

Is Bush planning to use nuclear weapons?

by Joseph Brewda

The destruction of an Iraqi civilian air raid shelter in Baghdad on Feb. 13 by a Tomahawk cruise missile, is the latest indication of the state of mind gripping George Bush and the U.S. political and military command. The premeditated attack which left several hundred women and children dead, could have had no military purpose except to generate terror, and to lend credence to Bush administration spokesmen's assertions that U.S. coalition forces might use nuclear weapons against Iraq.

The shelter is located in a residential area of Amariyah, and had been used nightly by especially women and children and the elderly. Even BBC's on-site correspondent, Alan Little, was clearly shaken by witnessing the scene around the shelter immediately after the bombing. He said that, for him and his fellow Western journalists, what they saw were "the most graphic scenes of grief and despair that we have ever seen in our lives." Civil defense volunteers recruited from the Iraqi Popular Army, grown men, were standing by the wreckage, weeping uncontrollably, Little reported. "People are incoherent with grief." One man screamed that 11 members of his family had been in the shelter.

"This will send a shockwave through Baghdad," Little added, because the population had been convinced that these shelters were impregnable to even a nuclear attack. In the first hours or days, there will be a mood of terror in Baghdad, because people will think that no area is safe. Left unsaid is that most of this terrorized civilian population have relatives in the Iraqi military. Some Washington observers feel that the possibly demoralizing effect this murder might have on Iraqi troops is one of the major reasons why the U.S. is systematically targeting civilians.

Since the war began on Jan. 16, some 70,000 U.S.-led bombing sorties have killed and wounded possibly several

hundred thousand civilians, according to numerous eyewitness accounts from several nations as of Feb. 14. Up to now, these reports have largely been censored from the U.S. press.

Conditioning Americans for mass death

Possibly as shocking as the incident itself are the justifications for the mass murder made by U.S. and British government spokesmen. "It's a command and control facility," Pentagon operations chief Lt. Gen. Thomas Kelly insisted in a press conference hours after the attack, without providing any supporting evidence. Kelly claimed that coalition intelligence had detected military personnel moving into and out of the building the previous evening. All Western reporters on the scene, many of whom have regularly expressed hostility toward Iraq, have reported that there is no evidence that the clearly marked shelter was used for any military purposes whatsoever.

"We don't know why civilians were at that location," White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater stated in another press conference that day, "but we do know that Saddam Hussein does not share our value for the sanctity of human life." Fitzwater added, "He time and time again has shown a willingness to sacrifice civilian lives and property that further his war aims," claiming that the site was really a military bunker and command and control center masquerading as a civilian shelter.

Defense Secretary Richard Cheney repeated the claim that the shelter was really a military facility in disguise, and also threatened that Iraq was hiding military equipment at its ancient Babylonian historic sites. "Clearly, he's demonstrated repeatedly a willingness to use his population and archeological artifacts in an effort to shield and protect his military equipment," Cheney said.

Showing a little more honesty than their American coun-

ins, some British spokesmen have defiantly asserted that bombings like those of the Amariyah shelter are "necessary," in order to keep up the pressure on the Iraqi population to get rid of Saddam Hussein. In an editorial on the incident in the Feb. 14 London *Daily Telegraph*, editor Max Hastings wrote that "The misery being inflicted upon the people of Iraq by the destruction of infrastructure and vital services is thought likely to bring Saddam's removal closer." Therefore, the world "must accept such episodes" as occurred at Amariyah, even if the results are "regrettable."

Meanwhile, in Germany, various commentators sadly noted that the date of the attack, was the 46th anniversary of the first Allied bombing raid on Dresden which ultimately killed 135,000 civilians.

Despite U.S. justifications, the targeting of civilians has been stated policy as far back as September when then-U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff Michael C. Dugan publicly outlined coalition strategy. "The cutting edge would be downtown Baghdad," Dugan told the *Washington Post* on Sept. 16, when listing what would be America's prime targets. "This bombing would not be nibbling at the edges. If I want to hurt you, it would be at home, not out in the woods someplace."

Options in ground war

Contrary to U.S. propaganda hype, the war is not going well from the U.S. standpoint. Despite the massive bombing raids, the Iraqi military is still significantly intact, and there is no indication that Iraq will capitulate as the Bush administration had apparently miscalculated that they would in their pre-war planning. Sooner or later, if Bush stays on the present war course, the United States will be forced to fight a ground war, and coalition casualties will be heavy.

There are only a few military options that the U.S. command has in the upcoming ground war. One is direct frontal assaults on Iraqi fortified positions in Kuwait. The American casualties resulting from such a policy would probably be unacceptable to Bush, simply out of a desire to be reelected. A second option would be to bring Israel officially into the war, with a flanking attack from the West. If Israel enters the war, the Arab coalition partners might immediately leave or even switch sides (see Messiri interview, p. 43).

A third option, which is increasingly more attractive to the desperate Bush administration, is to use nuclear weapons to attempt to end the war quickly. In one variant of this option, the nuclear strike would be conducted by the Israelis, in hopes that the U.S. would evade the international outrage that the use of the weapons would generate.

The effort to prepare the U.S. population for the potential nuclear option became evident on the weekend of Feb. 2, when Defense Secretary Cheney and Vice President Dan Quayle raised the threat that the U.S.-led coalition might use nuclear arms. "Our policy is very clear," Quayle said. "We simply don't rule options in or out."

Cheney was more explicit in a televised interview on

Feb. 3, citing the possibility that Israel might independently decide to bomb Iraq with nuclear weapons. Asked if a nuclear option is in the cards, Cheney said that, were he Saddam Hussein, he would be very worried about what Israel might do. Cheney's remarks were praised by the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* on Feb. 4.

Then, in his press conference Feb. 5, Bush went out of his way to assert that no option has been ruled out.

In order to justify this policy, administration spokesmen are claiming that the use of nuclear weapons would spare American lives otherwise killed in a bloody ground war. This was the message delivered by Cheney on Feb. 3, who said that dropping atomic bombs on Japan in 1945 was justified, to save the lives of many GIs.

The pro-nuke clamor: not grass-roots

The Bush administration has called into play its assets to fabricate a "grass-roots clamor" for the use of nuclear weapons. In the U.S. Congress, the "nuke 'em" faction is led by Rep. Dan Burton, an Indiana Republican with close ties to Quayle. On Cable News Network's (CNN) "Crossfire" program on Feb. 5, Burton called 10 times for use of nuclear weapons. "We should consider using . . . low-yield tactical nuclear weapons to hit those military targets, to dislodge them with everything at our disposal before we send our young Americans into a meat-grinder," he said. "To do less would be inhuman in my opinion."

Appearing on the same program with Burton, Col. William Taylor responded by saying that nuclear weapons use could plunge the U.S. into wars with Arab nations everywhere. Burton said, "No, they're not going to turn around and start causing problems with us if they know that we're willing" to use nuclear weapons.

Burton claimed his views are shared by many in Congress, and that he has discussed them with Quayle.

A few days later, Jeffrey Wright, president of the William Buckley-linked Young Americans for Freedom, called for using the nuclear option in the Gulf.

Administration media outlets are also trying to whip up a nuclear lynch mob. On Feb. 5, the New Hampshire *Manchester Union Leader* ran a front-page editorial headlined, "U.S. Has the Might, Israel Has the Will." It read: "We now seem to be marching into the bloody tragedy of a ground war. . . . But such a conflict could be avoided by combining our superior military might and Israel's superior will to survive. If we as a nation are incapable of committing ourselves to the quick, clean controlled use of nuclear bombs, it is time we turned to someone who is."

Similar madness came from Cal Thomas, whose column, syndicated in over 150 U.S. newspapers, said on Feb. 7 that the U.S. "should use tactical nuclear weapons against Iraqi forces occupying Kuwait in order to bring the Persian Gulf war to a speedy conclusion and thereby save the lives of American and allied fighters."