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Bomber

Continued from page 1

our land and we will follow the enemy into its land."

Thousands of Arab volunteers ready for martyrdom have been coming to Iraq since the start of the war, Ramadan said. A prolonged stay of U.S. and British forces in Iraq could turn the country into a magnet for Muslim militants seeking a new jihad.

"If there is an American occupation, then Iraq will definitely move to the top of the list of jihad for the international network of Islamists," John Voll, an Islamic affairs from Georgetown University, told The Associated Press from Washington.

Thousands of foreign Muslims joined the Afghan mujahedeen in their fight against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. After that, some

went on to continue the fight in other trouble spots such as the Balkans and Chechnya.

More recently, the U.S. military campaign against Afghanistan's Taliban government lured a ragtag army of thousands, mainly from neighboring Pakistan, vowing jihad against the Americans.

Magnus Ranstorp, a terrorism expert at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, said the main focal point of jihad fighters today is Chechnya, which he called "today's Afghanistan."

"Iraq also can become another Afghanistan, but with a huge twist because of the different regional factors," he said.

The bomber who killed the Americans had posed as a taxi driver, pulled up close to a roadblock north of Najaf, and waved to the troops for help. He blew up his vehicle when they approached. The names of

the four Americans were not released, although they were from the Army's 1st Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division.

Coalition officials said it would not change the way the U.S.-led forces proceed — except that they would be more cautious in vulnerable locations like checkpoints.

"It's just a reminder that there are some very desperate people out there. We've got to be on our toes," Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Sunday.

Maj. Gen Buford Blount, commander of the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division, said troops would probably have to restrict the movements of Iraqis and shut down roads while troops move through.

"That's unfortunate but it's going to be necessary to ensure the safety of our soldiers," he said.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said Sunday he didn't know anything about Islamic militants "flooding across the borders into Iraq."

"There's no question but that a terrorist that's willing to die can kill other people. We've seen that here in the United States," Rumsfeld said. "Is it going to change the outcome? Not a chance."

Iraqi TV praised the Najaf attacker and said he wanted "to teach the enemy a lesson in the manner used by our Palestinian brothers."

Saddam is admired by Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in part because he has doled out more than \$35 million to the families of civilians, gunmen and suicide attackers killed since fighting began in Israel about 30 months ago.

Rally

Continued from page 1

"This is a just war, a defensive war being fought to preserve our way of life,"

Stadelmann said.

The stiff opposition American forces are encountering in Iraq has not dampened the resolve of the protesters, who said they will see the war through to victory.

"It's our duty right now to support our president and our troops," said Jeff Graham, a sophomore management major. "Freedom isn't free, and (President George W. Bush) has told us that there will be sacrifices."

Kurdish fighters move toward key oil city as Iraq repositions

By Brian Murphy
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TAQTAQ, Iraq — Kurdish fighters took control Sunday of more territory left by Iraqi forces withdrawing toward the major oil center of Kirkuk, apparently to tighten defenses around northern Iraq.

The nearly 10-mile advance by the U.S.-backed Kurdish militia was unchallenged but slowed by dense mine fields left by Saddam Hussein's troops, said Ares Abdullah, a Kurdish commander. It was the third significant shift since Thursday in the front line separating Iraqi forces from the U.S.-backed Kurds. Each Iraqi move since last week allowed Kurds to move closer to Kirkuk — the nation's No. 2 oil-producing region and considered by Kurds as an essential part of their ethnic lands.

In the hill country south of Taqtaq — about 35 miles southeast of the Kurdish administrative capital Irbil — Kurdish forces can clearly see the glow of Kirkuk and its oil fields about 15 miles away.

"Our goal is now closer," said Abdullah. The two main northern cities under Baghdad rule — Kirkuk and Mosul — have come under relentless attack from U.S. warplanes. The reason for the Iraqi repositioning is unclear. But Kurdish commanders believe Iraqi troops have been seriously battered and need reinforcements.

Iraqi forces could also be rearranging units since the Pentagon apparently does not yet have enough strength in the Western-protected Kurdish zone for a ground assault. Plans for a northern offensive were crippled after Turkey refused to allow U.S. troops to cross the border.

The Kurdish advance in the Taqtaq region came less than 24 hours after its forces fell back along another front: conceding more than 12 miles along the main road from Irbil to Kirkuk. Iraqi gunners have now dug in just outside Altun Kupri — also known as Perdeh — about 27 miles

from Kirkuk.

Iraqi troops also pulled back east of Kirkuk on Thursday.

"We cannot move against them unless American planes bomb the positions," said Farhad Yunus Ahmad, leader of a front-line Kurdish unit near Altun Kupri, where Iraqi gunners control access to an important bridge.

Kurdish fighters spent Sunday clearing mines and poking through abandoned Iraqi posts. They carried away war souvenirs and anything with possible value: insulated electrical cables, helmets, vintage gas masks, casing from anti-aircraft artillery.

"We would welcome the Americans, but they do not come. We face this danger alone."

— Abdullah Hamza Salim
 Team leader, Kurdish sapper

Kamal Aziz Mohammad sat on the dried mud and smoked a cigarette surrounded by his haul. Crows picked at food left by the soldiers. Some puppies — perhaps left by the soldiers — romped through the deserted camp.

"They didn't leave much, but we'll take what we can," said Mohammad as he put on an Iraqi helmet, grabbed two others and a piece of camouflage netting.

The Iraqi outposts seemed little more than rough camps. Small cinderblock and mud shelters dotted a clearing — likely a muddy quagmire in rain and a dustbowl in the heat. Roofs were apparently tarps that were removed in the withdrawal. Dozens of

positions were dug out apparently for tanks or other vehicles.

At one site — less than 1.2 miles from the new Iraqi line — the military jetsam included lists of patrol schedules, times of radio blackout periods and authorization to fix communications equipment. Other items were more intriguing: a mud-encrusted dress shoe and a small wooden sign covered with shiny red "Happy Birthday" wrapping paper that could have been an identification symbol.

A section from the March 10 issue of the Iraqi military newspaper, featured a patriotic poem that ended with the lines: "The enemy will tire, and Saddam will remain. You will satisfy all the Arabs with your victory."

A newspaper photo of Saddam, with bright orange tape around the edges, blew in the wind near a discarded bottle of Pepsi. In what appeared to be the commander's quarters — where the sink was ripped from the wall and taken by the Iraqi forces — a sign advised, "Forgiveness is the greatest revenge."

Down the road, a team of Kurdish sappers pulled up about one mine every minute. In just five hours of work, they cleared more than 230 anti-personnel mines and 77 anti-tank mines, said the team leader, Abdullah Hamza Salim.

The smaller mines — black and about the size of an ashtray — were piled in a hole to be exploded. The light olive anti-tank mines, as big as a layer cake, would be destroyed in remote trenches, Salim said.

The team worked with no protective gear and used sticks to pry up the mines. At least two sappers have been injured since Saturday.

Salim said they had received some mine-clearance training but wondered why U.S. experts have not offered help.

"We would welcome the Americans, but they do not come," he said. "We face this danger alone."



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