

AMERICA AT WAR

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Gas masks at the ready, Israelis prepare for Iraq attack

Tel Aviv, Israel — Hundreds of Israelis fled this seaside city Wednesday, fearing a repeat of the first Gulf War, when Saddam Hussein hurled 39 Scud missiles at Israel. Some of the less concerned chose to sun themselves and sip cocktails, saying nearly 30 months of suicide bombings and other violence have prepared them for the worst. The Israeli government instructed people to bring gas masks with them to jobs and schools. They also were told to prepare sealed rooms. About 2,400 families from the Tel Aviv area have reserved space in hotels and public buildings being made available in the southern town of Kiryat Gat, Army Radio reported. Eight leading hotels in the Jerusalem area reported a surge of more than 1,500 calls from Tel Aviv residents looking for rooms.

Aircraft carriers slowly starting shift to battle mode for war in Iraq

Aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt — War preparations are in full swing aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt — most of the crew is asleep. Combat pilots and most of crew aboard the aircraft carrier were ordered to snooze through the day Wednesday so they could shift to night operations. The other American carrier in the eastern Mediterranean, the USS Harry S Truman, will stay on day duty — thus providing round-the-clock combat capability. Some sailors on the Roosevelt still had day assignments. Lt. Matt Arnold, 33, of Virginia Beach, Va., oversaw a crew that was equipping bombs with precision electronics. "It's time for us to do what we were trained to do," he said. The Roosevelt, one British carrier and the four other U.S. carriers on Iraq duty will act as the platform for combat aircraft.

Kurdish political chief demands 'partnership' with U.S. in oil regions

Irbil, Iraq — Iraq Kurdish forces will permit temporary U.S. control of key northern oil fields but demand a "partnership" with Washington in the areas if Saddam Hussein falls, a top Kurdish political leader said Wednesday. The future of the oil areas in Kirkuk and Mosul — now under Baghdad control — is one of the highest priorities for Kurds in their Western-protected enclave. Iraqi Kurds consider the areas part of their historical territory and within the borders of a possible Kurdish zone in a post-Saddam leadership. Long-term U.S. control of the areas could become a point of contention between Washington and Iraqi Kurds, who have played a key role in the anti-Saddam opposition. "Our relationship with the Americans is based on a partnership," said Djowhar Salem, secretary of the political bureau for the Kurdistan Democratic Party, one of two main Kurdish factions. "We will not be excluded from any sectors."

Turkey's government to again ask its parliament if U.S. can use bases

Ankara, Turkey — Turkey's prime minister said Wednesday his government would ask parliament to allow U.S. military use of Turkish airspace in a war with Iraq, although it will still not permit American planes to use Turkish air bases or refuel within its borders. Under the proposed agreement, the United States would not be able to use Incirlik air base, a sprawling facility that already houses 50 U.S. fighters used to patrol a no-fly zone over Iraq. In a war, those fighters will not be able to fly over Iraq. Incirlik was a key hub during U.S. operations in Afghanistan, serving as a supply and refueling station for flights from the United States and Europe to Afghanistan.

Anti-war groups to protest combat with vigils, acts of civil disobedience

Washington — A large anti-war coalition on Wednesday announced plans for a global vigil the night after combat begins, a new Internet petition drive and a campaign to communicate support to American troops. More militant groups staged acts of civil disobedience in several cities Wednesday, and they promised efforts to block federal buildings and military bases and to disrupt traffic in at least 50 cities when the U.S. invasion of Iraq starts. The group Win Without War, which includes 39 organizations such as the NAACP and the National Council of Churches, plans a "citizen's declaration" drive beginning Friday, to attract signatures worldwide on a pledge to oppose President Bush's doctrine of pre-emptive military strikes.

Mubarak blames Iraq for crisis; Mideast leaders convene for talks

Cairo, Egypt — Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak blamed Iraq for the impending war Wednesday, while he and other Arab leaders prepared for a possible backlash among their citizens following a U.S. attack on Saddam Hussein. Officials from Jordan met with counterparts from Saudi Arabia, and Iranian representatives conferred with Pakistani leaders to discuss the impact on their countries as the U.S. deadline neared for Saddam to leave or face military action. "My hope is that the Iraqi government will realize the seriousness of the situation in which it put itself in — and us in," Mubarak said in a nationally televised address Wednesday. "And that the different international forces will real-

Saddam's troops form defense ring around Baghdad

By HAMZA HENDAWI
Associated Press Writer

Baghdad, Iraq — Hundreds of armed members of Saddam Hussein's Baath party and security forces deployed Wednesday throughout Baghdad, taking positions behind sandbags and in foxholes ahead of the U.S. ultimatum for the Iraqi leader to leave or face war.

There was no sign during the day of regular army troops, however, and as the deadline approached, nearly half of the Baath loyalists were gone from the almost deserted streets.

Al-Shabab television, owned by Saddam's son Oday, showed an American movie late Wednesday. Earlier Al-Shabab, the most watched station in Iraq, broadcast hours of patriotic songs and extensive archive footage of Saddam greeting crowds and firing off a rifle.

In the city, almost every store was shut and traffic was light as residents continued to stream out of the capital, heading for the relative safety of the countryside.

Iraqi officials, however, remained defiant in

the face of about 300,000 U.S. and British troops backed by 1,000 warplanes and a fleet of warships — all ready for an attack on Iraq to rid it of weapons of mass destruction that Washington and London say Saddam is concealing.

President Bush gave Saddam and his sons until 4 a.m. local time Thursday (8 p.m. EST Wednesday) to leave Iraq or face war. Saddam rejected the 48-hour ultimatum on Tuesday.

Members of Iraq's parliament declared their loyalty to Saddam on Wednesday and renewed their confidence in his leadership.

"We are dedicated to martyrdom in defense of Iraq under your leadership," they said in a message to Saddam issued at the end of their session.

Speaker Saadoun Hammadi opened the meeting by saying: "The people of Iraq, with a free and honest will, have spoken decisively and clearly in choosing their mujahid leader Saddam Hussein president of the country."

Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, meanwhile, appeared at a news conference in Baghdad, putting to rest rumors he had abandoned

the Iraqi regime and declaring that he, like other Iraqis, would rally behind Saddam.

Ruling out a last-minute political solution, Aziz told the hurriedly convened news conference: "We are ready to fight, prepared to face the aggressors and are certain of victory."

Aziz scoffed at rumors of his defection as part of a psychological war against Iraq, adding: "It is not going to be a short war, unless he (President Bush) decides to end his aggression. It is not going to be a picnic for him."

"I am carrying my pistol to confirm to you that we are ready to fight the aggressors," said Aziz, who appeared in uniform. "American soldiers are nothing but mercenaries and they will be defeated."

Bahrain, a small Persian Gulf state allied with the United States, offered Saddam a haven Wednesday, the first such offer to be publicly extended to the Iraqi leader as Arabs scramble to avert war. There was no immediate comment in Baghdad on the offer.

The Baath loyalists and security forces, meanwhile, stood behind hundreds of sand-

bagged positions built throughout the city over the past two weeks. Some were inside foxholes. Most were armed with Kalashnikovs, but some had rocket-propelled grenades and heavy machine-guns. On the city's southern fringes, several anti-aircraft guns could be seen.

Even Baghdad's traffic policemen wore helmets and carried assault rifles.

The Baathists, who wore olive-green uniforms and deployed in clusters of fours and fives, are widely expected to take charge of keeping law and order in Baghdad and other main Iraqi cities in the event of war.

Saddam, Iraq's president of 23 years, also was expected to look to them and other loyal militiamen and troops to deal with any anti-government stirrings by groups tempted to capitalize on the chaos caused by war to try to seize power.

Curiously, there was no sign Wednesday of Iraq's army troops or armor in or outside Baghdad, where Saddam is widely expected to make his final stand against any invaders.

LEANING TOWARD WAR



■ In the control room of the submarine USS Providence, the crew, including Capt. Jon Kan, left, reacts to the "angles and dangles" exercise in which the submarine is put through a series of steep dives and ascents.

TIM COOK
The Day

DISPATCHES AT SEA

Editor's Note: Day reporter Robert Hamilton and photographer Tim Cook are aboard a Navy sub in the Mediterranean to begin their firsthand coverage of preparations for war.

USS Providence practiced for 'game day' Tuesday

Editor's Note: The following report was filed after exercises Tuesday. Wednesday night about 40 Tomahawk missiles — some launched from the Red Sea — were used in the initial attacks on and around Baghdad.

By ROBERT A. HAMILTON
Day Staff Writer

Aboard the USS Providence — "Weapons ready," Lt. Eric Svensson announces in the command center. The executive officer confirms the missiles are programmed for their intended targets and the officer of the deck says that the ship is ready.

The captain, Cmdr. Jonathan H. Kan, orders the launch. The same petty officer who fired the opening shots of the war against the Taliban in 2001 hits a button labeled "standby ordered." Then, lifting a plastic cover, he punches a second button, labeled "fire ordered."

If this were the real thing, 16 Tomahawk missiles — 12 from the vertical launch tubes and four from the torpedo tubes — would be lifting off from the surface of the sea just above the Providence.

Instead, Tuesday is a strike exercise, a drill that Providence sailors must conduct at least once every three months back home but that it has done at least weekly since arriving within range of Iraq almost a month ago.

And it has become a more profound undertaking since the Providence arrived in the Red Sea last week, because everyone realizes that the order to do it for real could come at any time. "The purpose of this exercise is to make it routine," Svensson said.

The Navy has an unofficial motto: "Train like you fight, fight like you train." It is akin to a professional athlete who develops "muscle memory" by which, because of training, they can react without thinking.

It is one of the reasons sailors refer to the expected first day of war as "game day," not out of a sense that it is trivial — most use the term with the utmost solemnity — but because it is what all their training is about.

Between deployments, in U.S. coastal waters, the Providence might conduct a strike exercise with five or six other ships every few months. Here, it coordinates with every ship that would take part in a strike against Iraq. The results will be analyzed by the theater commanders to make sure that the missions are not overlap-

ping, or in conflict with each other.

"It's more than an exercise for this ship, it's an exercise for the whole fleet," Svensson said. "And everything is done just as if this was the real thing. We use the same voice circuits, the same protocols. We do everything we would do in a real launch except launch the missile."

Command is crowded during an exercise, but it will be standing-room-only in a real strike, with at least double the normal complement.

"There will be fire technicians crawling out of the woodwork if we launch," said Fire Control Technician 2nd Class Kevin Bojanowski. "All of the fire techs will come up into control."

Torpedoman 1st Class Stephen E. Butterfield ran the vertical launch center console 17 months ago when the missiles flew into Afghanistan, and he has trained continuously since then. He'll be in the tiny room forward of the torpedo department again if the order comes.

"I'm just as ready to do my job this time as I was last time, maybe better, because I know the system better," Butterfield said.

The Tomahawk missile can carry a 1,000-pound warhead more than 1,000 miles from the ship, but it's not a simple task to get them into the air.

In the vertical launch center, a series of controls prevents the release of the missiles, including security keys. A series of switches has to be put into the proper configuration and done in the proper sequence.

"It's a very safe system, where a lot of things have to line up before you can make anything happen," Kan said. "It's not like Hollywood, where you can lean up against a panel and 'Whoops, what was that? Weapons away!'"

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Any strike mission starts with the planning process. The Providence left port Feb. 10 with a number of potential missions, and can receive new ones on a daily basis via the secret military Internet.

"They're sending us new missions every day at this point. We loaded some new ones in this morning," Svensson said Tuesday morning. "They could send us a new mission in the morning, and we could launch it that afternoon."

The submarine's crewmen don't know exactly what they're going to hit, only the geographic coordinates. And the missions arrive with the missile flight path programmed

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Lt. Eric Svensson

from the shore to the target. It's up to the fire control technicians on board to program the missile to reach that point.

Four of the monochromatic green screens in the command center are dedicated to fire control. Six other large color monitors can display a wealth of other information needed for the strike, such as other "contacts" in the area, with one color representing unknown ships and another color for "friendlies."

If a strike is ordered, one of the key pieces of equipment will be the mission-planning screen. It will display the "launch basket," or the space where it is safe for the Providence to fire, and the path of the missiles once they leave the ship.

For the vertical launch missiles, the sequence will be to arm the launch capsule, arm the booster, and then release the interlocks.

The tube-launched missiles have seven indicators all set at "no" during the exercise. On launch day, the indicators will all read "yes," and the vertical launch positions will all read "armed." "Weaps," as Svensson is known, will make his report to the captain, who gives the final word to launch.

If any of the automatic controls fail, manual overrides in the torpedo room would allow the functions to be carried out by hand. Svensson was on board, but in a different job, when the missiles left the Providence for Afghanistan in October 2001. Training, however, has prepared him for the task at hand.

"Since I became weapons officer in December, I've ordered more than 300 missiles 'launched' in exercise scenarios, but none for real," Svensson said Tuesday. "At least, not yet."

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Just because war seems imminent does not mean that the Providence relaxes its routine in non-combat areas. Early Tuesday morning, the engine room crew conducted a drill to simulate a propulsion plant casualty to see how quickly the crew can respond. A couple

of hours later the public address system announced "fire in the engine room," and the crew scrambled to their assigned stations.

Within three minutes, the fire was declared under control. The young crewmen who have unpacked sound-powered phones and protective clothing began the laborious task of returning it to scattered storage lockers. Emergency air breathing masks were wiped down with disinfectant and repacked.

Within 15 minutes came the announcement, "No hot spots in the engineering level," allowing everyone to return to their routine, except the emergency team leaders, who gathered to critique the response.

No matter how quickly the team responds, the chiefs and leading petty officers look for ways to improve the timing.

On surface ships, disaster simulations are announced with the forewarning, "This is a drill." There is no such heads-up on submarines; every drill is treated as the real thing because one of the things being evaluated is the speed of the response.

On a surface ship, fresh air from the deck will clear away the smoke. If the fire continues for a while, crewmen can run away from it. On a submarine, however, there is no place to run and the smoke will quickly accumulate to deadly levels. There is only one hope — to extinguish the fire before it extinguishes the crew.

The chief of the boat, Master Chief Torpedoman Russ Neal, said the submarine force remembers too well the loss of the Thresher in 1963 and the Scorpion in 1968 to flooding, and the fire aboard the Bonfish in the 1980s.

"We have to be able to solve any problem that we might have without anyone showing up to help us," Neal said. "You have to be able to nip any problem in the bud, before it gets serious." b.hamilton@theday.com