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US MISSILES RAIN OVER BAGHDAD PLOT AGAINST BUSH SPARKS STRIKE AT INTELLIGENCE HQ

Author: *Paul Quinn-Judge, Globe Staff*

Article Text:

WASHINGTON -- US warships launched a barrage of Tomahawk **cruise missiles** against Iraqi intelligence headquarters yesterday in what President **Clinton** called a "carefully planned strike" in retaliation for an alleged Iraqi attempt to assassinate former President Bush in Kuwait in April. The **cruise-missile** strike was "a message to those who engage in state-sponsored terrorism," a grim-faced **Clinton** said in a hastily arranged TV address from the Oval Office yesterday evening. "From the first days of our revolution, American security has depended on the clarity of this message: Don't tread on us."

There was no official US report of damage or casualties. An Iraqi government spokesman claimed "many civilian casualties" but did not give details. Journalists in Baghdad said a large blaze could be seen 2 miles from the center of the Iraqi capital in the vicinity of Iraqi intelligence headquarters.

Reuters news agency quoted Lt. Col. Akram Mohammed Mahamoud, a civil defense worker, who said three civilians had been killed. He identified two of them as Layla al-Attar, a celebrated Iraqi artist, and her husband.

Officials in Washington refused to rule out further raids if needed.

The **missile** attack, which struck Baghdad around 1:45 a.m. today, followed what **Clinton** described as "compelling evidence" presented to him on Thursday by Attorney General Janet Reno and CIA Director R. James Woolsey that the Iraqi intelligence service had plotted to kill Bush in Kuwait City with a massive car bomb.

"We should not be surprised by such deeds, coming, as they do, from a regime like Saddam Hussein's, which has ruled by atrocity, slaughtered its own people, invaded two neighbors, attacked others, and engaged in chemical and environmental warfare," **Clinton** said.

"But this attempt at revenge by a tyrant, against the leader of the world coalition that defeated him in war, is particularly loathsome and cowardly."

"We could not and have not let such action against our nation go unanswered," **Clinton** said.

Clinton made it clear that the raid on Iraq should be taken as a warning to anyone else planning attacks against the United States: "We will combat terrorism. We will deter aggression. We will protect our people."

The president's words were particularly significant at a time when US officials are trying to determine whether the Sudanese government or any of a number of Islamic extremist organizations were involved in the alleged plot uncovered last week to destroy the United Nations headquarters and other buildings in New York.

By launching the **missile** attack, the United States was exercising its right of self defense under article 51 of the UN Charter, **Clinton** said. The United States would call for a meeting of the UN Security Council today to "expose Iraq's crime," he added.

Neither **Clinton**, Defense Secretary Les Aspin nor Gen. Colin L. Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who briefed journalists immediately after the president's televised address, had any information on the degree of damage on the building or the number of casualties.

Two US warships, the guided **missile** frigate USS Peterson and the cruiser Chancellorsville -- one in the Red Sea and one in the Persian Gulf -- fired **23** Tomahawk **cruise missiles** at the Iraqi intelligence service

building, Powell said. A large, walled complex, the intelligence headquarters had been hit during the Gulf War but was later rebuilt, Powell added.

A 24th **missile** that was to have been fired malfunctioned, Powell said. The **missiles** were launched at 4:22 p.m. EDT and landed approximately 80 minutes later, **Clinton** said.

About the time the **missiles** were launched, **Clinton** telephoned Bush at his summer estate in Kennebunkport, Maine, to inform him of the action being taken in retaliation for the alleged Iraqi plot on his life. Secretary of State Warren Christopher flew to the coastal town to brief Bush on details of the investigation.

The former president, reached by the Associated Press at his home in Kennebunkport, declined comment. "I'm not in the interview business, but thank you very much for calling," he said.

In theory a **missile** strike of this magnitude should destroy the site completely, officials say. **Missile** strikes earlier this year, however, proved less effective than hoped.

The alleged Iraqi plot was due to be carried out during a visit by Bush and other former senior members of his administration to Kuwait. The visit had been arranged by the Kuwait royal family in gratitude for the defeat of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War.

A preliminary report on the alleged assassination attempt, written by a senior member of the CIA's Counter Terrorism Center in mid-May, had cast some doubt on the Kuwaiti claim of a plot, saying the Kuwaitis might have presented an unrelated Iraqi terror operation as an attempt against Bush's life as a way of reminding the West of the continuing threat from Saddam Hussein.

Clinton, however, told television viewers last night that a "thorough and independent investigation" left no doubt in his mind that the attack had been carried out by Iraqi intelligence and was ordered by Saddam Hussein. This appeared to mean that further investigation had, in fact, proven the Kuwaiti claim.

After **Clinton**'s address the White House released color photographs of the firing device found in a Toyota Landcruiser that was to have been detonated as Bush's motorcade passed. US officials said that the vehicle contained components "found only in devices linked to Iraq." The 176-pound bomb hidden in the Landcruiser was examined by FBI experts, who determined it was "built by the same person or persons who built or modified bombs previously recovered from the Iraqis," officials said.

The car bomb was said to be capable of devastating a 400-yard radius from the center of detonation.

An intelligence officer briefing reporters said that one of the men arrested in Kuwait, Wali Ghazali, an Iraqi national, has been identified as "the shooter tasked specifically to kill President Bush."

One point of the now-rejected earlier report, however, may remain relevant: CIA analysts said that Saddam Hussein was confident that he could survive, unscathed, any retaliation that the United States might care to throw at him in the event of a terrorist outrage.

Clinton said he had briefed congressional leaders on the attack, and rank- and-file members were quick to declare their support for his action.

Rep. J. Joseph Moakley, Democrat from Boston, said "Nobody likes violence, but I think we've got to show those people we're not going to take that anymore. I think it was justified. Some people felt we should have gone all the way to Baghdad when we were over there. The president said we did it because they were advocating Bush's assassination. I can buy that. We live in violent times, unfortunately."

Rep. Peter I. Blute, Republican from Shrewsbury, said he was "fully supportive" of the bombing, saying, "I think state-sponsored terrorism such as an attempt on the life of a former president has to be met with a strong response."

Caption:

AP PHOTO / Gen. Colin Powell shows the location where US **missiles** struck Iraqi intelligence headquarters in Baghdad yesterday.(COLOR)

PHOTO MAP

Memo:

STRIKE ON BAGHDAD Michael Putzel and John Aloysius Farrell, both of the Globe staff, contributed to this report from Washington.

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