

Handout #6 – American Media Accounts

From *The Washington Post*

U.S. Troops Preparing to Seize Airport

By Thomas W. Lippman

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As the military noose tightened around Baghdad with U.S. troops preparing to seize the airport, an upbeat President Bush told cheering Marines in North Carolina this morning that "a vise is closing, and the days of a brutal regime are coming to an end."

Air Force Gen. Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at a Pentagon briefing today that U.S. "forces are on the outskirts of Baghdad right now." Advance units of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division were moving quickly on Saddam International Airport, a few miles west of the city center. Meanwhile, Marines moving on a parallel course were stunned by the speed of their advance, and Marine planners "pulled an all-nighter" figuring out how to take the city itself, Washington Post correspondent Peter Baker reported. After dark fell in Baghdad, the power went off in large portions of the city. Myers said that the U.S. "Central Command has not targeted the power grid" there. He refused to speculate on what may have taken the electricity out.

The Associated Press reported that U.S. forces had begun an assault on the Baghdad airport, but Myers refused to comment on any operations in the city.

Also today, U.S. military officials said they are investigating a possible friendly fire incident involving an F-15 Strike Eagle and ground forces that left one U.S. Army soldier dead and several others injured or missing, correspondent Alan Sipress reported. No other details were released by U.S. Central Command officials in Doha, Qatar.

In a separate incident, Central Command officials acknowledged late today that a U.S. Patriot missile may have inadvertently shot down a U.S. Navy F/A-18C Hornet single-seat fighter over central Iraq on Wednesday evening. Officials, who earlier today said they were examining several possible explanations for the downing, have reported the pilot as missing.

On a visit to the Marine base at Camp Lejeune, N.C., the president hailed Marine contributions to the campaign to bring down the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, which he said is close to achieving its goal. "There's no finer sight than to see 12,000 U.S. Marines and corpsmen," he said, pausing for effect, "unless you happen to be a member of the Iraqi Republican Guard."

The Republican Guard, six divisions of Iraq's best troops, was expected to put up vigorous resistance to U.S. Marine and Army units driving toward the capital, but the relentless pounding by U.S. air strikes and artillery appears to have softened them up sufficiently for the U.S. troops to roll right to the edge of the city. "Having traveled hundreds of miles, we will now go the last two hundred yards," the president said, pledging to "accept nothing less than complete and final victory."

In the daily press briefing at Central Command headquarters in Doha at 7 a.m. (EST), U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Vincent K. Brooks said that "we certainly are in close proximity to Baghdad," but he also warned that tough fighting could still lie ahead.

It is possible that remnants of the Republican Guard divisions that collapsed on Baghdad's southern defense perimeter have pulled back into the capital and are trying to rally for a last stand, he said. "There are still options available to the regime," including the possible use of chemical weapons, Brooks said. "We don't want to be overconfident."

In truth, the U.S. advance toward Baghdad, while surprisingly rapid over the past three days, is not uncontested. A BBC reporter traveling with one Marine unit said the Marines "now feel hunted" because of constant sniping at their column by Iraqi defenders along the road. Other units have encountered mines and scattered shelling from pockets of resistance.

Nevertheless, it appears that the U.S., British and Australian forces are able to move with increasing freedom throughout the country, and Brooks said they are doing so.

He said special operations units are raiding and seizing Iraqi military positions and Baath Party facilities in all regions of the country, including Baghdad itself, to break down the government's remaining ability to organize resistance.

He showed a video of what he said was a Special Forces raid on a palace called Thar Thar, 56 miles outside Baghdad, that he said is "a known residence" of Saddam Hussein and his two sons. Troops were shown landing in a helicopter, blowing the door, rushing into the building and climbing stairs.

No one from Hussein's family was present, Brooks said, but the raiders did recover documents with useful intelligence information, he said.

In the Shiite Muslim holy city of Najaf, about 80 miles south of Baghdad, U.S. troops edged toward the center of town, searching out paramilitary fighters loyal to Saddam Hussein.

U.S. officers said they believed most of the paramilitaries, known as fedayeen, had simply dropped their equipment and fled—but that a few were still in the city putting up a fight.

"Another fedayeen outpost has been eliminated," Col. Joseph Anderson, a brigade commander of the 101st Airborne Division, told the Reuters news agency.

"Ideally, we would kill them all. But if they choose to change their mind and flee, there's not much we can do. But they lost their equipment and their chain of command, so that's OK too."

Brooks said a senior Shiite Muslim theologian with the rank of grand ayatollah, highest in the Shiite hierarchy, who had been held under house arrest by the Iraqis, had ordered local people in Najaf not to interfere with the U.S.-led invasion troops.

"A prominent cleric, Grand Ayatollah Sistani, who had been placed under house arrest by the regime for a considerable period of time, issued a fatwa," or religious decree, Brooks said.

"And it was done this morning, instructing the population to remain calm and to not interfere with coalition actions. We believe this is a very significant turning point and another indicator that the Iraqi regime is approaching its end."

Washington Post correspondent Rick Atkinson, who entered Najaf with the 101st Airborne Brigade, reported finding no evidence that Iraqi defenders had been firing at U.S. troops from the tomb of Ali, one of the most revered shrines of Shiite Islam, as U.S. military officials have said. "My close view of the fight this week revealed no direct fire from the shrine, although certainly fedayeen were sheltering in buildings both north and south of the complex," Atkinson reported.

U.S. military briefers have said that U.S. forces refrained from shooting back at Iraqis firing from the shrine, out of respect for the shrine's religious significance, and they have cited Iraqi defenders' alleged use of the shrine as a firing base as yet another criminal act by a desperate regime.

The sensitivity of the site was brought home to U.S. troops in a dramatic confrontation yesterday that was filmed by CNN. Ayatollah Sistani's home is close to the shrine, and U.S. troops attempting to go there were cut

off by a shouting, waving mob that apparently believed they were headed for the shrine itself. After a tense standoff, the Americans retreated.

From Irbil, in northern Iraq, Washington Post reporter Steve Vogel reported that paratroopers from the Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade dug into defensive fighting positions and prepared for possible combat operations against Iraqi forces.

Task Force Red Devil, a battalion-sized light infantry force, occupied a strategic area outside Irbil Wednesday night following a convoy movement from the brigade's base at the Bashur airfield 40 miles to the northeast.

The action, meant to stabilize the Kurdish-controlled zone, is also intended as a warning to Iraqi forces in the north to surrender or face attack, commanders said.

Thus far, the much-larger Iraqi units in the region are showing no signs of capitulation. Nor were there any signs of movement detected threatening the American force, which is near the demarcation line between Iraq and the autonomous Kurdish zone. The Iraqi forces are across the border, including some units within 20 miles of the U.S. task force, Vogel reported.

Further to the west, the Iraqi V Corps has dug-in positions defending Mosul. The 16th Infantry Division, which the Americans considered a significant threat because of its aggressive commander, has moved much of its force south toward Baghdad during the past two days. The Iraqi 4th Infantry Division has moved in to cover positions north of Mosul. Another Iraqi corps is arrayed further south defending Kirkuk.

In Baghdad itself, heavy bombing rattled the city throughout Wednesday night, but this morning Washington Post correspondent Anthony Shadid reported the city was mostly calm as residents returned to streets and shops during a relative slowdown in the airstrikes. The people of Baghdad know what is coming because they hear foreign radio broadcasts, Shadid said, but there is "remarkably little" military presence in the city other than lightly-armed militias, he said.

Certainly Baghdad residents are not getting the full story from their own information minister, Mohammed Saeed Sahhaf, who held yet another news conference today to deny that allied troops were making any progress against Iraqi defenders.

"They are not even 100 miles [away from Baghdad]. They are not anywhere. They are like a snake moving in the desert. They have no foothold in Iraq," he said. He said Iraqi troops had inflicted heavy casualties on U.S. forces south of the capital. "We buried a lot of them today," he said.

Describing what he said is the Iraqi regime's strategy for thwarting the U.S. and British forces in the country, he said, "We are now trying to exhaust them, making them more tired until our leadership decided the time and method to clean our territory of their desecration."

Iraqi television broadcast a statement attributed to Saddam Hussein urging citizens to resist. "Fight them with your hands. God will disgrace them. God is great," the statement said.

In Brussels, Secretary of State Colin Powell met with NATO allies to discuss the governance and reconstruction of postwar Iraq. The task of rebuilding "will require the entire international community to join together," he said at a news conference.

Powell acknowledged the "heated disagreements" over the war that divided the alliance, but said all members now share an obligation to put aside their differences to give the people of Iraq the help they will need.

Article #2 – Newshour Article, April 3

RAPID COALITION MOVEMENT TOWARD BAGHDAD

U.S. troops surrounded Saddam International airport about six miles from Baghdad Thursday and were massing at the "gateways" of the city, according to U.S. military officials and reporters traveling with coalition forces. Embedded New York Times correspondent Dexter Filkins reported Thursday that U.S. tanks and Marine units moving at full-speed "chased away a Republican Guard division this morning and raced almost unimpeded toward the outskirts of Baghdad."

As coalition forces converged from the southeast and southwest, reports suggested that some Iraqi soldiers shed their military uniforms and fell back into the city.

Saddam Hussein's regime has warned that U.S.-led troops will face street-by-street urban combat when they arrive in Baghdad. Militia forces inside the city have reportedly outfitted pickup trucks with machine guns in preparation of an invasion.

U.S. military officials said the rapid advance to within the outskirts of Baghdad does not mean that an invasion is imminent.

"We are getting closer and closer," said Navy Capt. Frank Thorp, a Central Command spokesman. "We will be in Baghdad within a matter of hours from when we decide to go."

Iraqi artillery fire was reported around the edges of the city Thursday afternoon as coalition planes continued to bomb targets inside the capital.

The Iraqi information minister denied reports that coalition forces are closing in on the city and accused the United States of killing civilians with its bombing.

"They are nowhere near Baghdad," Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf told reporters at a press conference. "These criminals dropped cluster bombs on the Douri residential area of Baghdad, and 14 people -- men, women and children -- were martyred and 66 were wounded."

Iraqi officials have taken journalists to city morgues to view the bodies of civilians they say have been killed by U.S. attacks.

Special forces units are also reportedly conducting raids in and around Baghdad including an operation Wednesday night in which U.S. soldiers, ferried by helicopters, entered and inspected one of Saddam Hussein's palaces about 55 miles outside of Baghdad.

U.S. Central Command spokesman General Vincent Brooks said the soldiers found the palace unoccupied but seized documents. Brooks said the coalition also raided a palace close to the airport on the edge of Baghdad. Brooks cautioned that the positive news does not yet indicate victory over Saddam Hussein's forces. "There are still options that are open to the regime, including weapons of mass destruction. We take that very seriously," Brooks said.