loyal following in the General. The best we can piece together, what with the dryness of the desert, he's probably got a Diet Pepsi with him at all times."

Wishful thinking? When I sought confirmation from a source close to General Schwarzkopf in Riyadh, there was a nervous silence on the line as he contemplated the implications. When the answer finally came, it was terse, but unequivocal: "The CINC drinks Diet Pepsi."

Eat death Coke.



Garry Trudeau, creator of the comic strip *Doonesbury*, is an occasional contributor to this page.

Kuwaiti Cabinet Resignation Kindles Hopes, Skepticism

KUWAIT, From A23

Kuwaitis Hopeful, Skeptical

Cabinet Resignation Widely Applauded

By Nora Boustany
Washington Post Foreign Service

KUWAIT CITY, March 20—The resignation of Kuwait's cabinet today in the wake of the trauma and devastation of the Persian Gulf War has spurred hopes of broad social change and a swifter pace of reconstruction after three weeks of what is viewed widely here as government lethargy.

Sheik Jabir Ahmed Sabah, the ruling emir, accepted the resignation of the cabinet of Prime Minister Saad Abdullah Sabah, who is also the crown prince. Another official told ambassadors that a new government would be formed within a week or 10 days as hopes mounted that a younger, more pragmatic cabinet would bring more assertive leadership. But several opposition figures criticized the dissolution of the cabinet as an inadequate step toward democracy in a country where the elected parliament was dissolved by decree five years ago.

Despite widespread popular frustration with the government's failure to overcome acute shortages and restore basic services in the aftermath of the seven-month Iraqi occupation, observers also said it was likely there would be no substantial change in outlook in the new cabinet and that it would continue to be headed by Saad, who has been prime minister for 10 years.

"The captain stays, and the crew changes," said outgoing Planning Minister Suleiman Mutawa, who said that the present ministers would stay on as caretakers while Saad forms a new government.

In Washington, White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater said that the United States had played no role in the resignation, but he said he believed it could help Kuwait's recovery. Formation of a new government, he said, "can be positive in the sense of bringing in people who have expertise" in rebuilding.

Mounting criticism of the government's inability to do something about scarce food supplies and lack

See KUWAIT, A25, Col. 1

of water and electricity three weeks after Kuwait was liberated prompted the unexpectedly early collapse of the cabinet, diplomats here said. But Saad denied that the move to form a new postwar cabinet was prompted by public pressure or anger, saying only that "the time was right" for "me and my colleagues to submit the resignation."

Hamad Tuweijri, 34, a businessman and a member of an interim 50-man National Assembly selected last year to revise the constitution, welcomed steps for renewal but expressed skepticism, saying the real motive was to divert attention from the present shortcomings.

"It was a must to change the government," he said. "They want to change whatever reminds us of the invasion. It will be a new government with new blood. The ministers will be younger, more practical, more pragmatic." But he added: "It is a political game, however. A lot of people are complaining. Now they will talk about the cabinet for two or three weeks."

History professor Khaled Wasmi, an opposition figure and member of the last elected parliament, called the creation of a new government, regardless of its makeup, "unconstitutional" in the absence of what he described as "popular supervision."

The revival of democratic political life is a fundamental demand of the opposition, most of which does not object to preserving the Sabah family at the helm of leadership, but with an elected legislature.

Wasmi said the resignation was necessary and a direct result of the Iraqi invasion, for which the Kuwaiti people were improperly prepared by their leadership. "The government was defeated on Aug. 2," he said. "There is no trust. It has to change."

After years of being envied by Arab states as the richest and most advanced of Persian Gulf communities, Kuwaitis have had to scrape by with no currency, water or lights. For basic food provisions, they have had to rely on an inefficient system of cooperatives left over from the Iraqi occupation.

A dense, oily smog from 500 blazing oil wells still hangs over the emirate, darkening its days and aggravating the despair of a population that lived through terror, violence and pillage.

Planning Minister Mutawa said the ordeal of the Kuwaitis has compelled a hitherto carefree society used to lavish lifestyles to worry and "think of the future." Everyone is expecting "radical and operational changes," he said.

"We have suffered and endured hardships, and now we feel we have to look to a new Kuwait with different concepts and a new set of responsibilities," Mutawa said, reflecting the view of most "insiders" as they are now known—the third of Kuwait's population who braved the peril of Iraqi occupation.

"After Aug. 2, this is a newborn society, a newborn Kuwait. What we have gone through these seven months, wherever you are on the political-social spectrum, is bound to make you a different man, a different woman," said Sheik Khaled Nasser Ali Sabah, a cousin three times removed of the Sabah rulers. He said



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kuwaiti Crown Prince Saad Abdullah Sabah leaves his residence in Kuwait City after dissolving cabinet.

that Kuwaitis who remained at home while others fled abroad now "want to be listened to."

Nearly half the outgoing cabinet comes from the ruling Sabah family—a clan that numbers 350—and not all of them are popular or held in high esteem.

Singled out for the harshest criticism has been Defense Minister Nawaf Ahmad Sabah, a subject of derision for what many critics see as his bungling failure to foresee the dangers of Iraqi military preparations last July.

Another unpopular figure is Interior Minister Salem Sabah Salem, who in late 1989 and early 1990 used police to disrupt the cherished local political ritual of the *di-waniya*—informal gatherings of men before morning and evening prayers that became forums for debate and consultation.

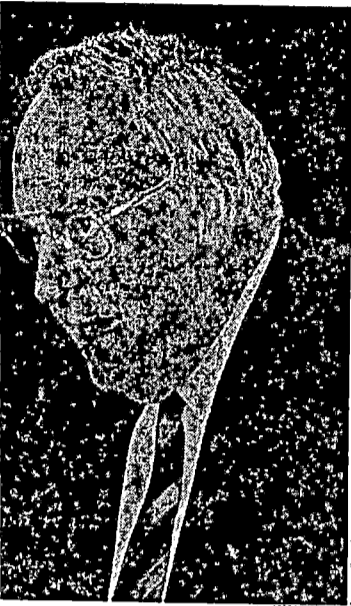
Despite the pressures at home and abroad to democratize, however, few observers here believe that the liberalization of the system will be a top priority for the new government. Unresolved issues of security, the status of resident aliens whose loyalty to Kuwait is now being questioned and the gargantuan task of rebuilding will likely take precedence at least for the next year or so, diplomats said.

The Reuter news agency reported from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia:

American Red Cross President Elizabeth Dole said that the International Committee of the Red Cross has so far handed over to Iraq about 1,700 Iraqis held as prisoners of war by the allies and that about 1,200 Kuwaitis abducted by Iraq have been released.

According to Red Cross officials in Riyadh, Dole said, there are about 5,000 Kuwaitis still held in Iraq but that they would be returned soon. Some Kuwaiti officials have put the number as high as 33,000.

NEWS



Genscher, opens cabinet meeting in Bonn yesterday.

al Collapse

conomic Policy Toward East

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tion is squabbling over its contro- versial 'policy' to 'limit' Germany's participation in the Persian Gulf War to financial contributions, and searching for strategies in the economically desperate east.

Tens of thousands of voters took to the streets of eastern German cities Monday night to protest the loss of jobs. Today, the president of Germany's powerful central bank, Karl Otto Poehl, blasted Kohl's decision last summer to swap at parity East Germans' nearly worthless money for the powerful western mark. "The result is disaster, as you can see," the Bundesbank president said. His remarks contributed to the recent steady rise in the dollar against the mark, closing today 3 pfennigs higher at 1.64 marks.

"Convincing and powerful a year ago," said Munich's Sueddeutsche. See KOHL, A28, Col. 1

Kuwaiti Banks To Reopen; New Currency Planned

Cabinet Resigns as 'First Step In Putting House in Order'

By William Branigin
Washington Post Foreign Service

KUWAIT CITY, March 19—Kuwait today announced plans to reopen the country's banks Sunday, indemnify citizens who stayed during Iraq's military occupation and issue new currency to replace more than \$2 billion reported stolen by the Iraqis.

[Kuwait's Cabinet resigned Tuesday in a move intended to bring in new officials as the nation rebuilds from nearly seven months of Iraqi occupation, the emirate's U.N. ambassador said in New York.

[Ambassador Mohammad Abulhasan said the prime minister submitted the resignations, which were immediately accepted by the emir, Jabir Ahmed Sabah, the Associated Press reported. Abulhasan said the new cabinet should be named in about a week. "This is the first step in putting the house in order," he said.]

The monetary announcement by Salem Abdulaziz Sabah, the governor of Kuwait's Central Bank, appeared designed to breathe life into an economy virtually snuffed out by the seven-month Iraqi occupation, and to head off growing public discontent over the pace of restoration efforts.

The banks, many of which have been closed since December, are to reopen with some restrictions, such as limits on individual withdrawals and foreign transfers, for the first 45 to 90 days, Sabah said. He declined to elaborate on the restrictions but said they would be "very, very comfortable."

Sabah also said the government had canceled all financial transactions during the occupation and would make good the amounts that Kuwaitis held in their bank accounts here on Aug. 1, the day before the Iraqi invasion. He charged that the Iraqis stole gold bullion worth about \$950 million and seized more than \$1.2 billion in bank notes.

After annexing this wealthy, oil-producing Persian Gulf emirate as Iraq's "19th province," the Baghdad government of President Saddam Hussein sought to stamp out the national currency, the Kuwaiti dinar, as part of an effort to eliminate the country's national identity. Large amounts of Kuwaiti currency were confiscated, and inhabitants were forced to use Iraqi dinars.

The Iraqi effort largely succeeded. Although Kuwait ranks as one of the world's richest countries per capita, its currency has virtually disappeared. Payments today are accepted in U.S. dollars, Saudi Arabian riyals, whatever old Kuwaiti dinars are available and—sometimes—even Iraqi dinars.

See KUWAIT, A24, Col. 1

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Central Bank governor Salem Abdulaziz Sabah shows samples of new

Kuwaiti Banks to Reopen; New Currency Is Planned

According to diplomats, issuing a new currency will help resolve some uncertainty.

"It will give a big impetus to opening of shops," one diplomat said. Some merchants who have been reluctant to reopen are now more willing, knowing the exchange rate will be set at a new Kuwaiti dinar.

Sabah told a news conference that the new rate would be set at the old rate of \$3.3 to the dinar. He said the government had printed more than \$2 billion in the new currency.

Kuwait holds foreign currency reserves of about \$90 billion, largely of revenue from oil exports. Three weeks after the liberation of Kuwait, the capital still has an abandoned, deserted look. In many areas, vacant office buildings and apartment blocks loom over largely empty streets.

Although electricity is slowly being restored, much of the city remains blacked out, and water is available only from a disorganized system of deliveries by tanker trucks. The situation has prompted widespread complaints among Kuwaitis of government incompetence.

The first daily newspaper to be published here since Kuwait's liberation was suspended Monday after it criticized the government for failing to restore public utilities, Reuter reported.

To compensate Kuwaitis for their losses and suffering under Iraq's brutal, destructive occupation, citizens who remained in the country will be entitled to about \$1,600 each, Sabah said. Many Kuwaitis who fled already have been receiving government stipends in exile, a sore point for some of those who stayed behind. It was not immediately clear whether compensation would be offered to noncitizens who remained during the occupation.

About 200,000 Kuwaitis—a third of the population—opted to endure the Iraqi occupation rather than flee. Estimates of the number of expatriates who stayed range from about 200,000 to 400,000, including about 150,000 Palestinians.

As a community, the Palestinians are widely resented by Kuwaitis these days because of the Palestine Liberation Organization's staunch support for Saddam in the Persian Gulf War and the partitioning of

Kuwait's ambassador to the United Nations, Mohammad Abu Rayes, said the complex issue of reopening and accounting for missing Kuwaiti prisoners of war and civilian detainees could slow the adoption of any final cease-fire resolution between the allied coalition and Iraq.

Kuwait says 33,000 of its citizens have been abducted, killed or missing. The International Committee of the Red Cross, said only 4,368 Kuwaiti POWs and detainees have been registered in the ICRC's humanitarian measure. The ICRC has appealed for a deal with the food shortages in a statement, the ICRC said the food-distribution system has been partially disrupted by the breakdown of communications and transportation. In Washington, Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams announced

Border Town Becomes Wasteland of Refugees

Iraqis in U.S.-Held Zone Plead for Food

WPOST
3-20-91 PA1

By Nora Boustany
Washington Post Foreign Service

SAFWAN, Iraq—This U.S.-held Iraqi border town, which in peaceful times flourished on trade with travelers between Kuwait City and the southern port of Basra, has now become a wasteland for its residents and thousands of refugees stranded with little food and nowhere to go.

As of Tuesday—when relief officials announced a tentative agreement for the U.S. military to provide food and water—5,000 Iraqis fleeing their government's bloody repression of a Shiite Muslim uprising had crowded into Safwan, fully overwhelming this once self-sufficient farming town.

"Please help us. We have no water, no medicine, no diesel fuel, we are part of neither Basra nor Kuwait," Mohsen Kazem, 40, pleaded recently as he and others gathered around a jeep carrying Western reporters. "We want to buy vegetables, food, medicines. We don't know what to do with our sick. We just want water. Please tell the Red Cross."

Children standing forlornly on the side of the road motioned to motorists that they were hungry—

putting small, grimy hands to wide-opened mouths. Nasser Saadoun Qlayyesh said that his family was subsisting on "boiled leaves with salt and tomatoes," and that some people were drinking from muddy puddles of water to survive.

At least five children have been killed playing with or stepping on unexploded yellow bomblets from allied cluster bombs, villagers said.

For days, relief organizations and the U.S. military disagreed on who was responsible for helping the refugees, but Walter Stocker, the chief International Committee of the Red Cross delegate in Kuwait, said Tuesday that under a tentative agreement, U.S. forces will begin distributing food and water.

Still unresolved, according to Stocker, is who should meet the broader humanitarian needs of the growing number of refugees here and who is responsible for their security. Even if immediate relief needs were met, he warned, "not only the United States but also Iraq" would have to decide on their future.

One of the U.S. officers stationed up the road shrugged last

See SAFWAN, A22, Col. 1



U.S. guard walks by an Iraqi soldier who tried to go to Kuwait as a refugee. ASSOCIATED PRESS

A22 WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20, 1991

THE WASHINGTON POST

Refugees Jam Town on Iraqi Border

SAFWAN, From A1

week when asked about the fate of the people in Safwan. "I am a military man. We are not in the business of massive humanitarian assistance," said Col. Robert Westholm, of San Antonio, Tex., gazing toward a desert strawn with overturned military vehicles, burned-out carcasses of trucks and blown-up bunkers. "This is Iraq and the government still needs to provide for its people."

Lower-ranking soldiers, however, allowed their concerns to show. Pvt. Rodney Hall, from Rockville, Md., assigned to a checkpoint six miles into Iraq to search vehicles heading toward Kuwait, said he was pained by the human misery he was witnessing at the border. "It's hard. It kind of hurts me. I hope one day we don't end up like this," he said.

"That is one part of the war I really did not want to see," added Pfc. Rubin Perez, 20, from La Puente, Calif. "I was shocked when we rolled into that desert camp. We had seen nothing like that before except for a couple of soldiers."

The ICRC and the executive director of Middle East Watch, a human rights group, say that under Article 55 of the Geneva Convention, the United States, which now controls that desert strip, is also responsible for the humanitarian problems that go with it.

"If those countries can make war, they also have to assume their responsibility in this respect," the ICRC's Stocker argued. He said he was trying to urge the allied commanders who have troops and equipment massed along the border to help the people.

"It's not that we do not want to assist these people, it is not a question of resources," Stocker said



A refugee at Safwan shows scars that he said came from razor blade cuts by Iraqi soldiers who seized him in Kuwait. ASSOCIATED PRESS

We cannot protect them in a void. It is only a government that can demand an internment camp."

Andrew Whitley, executive director of the New York-based Middle East Watch, said it was a "requirement" that the allies take care of civilians in areas they control. "What happens to people who do not want to go home?" asked Stocker. "We are going to have a no-man's land of uprooted people in the middle of the desert."

Relief officials said establishment of an internment camp at the border until the situation normalizes should be considered, especially while Kuwait itself is still struggling to overcome the ravages of war.

Safwan residents have ousted local officials, including those from Iraq's ruling Baath Party, and in the

Iraqi civilians, mainly Shiites who may never have felt they belonged to President Saddam Hussein's predominantly Sunni Moslem regime or identified with his Baath Party, now face being unwanted aliens in neighboring Kuwait—as it emerges from a devastating occupation by Iraqi troops.

But Kuwaiti soldiers, on their side of the border from Safwan, are turning back fleeing Iraqis hoping to escape through Kuwait to safer havens.

Meanwhile, dejected Iraqi soldiers turn up at the first U.S. control point, six miles north of Safwan, also seeking to flee, but they are being disarmed and turned back. Kuwaiti soldiers who interrogate them before sending them on their way insist that the deadline

said, "We are victims of the Iraqis. I have a bag of candy to give to the children, but not to the soldiers. They all had a chance to refuse the order to invade Kuwait. When Iraqi soldiers were killing and looting the country, they were alone, no one was forcing them to do it."

"They harmed the Kuwaitis, when they had the chance to."

Members of the Kuwaiti army who were taken away by the Iraqis and now have been freed without their papers also are being turned back by Kuwait since they cannot prove their identities and their allegiance is suspect.

This community of Kuwaiti soldiers, known as the *bidoon*—Arabic for without—is another side to the tragedy of this war, compounded by

30,000 Flee Get Shelter U.N. Office

By Susan Okie
Washington Post Staff Writer

More than 30,000 Iraqi refugees, fleeing from the civil war in southern Iraq, have taken shelter in refugee camps in southwestern Iran, according to U.N. health officials who visited the camps last weekend.

Most of the refugees are women, children and elderly people, according to Hiroshi Nakajima, the director-general of the Geneva-based World Health Organization, who visited Iran last weekend. Nakajima gave details of his visit at a news conference in Geneva yesterday.

Nakajima said refugees described heavy fighting in southern Iraq and reported that in some cases, women and children were being used by the combatants as "human shields." Refugees told U.N. officials that many Iraqi families had been killed in the fighting or by mine explosions while trying to cross the border.

The refugees, some of whom suffered wounds or burns in the fighting, "are being well looked after by the Iranian authorities," Nakajima said in a statement. "But this is an emergency situation and will require immediate, concentrated action on the part of the United Nations system."

Nakajima gave no estimate of how many Iraqis are arriving in Iran each day, but he said that about 2,100 people arrived at one of the largest camps, near the Iran-Iraq border at Khorramshahr, on Saturday morning. Nakajima and another WHO official visited the Khorramshahr camp, a second large facility at Shushtar and a smaller "transit" camp in a military hangar containing about 3,900 people.

The camps so far have adequate food, water and sanitation, but there is a shortage of medical workers.