

PERSIAN GULF WAR

Ex-attorney general says 'collateral damage' heavy

DHAHRAN, Saudi Arabia (AP) — In endless hours of air strikes, U.S. and allied pilots rocked Baghdad, key bridges and the bunkers of front-line troops Thursday, and blew two more Iraqi "getaway jets" out of the sky.

A second veteran U.S. battleship joined in the bombardment of Iraqi-held Kuwait.

The pounding was having an impact. Returning pilots told of a devastated landscape in Kuwait, and journalists near the border found first-hand evidence — four Iraqi soldiers who turned themselves in muttering over and over about the "bombing ... bombing ... bombing."

But Desert Storm losses mounted, too. A U.S. Navy FA-18 Hornet fighter went down in the northern Persian Gulf, apparently not from hostile fire, and an Army helicopter crashed in Saudi Arabia. The Navy pilot was missing; one soldier was killed and four were wounded in the helicopter accident.

President Bush's two top war advisers — Defense Secretary Dick Cheney and joint chiefs chairman Gen. Colin Powell — flew to the gulf to confer over the weekend with local commanders on the countdown to a ground offensive, a momentous clash between a half-million or

more men on each side.

"Our hope is that we can wrap it up as soon as possible, to minimize the loss of life on all sides," the defense secretary said before he left.

The commander of British forces in Operation Desert Storm, Lt. Gen. Peter de la Billiere, told reporters he believes "the land war is inevitable." A U.S. command spokesman disputed the use of "inevitable." But up on the northern desert line, U.S. troops had little doubt.

"This could get very ugly at any moment," one officer told a reporter visiting the Saudi-Kuwaiti front. That view found high-level support in France, where President Francois Mitterrand told reporters: "The ground battle promises to take place ... this month."

Miles from the wind-whipped front, some clung to hopes for peace. In Tehran, Turkey's foreign minister met with President Hashemi Rafsanjani to discuss the Iranian leader's offer to mediate between Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and the international alliance arrayed against him. A Soviet envoy also was to meet with Iranian officials.

The Bush administration says there is nothing to mediate: Saddam must simply announce a withdrawal from Kuwait.

But Saddam showed no signs of surrender. Iraq launched one of its largely ineffective Scud missiles early Friday at Riyadh. Like an estimated 17 others fired previously at the Saudi capital, it was intercepted by a U.S. Patriot missile. The wreckage landed in a parking lot and caused no injuries or major damage, witnesses said.

Allied warplanes battered Baghdad for 12 hours from Wednesday night to Thursday morning, Associated Press correspondent Salah Nasrawi reported from the Iraqi capital.

He said at least 10 homes were destroyed or heavily damaged, and Iraqi authorities said 22 civilians were killed.

Ramsey Clark, the former U.S. attorney general and peace activist who is in Baghdad this week, told reporters that residential damage showed the U.S. air war exceeded the mandate of U.N. Security Council Resolution 678, which authorized the use of force to expel Iraq from Kuwait.

"You don't have to bomb cities. It has nothing to do with resolution 678," he said.

Clark said he visited the heavily bombed southern port city of Basra and described what he saw as "a human and civilian tragedy," including bombing of

hospitals and other non-military sites.

He also said a Baghdad doctor spoke of several thousand deaths of injuries from allied air strikes. Iraqi authorities have reported more than 400 civilian deaths.

Asked about Clark's statements about civilian casualties at a news briefing in Riyadh, a U.S. command spokesman, Marine Brig. Gen. Richard I. Neal, said: "War is a dirty business, and unfortunately there will be collateral damage."

He used the military euphemism for civilian casualties.

And allied pilots were discovering another obstacle to their three-week-old air war against Iraqi positions: the easiest targets had already been hit.

"We have fewer targets than we did when we started," said Col. Hal Hornburg, 45, of Dallas, commander of the 4th Tactical Fighter Wing Provisional. He and others cited bunkers which hid Iraq's armor and decoys that sometimes fooled allied pilots.

Neal said U.S. Air Force F-15s shot down two or three Iraqi SU-22 attack jets as they tried to fly to Iran. Tehran television said five Iraqi warplanes, apparently including those caught by the American pilots, crashed while fleeing to Iran.

Syrian says nice words need backing

LONDON (AP) — Syria's foreign minister said Thursday that if Israel did not leave the occupied territories after the Gulf War, the situation in the Middle East would worsen.

"If we stand firm against an Arab country occupying an Arab country, then it is even more natural to stand firm against Israel occupying an Arab country," Farouk al-Shara said on the final day of a two-day visit to Britain.

Syria, led by a branch of the Arab Baath Socialist Party opposed to the wing headed by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, has contributed 20,000 troops to the multinational coalition trying to oust Iraq from Kuwait.

Al-Shara also told a news conference that Western lead-

ers should ensure their statements about solving the Arab-Israeli conflict are backed by action.

"We say that these countries should ensure that nice words about peace, security and a new international order should be backed," he said.

The United States has rejected attempts to link the Palestinian issue on the occupied West Bank with the war against Iraq but has, like other Western nations, expressed interest in resolving the Palestinian dispute.

Al-Shara's talks Wednesday with British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd marked the first ministerial meeting between the two countries since 1986. Britain severed relations after identifying a terrorist who

tried to plant a bomb on an airliner at London's Heathrow Airport as a Syrian agent.

The Gulf War has also driven Syria closer to traditionally moderate Arab states such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Esmat Abdel-Meguid, Egypt's foreign minister, and his Saudi counterpart, Prince Saud al-Faisal, announced plans in Cairo on Thursday for a general cooperation agreement among the three countries, whose foreign ministers have met periodically since October to coordinate policy.

Abdel-Meguid said senior Syrian, Egyptian and Saudi officials will meet in the Syrian capital of Damascus soon to draft the cooperation agreement.

Persian Gulf War summary

Here's a summary of the latest numbers on the Persian Gulf War. REPORTED THURSDAY:

- 2,600 sorties.
- One non-combat U.S. helicopter crash, one person killed.
- One U.S. Navy plane lost over Gulf, non-combat, one missing.
- Two, possibly three, Iraqi planes shot down.
- 22 Iraqi civilian deaths.

SINCE START OF WAR:

Allied Sorties

- Over 52,000 missions flown.

Reported by the allies:

- 30 killed in action, including 12 Americans and 18 Saudis.
- 24 Americans listed as non-combat deaths. An additional 105 Americans listed as non-combat deaths in Operation Desert Shield before the war.
- 44 missing in action, including 26 Americans, eight British, one Italian and nine Saudis.
- 12 prisoners of war, including eight Americans, two British, one Italian and one Kuwaiti.
- 28 allied planes lost; 21 in combat, including 14 American, five British, one Kuwaiti, one Italian. Non-combat losses: seven planes, including five American, one British, one Saudi. Six American helicopters to non-hostile causes.
- More than 885 Iraqis taken prisoner.
- 135 Iraqi planes destroyed in air or on ground.

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