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U.S. Deploying 36,000 Troops To Defend Kuwait From Iraq

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Kathy Lewis
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WASHINGTON - Pentagon officials said Sunday that 36,000 troops are being deployed to the Persian Gulf and 16,000 more are being put on alert to counter Iraq's military buildup along the Kuwaiti border.

Iraqi soldiers continued to amass near the border - only 1.2 miles from the demilitarized zone - despite the U.S. troop buildup and tough words from American officials.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher urged Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "in the strongest terms" not to subject his people to the devastation they would face after an invasion.

"He's been thoughtless about his people in the past, but this would be just madness for him to do that," Mr. Christopher said on ABC's This Week with David Brinkley.

"They would pay a horrendous price if they were foolish enough to miscalculate again."

President **Clinton** canceled plans to return to Camp David late Sunday afternoon and instead remained at the White House for a meeting with his national security advisers.

U.S. officials said Mr. Hussein has moved about 64,000 soldiers near the border. The soldiers include two divisions of Republican Guards, who moved to the border region late last week.

The first of 4,000 Army soldiers began flying to the region Sunday, and shipboard units of Marines took up positions in the northern Persian Gulf. Also on Sunday, Mr. **Clinton** ordered more aircraft to the region.

Still uncertain about Mr. Hussein's intentions, administration officials spent much of Sunday emphasizing that the United States is far better prepared this time to deal with an invasion.

But they dropped earlier cautionary comments about downplaying the situation.

Defense Secretary William Perry said military equipment in position in Kuwait, a swift military response and other lessons learned from the Persian Gulf War all contribute to a stronger position this time than in August 1990, when Iraq captured Kuwait in a matter of hours.

Administration officials also would not rule out the possibility that the United States would take the war all the **way to Baghdad**, the Iraqi capital, and overthrow Mr. Hussein if he decides to again invade Kuwait.

"I'm not going to go into the details of what a military mission might be if we have to face that fact, but I can tell you this:

We're not going to repeat the mistakes of the past, either," White House chief of staff Leon Panetta said on NBC's Meet the Press.

Interviewed on CBS' Face the Nation, Mr. Perry said the rapid deployment of U.S. forces is designed to make it clear to Mr. Hussein that the United States is prepared to "respond with robust force and that we would be very successful in that response."

The **Bush** administration was **criticized** by some lawmakers for ending the Gulf War too soon. At the time, former President George **Bush** said the mandate was never to take the ground war to Baghdad and that the Arab coalition would have quickly dissolved had the United States pursued such a course.

Mr. Christopher on Sunday refused to criticize that decision and instead welcomed the "various voices" of

congressional support for Mr. **Clinton's** actions.

But former 1992 independent presidential candidate Ross Perot on Sunday accused Mr. **Clinton** of using the Iraqi situation for his own political purposes.

"We're about to have an election, right? This is the old game.

The first war didn't get him a bump in the polls, now let's try a second one," Mr. Perot said on Face the Nation.

An administration official, who requested anonymity, said, "That's so silly. It doesn't merit a response."

Mr. Perot, who has made similar charges about Mr. **Clinton's** political motivations in Haiti and Bosnia--Herzegovina, also said that the president had delayed reporting the Iraqi troop movements until he considered it "an optimum time."

Though the troop buildup in southern Iraq gives Mr. Hussein superior troop strength in the region, administration officials said the U.S. forces would be able to defeat any invasion.

"We're moving a lot of forces in there very rapidly at the present time. It will be some time, I think, before his forces are ready," Mr. Christopher said of Mr. Hussein's military.

Mr. Perry said he didn't think Iraq could invade before week's end.

"If the Iraqis enter Kuwait, they will be soundly defeated," he said. "I don't want to try to forecast a day-by-day account of how a battle would go, because that would depend on how quickly they decided to go in, how far a build-up had proceeded."

But he warned that the outcome would be "just as certain this time as it was last time."

The deployment numbers released by Defense Department officials Sunday night are a sharp increase over those announced on Saturday.

On Sunday morning, Mr. Perry said the United States had dispatched 2,000 Marines, squadrons of tactical aircraft - including F-15s, F-16s, A-10s and AWACS - to Saudi Arabia, a carrier battle group and destroyers and Aegis ships with Tomahawk land-attack missiles to the Persian Gulf.

Almost all of the 18,000-man Kuwaiti army was being sent to the Iraqi border as well.

White House officials said they do not know whether Iraq will invade, but they said the United States can't afford to take any chances.

"We're not sure why he's doing it. It could be an invasion. It could be just bluster. It could be a threat, but, frankly, we can't take anything for granted here," Mr. Panetta said.

"So, that's why we are moving a major force into place."

Mr. Christopher said, "You know, in 1990 he proved himself to be a master of miscalculation. He may be about the same thing again.

But the best thing for us to do is simply to examine the facts on the ground."

A defense official, who requested anonymity, said the United States also is watching for any potential amassing of troops in northern Iraq. But so far, they have no indication that is happening.

PHOTO(S): (Associated Press) A soldier from the 24th Infantry Division takes a last look Sunday at the Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, Ga., before boarding an MD-11 aircraft bound for Kuwait. CHART(S): MAP(S): / (DMN) Military buildup in the Mideast.

Washington Bureau of The Dallas Morning News

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