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# U.S. begins 'Iron Hammer' attacks against Iraqi rebels

After numerous attacks on U.S. soldiers, the U.S. military began shelling areas in Iraq

By Drew Brown and Jeff Wilkinson  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

BAGHDAD, Iraq — U.S. forces on Thursday stepped up a bold yet risky new offensive to stamp out the Iraqi insurgency.

Shelling began at dusk — sending shock waves through the capital — as American soldiers fired at least eight mortar shells into a clothes-dyeing factory that had been attacked the night before.

At 7 p.m., 1st Armored Division soldiers fired mortar and artillery shells at two more sites in Baghdad that officials suspected had been used to launch rockets and mortars at coalition compounds, Capt. Dave Gercken, a spokesman for the 1st Armored Division, said.

The attacks — part of operation "Iron Hammer" — mark an aggressive new attempt by coalition forces to beat back an insurgency that has caused 156 U.S. combat deaths since May 1, when President Bush declared major combat operations over. U.S. forces have recently been subject to about 35 attacks daily throughout Iraq, and insurgents have launched a series of deadly suicide attacks aimed at undermining the U.S. effort and driving foreigners from the country.

The U.S. counterattack, however,

risks alienating Iraqis should civilians be caught in the crossfire.

In a separate attack Thursday night, an AC-130U "Spooky" gunship used 105 mm cannons and 40 mm machine guns to destroy a former Republican Guard building in Baghdad's al Farat neighborhood. Dozens of distant explosions could be heard around 9:30 p.m.

Gercken said insurgents had used the building to attack the 1st Armored Division.

Brig. Gen. Martin Dempsey, the commander of the 1st Armored Division, said the operations were based on an analysis of recent patterns of enemy activity and were designed with enough precision to minimize civilian casualties. "Throughout this operation we are communicating with the Iraqi people to let them know that these combat operations are being executed on their behalf," Dempsey said in a statement.

Earlier in the day, coalition officials moved to secure Baghdad by closing the 14th of July Bridge.

Operation "Iron Hammer" began Wednesday night after 1st Armored Division soldiers saw mortar rounds being fired from a van in the gritty town of Abu Ghraib, about 15 miles west of Baghdad. An Apache helicopter gunship followed the van out of town and attacked it, killing two suspected guerrillas and injuring three others. Five other suspected insurgents were captured, along with an 82 mm mortar tube, said Lt. Col. George Krivo, a coalition military spokesman.

About a half-hour later, Bradley

armored vehicles from the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment and an AC-130 "Spectre" gunship destroyed the "Al Jazeera Clothes Dyeing Company" in the southern Baghdad suburb of Sadia. Krivo said intelligence indicated that insurgents were storing mortar rounds and other munitions there. A Defense Department statement issued in Washington said the warehouse was a "washing meeting, planning, storage and rendezvous point for belligerent elements currently conducting attacks on coalition forces and infrastructure."

In a third strike, soldiers with the 1st Armored Division fired 155 mm howitzer shells at a "terrorist mortar team" that had lobbed several rounds in the direction of the Green Zone, as the main coalition compound in Baghdad is known.

Some fear moves against the insurgency may inadvertently hit civilian targets and turn more of the population against the coalition.

"It will bring chaos," said Hazim al Jumaily, a member of the security committee for the Fallujah Tribal Council. "Chaos."

Some senior coalition officials are expressing reservations over the new strategy, agreeing that it could cause the insurgency to spiral out of control.

"The message is we're coming," said one senior official, who asked not to be named. "In the next few weeks, we're going to test the waters."

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# Democrats denounce outlines of prescription drug benefit

As Bush pushes for a drug benefit plan, Democrats debate 'premium support'

By Jill Zuckman  
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

WASHINGTON — President Bush pressured Congress on Thursday to "finish the job" on a prescription drug benefit for seniors as Republicans negotiated among themselves and Democrats denounced the rough outlines of their plan.

"The choice is simple: Either we will have more debate, more delay and more deadlock, or we'll make real progress," Bush told seniors at the Englewood Neighborhood Center in Orlando. "I made my choice — I want real progress. And I urge the Congress to take the path of progress and give our seniors a modern Medicare system."

House and Senate Republican leaders had proposed combining the prescription drug benefit with a plan to allow private insurance companies and HMOs to compete directly with the traditional Medicare program. The

competition would take place in one of the country's 11 regions and in four major metropolitan areas.

But the competition issue, known as "premium support," is one of the biggest roadblocks to a deal that can pass both the House and Senate. Conservative Republicans say it is the key to saving money and preserving Medicare for the long run and want it instituted nationwide. Democrats, however, oppose introducing private insurers into the equation, saying it will undermine a program that has worked well for 40 years.

Republicans closeted themselves in meetings to argue over the proposed bill's language. By day's end, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee demanded that the two chairmen, Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa and Rep. Bill Thomas of California, present him with a final proposal Friday.

Meanwhile, Democrats mounted a campaign to derail the GOP effort to use private insurance companies for seniors' health care.

"This program is untested. It's untried. It's unworkable. It's playing roulette with

the lives of our senior citizens," said Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass.

"We're deeply concerned that 10 million people will be forced into an HMO for the first time," said Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D. "And all senior citizens, the other three-fourths of senior citizens, are going to be forced to pay much higher premiums."

Democrats circulated a letter to Frist protesting the GOP plan to incorporate private health plans into the Medicare system and urging him to remove it from the legislation. By late Thursday, four GOP senators had signed on: Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins of Maine, John McCain of Arizona and Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania.

Daschle and Kennedy also brought in several consumer and seniors' organizations to denounce the Republican proposal. Missing from the line-up was the AARP, the nation's most prominent seniors' group, which is expected to support the GOP plan.

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## CAMPUS BUZZ

### Monday

Judaic Studies brown bag seminar, 12 p.m., 375 McKenzie Hall. Ellen Schiff, Massachusetts

College of Liberal Arts emerita, discusses "Anthologizing American Jewish Drama: Confessions of an Editor." Schiff is the author of several books and an adviser to the Jewish Theatre of Austria.

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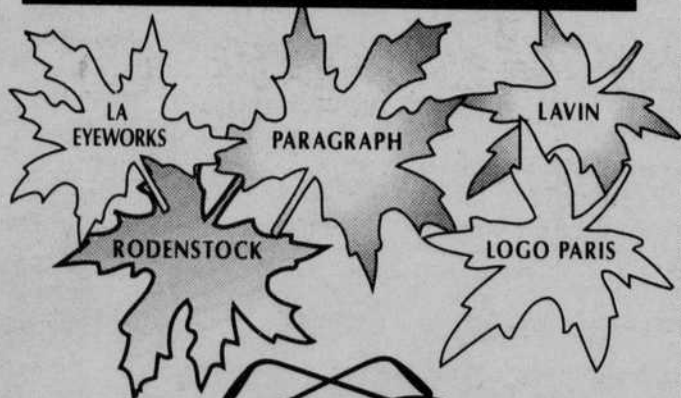
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