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RAID ON IRAQ

RAID ON IRAQ; U.S. AND ALLIED PLANES HIT IRAQ, BOMBING MISSILE SITES IN SOUTH IN REPLY TO HUSSEIN'S DEFIANCE

By R. W. APPLE Jr.,

WASHINGTON, Jan. 13— Warplanes from the United States, France and Britain bombed missile sites in southern Iraq today, two years after the allies claimed to have decisively defeated President Saddam Hussein in the Persian Gulf war and just a week before President Bush is scheduled to leave office.

The 30-minute night attack, limited in scope and in duration, was clearly intended to deliver a political message of allied resolve in the face of Iraqi defiance and not a crushing military blow.

About 80 strike aircraft and about 30 support planes took part. No economic targets like power stations or warehouses were hit, nor did bombs rain on airfields or on major cities as they did during the war. Iraq Offers to Halt Incursions

Having withstood a merciless pounding in 1991, it was not clear why Mr. Hussein would buckle in his resolve in the face of much less punishment now, especially since the attack took place in remote areas, far from the view of most Iraqi citizens.

Indeed, he breathed defiance in a broadcast tonight, urging the "falcons" of his air force to fight the allies "the way you fought God's enemies before."

At the same time, Iraq offered to halt its raids into Kuwait. They have been taking place for several days and were a violation of United Nations resolutions. Iraq has also deployed missile batteries in forbidden areas and fired an Iraqi missile at an American plane, actions the United States has described as brazen provocations by Baghdad. 1,250 Troops Sent to Kuwait

In a further warning to Mr. Hussein that he could not continue to flout the will of the United Nations, Mr. Bush announced the dispatch of a battalion-sized task force, composed of about 1,250 American troops, to neighboring Kuwait, where they will act as a deterrent to further Iraqi incursions.

"I would think that soon Saddam Hussein would understand that we mean what we say and that we back it up," the President said in a meeting with reporters, brushing aside any suggestion that it was improper for him to launch an attack with so little time left in office. He implied, and officials in Paris and London said more bluntly, that if the Iraqi leader did not mend his ways, there would be more attacks.

"If he infringes again, he must expect us to retaliate again," Prime Minister John Major of Britain said. "We have made it clear to him that we will certainly do that."

President-elect Bill Clinton, who was briefed on the raids and supported them, said in Little Rock, Ark., that "it was the right decision, done in the right way." He added in an interview that he hoped Mr. Hussein would change his policies so a new leaf in relations between Baghdad and Washington could be turned on Jan. 20.

All the strike aircraft, which operated mainly from airfields in Saudi Arabia and from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk in the Persian Gulf, returned safely, and there were no allied casualties, Pentagon officials said. Marlin Fitzwater, the White House spokesman, said early reports indicated that "the mission was accomplished." 'Systematically Destroyed'

A Navy Intruder pilot, Comdr. Rick Hess of the 52d Attack Squadron, based at Whidbey Island, Wash., said the missiles he had struck, which were in position to imperil allied aircraft patrolling the air-exclusion zone in southern Iraq, had been

"systematically destroyed."

United States pilots, who were joined by British airmen in Tornados and Frenchmen at the controls of Mirages, said they flew through skies lit by the orange splashes of anti-aircraft fire. Several said they made double passes over the targets before dropping their bombs to make sure they had correctly identified the targets.

Reports from the Kitty Hawk said at least four surface-to-air missiles had been fired at the American planes. But they were apparently launched at random, without the benefit of the crucial guidance supplied by radar.

Intelligence specialists and military analysts said most of the missiles based in southern Iraq were obsolete and could easily be replaced by more modern Soviet-built weapons that are kept in reserve near Baghdad. But the allied bombs also hit control bunkers and radar units, using high-speed anti-radiation missiles that home in on radar beacons, and that may prove to be of more significance.

"This takes out his ability to control his aircraft south of the 32d parallel," where the air-exclusion zone begins, exulted Comdr. Kevin Thomas, commander of an A-18 Hornet squadron on the Kitty Hawk. "It was like a big laser light show."

The troops headed for Kuwait will be drawn from the Army First Cavalry Division, based at Fort Hood, Tex., and will join 300 special operations force troops who are already there some time later this month. The division saw extensive action in the Vietnam war and in the campaign in the gulf.

For Mr. Bush, it was an oddly aggressive start to his final week in office. Never in recent American history has an outgoing President initiated a military attack so close to his date of departure; more often, lame ducks in the White House have sought to make peace. For example, Harry S. Truman left the Oval Office in the midst of talks on ending the Korean War, and Lyndon B. Johnson ordered a bombing halt in a vain effort to end the war in Vietnam.

But Mr. Bush, who according to his aides had been weighing an armed response to Mr. Hussein for months, said he had no reservations at all about the course he had decided upon.

"You got to do what you have to do," the President said, "and there should be no question about that. I'm President until the 20th, and I will run the foreign policy and conduct these -- make these kinds of decisions as long as I am President."

The Pentagon said the attacks in Iraq, which won the support of virtually all major figures on Capitol Hill and most leaders abroad, began at 6:45 P.M., Baghdad time, 10:45 A.M. Eastern time. Laser-Guided Bombs

In addition to the anti-radar missiles, the allied planes dropped laser-guided bombs as well as conventional munitions, senior officers said.

Conspicuous by their absence from the strike force were planes from Arab nations, which took part in the gulf war. According to some accounts, Saudi refueling planes did play a support role, orbiting just outside Iraqi airspace. Some Arab leaders have voiced skepticism about the course of recent allied policy in the gulf.

Gen. Joseph Hoar, commander of the United States Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base, near Tampa, Fla., who had overall charge of the operation, said all the targets were below or close to the 32d parallel. He said they included radar sites at Tallil air base near Nasiriya, and also at Samawa, Najaf and Al Amara. Mobile missile sites in the general area of Tallil and Basra were also struck, according to the general. Saudi Sensitivities

General Hoar said during a briefing in Florida that he had monitored progress in the raids over an open phone line to the United States commander on the spot, Maj. Gen. James Record of the Air Force. General Record was reportedly in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, but United States officials said as little as possible about that country because of Saudi sensitivities.

The strike force included F-117 Stealth bombers, F-16's, F-15's and F-18's, as well as tankers, Awacs radar planes, reconnaissance planes and helicopters.

"It was well crafted, a pin-point strike," a briefer at the Pentagon said, speaking under ground rules that forbade reporters to identify him. "It was designed to send a crystal-clear message."

But Defense Secretary Dick Cheney said on the "MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour" that "the restrained and modest option" had been chosen to deliver that message. Other options existed, including target lists of much wider scope. It was not clear why

those options had been rejected. Missiles Were Not Returned

Last Saturday, the White House said Iraq had "backed down" in response to an ultimatum by dispersing its missiles that had been placed in the southern zone, where allied planes patrol to enforce a ban on Iraqi military flights. They presented it as a victory in the latest showdown with Mr. Hussein.

But the missiles were never returned to their original bases, as the allies had demanded. When asked about this, the Bush administration called it a mere technicality and said the missiles were no longer a threat.

Today, Mr. Fitzwater told a different story. "After initially responding to the terms of the Jan. 6 warning," he said, "Iraq violated its requirements and the coalition is acting to restore an environment that poses no threat to coalition aircraft." In between, there was no major change in the status of the missiles in the South.

But Mr. Hussein angered the President and his allies by sending missiles to a northern zone where they are also forbidden and dispatching troops into territory that the allies have given to Kuwait, where they took back weapons that had been seized in 1991. Notable among those weapons were several Chinese-made Silkworm missiles.

Map/Chart shows cites of the following initiatives: The force attacked military targets below or close to the 32d parallel, the northern border of the southern no-flight zone. About 35 planes from the U.S.S. Kitty Hawk took part in an attack coordinated by U.S., French and British forces yesterday, beginning at 6:45 P.M. (10:45 A.M. Eastern time). Targets included radar stations at Tallil Air Base near Nasiriya, Al Amara, Najaf and Samawa. About 1,250 ground troops are being sent to Kuwait to deter further Iraqi incursions. (pg. A1) Chart of principal airplanes used by US and its allies in strike against Iraq yesterday. (Source: Jane's All the World's Aircraft)