

# Saddam plays his wild card

**U**p until last night, the world's first made-for-TV war was proving something of an anti-climax. Where were all of Saddam's fearsome secret weapons? What of his threats to bring down the roof on the Mideast?

The dramatic and horrifying answer came suddenly when eight Iraqi Scud missiles from mobile launchers, apparently with conventional warheads, hit Tel Aviv, Haifa and other, more rural, areas.

The big question was whether Israel would launch an air counter-attack against Iraq, which would alter the entire complexion of the war.

We should know within the next 24 hours if the anti-Iraq Arab co-alition will fall apart. The Iraqi attack could bring Syria into the war on the side of Baghdad, particularly if the Jordanian air force opposes passage of Israeli warplanes.

Saddam Hussein has played his missile trump card in the hope that Arab members of the U.S.-led coalition will turn on Israel, widening and confusing the war and leaving the U.S. and Britain basically alone to fight.

Up until last night, Baghdad had been putting out more verbal bombast than ack-ack. U.S. and British air attacks have proven enormously successful — as everyone predicted. In fact, the attacks succeeded in eliminating fixed Iraqi missiles aimed at Israel, but obviously failed to eliminate hidden mobile Scud missile launchers in northern Iraq. It's unlikely the Israelis could have taken out these missiles in a pre-emptive strike.

What is surprising is the allied coalition had earlier succeeded in demolishing Iraq's mediocre air defence system so quickly.

As of this writing, however, the U.S. has not announced any more losses, in spite of waves of bombing during daylight when aircraft are far more vulnerable. Iraq claims only 23 dead and 66 wounded to date — a curiously low figure.

Even so, the success of the air campaign and massive carpet-bombing will likely advance the date of Phase Two, the ground offensive which may already be underway.

Ominously, a potentially dangerous development is taking place on the Turkish-Iraq border. Turkey's president, Turgut Ozal, who has adopted a strongly anti-Iraq stance, demanded war powers from his parliament. Some 150,000 tough Turkish troops are massing on the Iraqi border. It's possible the Turks may enter the war by invading Iraq.

Thirty to 80 miles south of the border are Iraq's northern oil fields in the Mosul region. The Turks, who have no oil, would dearly like to annex this area. If Iraq disintegrates — a very real threat in

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the event the Baghdad regime falls — the Turks may grab Iraq's oil-rich north.

Formation of an independent republic by the north's Kurdish majority might well trigger a Turkish attack. This would ignite demands by Turkey's own Kurdish majority just across the border for separation or union with Iraqi Kurds.

**I**ntriguingly, just as the Turks are mobilizing on Iraq's border, the Soviets announced they are moving large forces onto their border with Turkey. This is precisely what happened in 1958 when Iraq's British-run king was overthrown by a nationalist coup. The U.S. got the Turks to threaten to invade Iraq and the Soviets countered by massing on the Turkish border, preventing the Turks from taking any action. Is the Soviet military moving to support Iraq?

Back in cratered Iraq and Kuwait, the bombing campaign goes on without relent. U.S. military reports claim the best units of Saddam's army, the Republican Guard, have been decimated by B-52 attacks. Three B-52s flying in formation can kill every living thing in a rectangle 1.5 miles long by one mile wide and cause serious concussion injuries to soldiers up to three miles away. The only thing that will stop this meatgrinder is a shortage of bombs.

But none of this means Iraq is on the verge of collapse. Some of its missiles remain in secure storage. Following the tactic adopted by North Vietnam in its war with the U.S., Iraqi interceptors are being held back in shelters to stage guerrilla attacks on enemy air formations. Most important, ground battles are still to come. Kuwait will not be taken by air power alone. The Iraqis are counting on bloody land combat to bog down the coalition's forces.

But how much more bombing can Iraqi ground troops take? And will the Iraqi Army try to save itself from further losses by overthrowing Saddam and offering his head to the Americans?