

U.S. DENIES ROLE IN BAGHDAD MARKET BOMBING

March 26, 2003

U.S. Defense Department officials on Wednesday said coalition forces did not target a Baghdad neighborhood where explosions reportedly killed at least 14 people and wounded some 30 others.

"There are recent press reports that coalition forces bombed a marketplace in Baghdad. Coalition forces did not target a marketplace nor were any bombs or missiles dropped or fired" in the northern neighborhood of Al-Shaab, Maj. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, vice director for operations for the Joint Staff, told a Pentagon briefing.

"We don't know for a fact whether it was U.S. or Iraqi. And we can't make any assumption on either at this point," he said.

Other explanations

"We'll continue to look and see if we missed anything. But another explanation could be that [Iraqi] triple-A [anti-aircraft artillery fire] or [a] surface-to-air missile that missed its target fell back into the marketplace area," McChrystal added.

According to **Reuters**, the attack came around mid-day Wednesday local time (overnight EST), with two blasts allegedly striking the densely populated northern Baghdad neighborhood of Al-Shaab. Associated Press Television News broadcast images from the area showing a large crater in the street, smoke pouring from a building, damaged cars and bodies wrapped in plastic sheets.

Haneed Dulaimi, head of the Iraqi defense unit for the area, told Reuters no military facilities are located in the neighborhood. Iraqi and Arab television broadcast footage of the attack's aftermath, including protests from angry Iraqis.

A targeted campaign

In a statement Wednesday, **U.S. Central Command** said that coalition aircraft "used precision-guided weapons to target nine Iraqi surface-to-surface missiles and launchers in Baghdad at approximately 3 a.m. EST. The missiles and launchers were placed within a civilian residential area. Most of

the missiles were positioned less than 300 feet from homes. A full assessment of the operation is ongoing."

"Military targets -- such as the missiles and launchers placed in Baghdad -- are a threat to Coalition military forces and will be attacked," the statement went on to say. "While the Coalition goes to great lengths to avoid injury to civilians and damage to civilian facilities, in some cases, such damage is unavoidable when the regime places military weapons near civilian areas."

Bombing attacks earlier Wednesday targeted Iraqi broadcasting and communications facilities, knocking state-run Iraqi satellite television off the air for several hours. Reporters in the city reported smoke rising from the Iraqi television headquarters and the country's information ministry.

Vocabulary

Reuters - (n.) *an organization that provides news to newspapers, television, radio and other media outlets*

U.S. Central Command- (n.) *Headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) is one of nine Unified Combatant Commands assigned operational control of U.S. combat forces. A Unified Combatant Command is composed of forces from two or more services, has a broad and continuing mission, and is normally organized on a geographical basis into regions known as "Areas Of Responsibility" (AORs). USCENTCOM's AOR stretches from the Horn of Africa to Central Asia. (www.centcom.mil)*