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Monday, September 30, 2002

U.S. forces build up around Kos Iraq as world awaits next movin S

KUWAIT CITY, Kuwait (AP) - U.S. Marines rode massive green hovercrafts last week onto the Kuwaiti shore the same way they did 12 years ago in the opening days of the Gulf War.

Instead of meeting hostile Iraqi troops, they joined Kuwaiti allies for a three-week exercise in the desert.

Fighter jets from the USS Abraham Lincoln flew overhead, not part of the exercise, but on their way to enforce a "no-fly" zone in southern Iraq.

Engineers in Qatar, meanwhile, are finishing a new forward command post for the U.S. Central Command — the men and women who would lead a war in Iraq. They're expected to arrive in November to direct another exercise from the lowprofile buildings camouflaged as sand dunes.

Special operations forces have put up tents at a new base in Djibouti, across the Red Sea from Yemen. In Kuwait, part of an armored infantry brigade from Fort Benning, Ga., sits within 28 miles of the Iraqi border — a 10hour drive to Baghdad.

U.S. military spokesmen insist the exercises and deployments are routine, or part of the war against terrorism. But there is little doubt these forces could be used in an invasion of Iraq to remove President Saddam Hussein.

During a visit to Kuwait last week, Central Command's Gen. Tommy Franks said his men 'are prepared to do whatever we are asked to do.'

While the governments of Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia refuse to discuss military matters, their citizens bear witness daily to the U.S. military presence in the region.

The Kuwaiti government ordered gas masks for all civil servants and authorized their sale to civilians. Troops have

rolled out Patriot missile batter-

ies to defend against possible Scud missile attacks.

"From what we're seeing, it looks like something is going to happen, but it's hard to know exactly what," said Bader al-Otibi, a government worker who was taken prisoner during the Iraqi occupation in 1990. "I'm against war, but I'm also against Saddam."

Along the featureless, rolling desert that is shared by Kuwait and Iraq as a border, unarmed U.N. monitors stand guard in a 10-mile-wide demilitarized zone. An electric fence and anti-tank trenches mark it, but there's little to slow an invading force.

> From what we're seeing, it looks like something is going to happen, but it's hard to know exactly what.

> > — Bader al-Oitibi government worker

Experts differ on the number of troops needed to invade Iraq - estimates vary from 50,000 to 350,000, depending on the strategy. Deployments already planned would bring the number of troops in the region to near 50,000 by November, which coincides with a U.S.proposed deadline for Iraq to comply with U.N. resolutions.

U.S. military personnel, with their close-cropped hair, military-issue luggage and incongruous civilian clothes, are already in hotels in Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait.

F-16 fighter jets roar over Qatar's capital, Doha, and vans full of troops shuttle between

TURKEY

□ Incirlik Air Base

IRAQ

the 5th Fleet's headquarter Juffair, Bahrain, and the inte tional airport, where the l Navy maintains a special ter nal for aircraft that fly to be USS Abraham Lincoln a

other regional bases. The aircraft carrier l Harry Truman, leading at battle group, is scheduled to within striking distance of in November to replace the U George Washington by group, Pentagon officials bringing the total U.S. 18 forces in the area to more 20,000 sailors and 255 aircraft

The Marines, in Kuwait is the "Eager Mace" exerc make up the 11th Maria Expeditionary amphibious invasion force 2,200 troops. A similar fi accompanies most carrier be groups, meaning 6,600 Mains will be in the region November.

The U.S. Air Force keep 6,000 personnel and an unis closed number of planes Saudi Arabia's Prince Sultar Base; 1,700 troops at Incir Turkey; and 3,300 at the Udeid Air Base in Qatar, o rently home to refueling pl Several thousand more U.S. Force members operate fr two air bases in Kuwait a hundreds of ground suppowerkers are in the United An Emirates and Oman.

Part of the 3rd Brigade, Infantry Division from F Benning is wrapping up an tine six-month tour as Kuwaii defenders, waiting to be relieve in November by the Brigade from Fort Stewart, Ga a Central Command spokesn said. A typical armored infant brigade numbers between 2,50 and 3,000 troops.

The Fort Benning troops, like the USS George Washington bat tle group's sailors, could have their stay extended, military spokesperson said.

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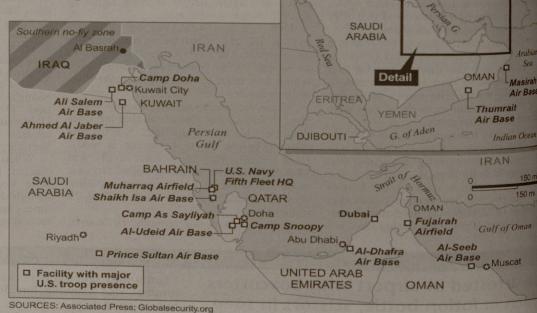
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Beefing up in the Mideast

U.S. friendly nations in the Persian Gulf are home to a plethora of military installations designed to provide U.S. enemies with an ever-present threat of fast action. Scheduled deployments will bring the population of U.S. troops in the region close to 50,000 by November.



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