

IRAQ:

Iraqi leader Allawi said he expected a "clear-cut" victory.

FROM A-1

Exploiting the redeployment, insurgents stepped up attacks in areas outside Fallujah, including a bombing that killed two Marines on the outskirts of the former rebel bastion 40 miles west of Baghdad.

Military activity also surged along the Euphrates River valley well to the north and west of Baghdad, with clashes reported in Qaim on the Syrian border and in Hit and Ramadi, nearer to the capital.

A series of thunderous explosions rocked central Baghdad after sunset Saturday, and sirens wailed in the fortified Green Zone, which houses major Iraqi government offices and the U.S. Embassy. There was no immediate explanation for the blasts, but the Ansar al-Sunnah Army later claimed responsibility for firing several rockets at the zone. The claim's authenticity could not be verified.

A car bomb exploded on the main road to Baghdad airport, and there was fighting near the Education Ministry in the heart of the capital.

Insurgents also attacked a military base outside Baghdad Saturday, killing one coalition soldier and wounding three others, the U.S. military said. The nationalities of the casualties weren't immediately available.

Baghdad's international airport was ordered Saturday to remain closed to civilian traffic for a further 24 hours, according to government adviser Georges Sada.

The airport was closed for 48 hours under the state of emergency imposed Nov. 7 and has

remained shut under a series of one-day extensions ever since.

At least four people were killed and 29 wounded, police said, during a U.S. airstrike on rebels and clashes Saturday in the Abu Ghraib suburb of western Baghdad. One Iraqi was killed and 10 wounded in fighting between U.S. troops and insurgents in the northern city of Tal Afar.

Flames of fire and heavy black smoke were billowing to the sky after saboteurs attacked an oil pipeline north of Baghdad Saturday night, witnesses said.

The oil pipeline carries crude oil from Taji, 12 miles north of Baghdad, to the Dora refinery in Baghdad.

Witnesses said insurgents have virtually controlled the town of Taji for the last several days, distributing leaflets warning people not to leave their houses or open their shops.

The drive against remaining insurgent holdouts in southern Fallujah was aimed to eradicate the last major concentration of fighters at the end of nearly a week of air and ground assaults.

"We are just pushing them against the anvil," said Col. Michael Formica, commander of the 1st Cavalry Division's 2nd Brigade. "It's a broad attack against the entire southern front."

As a prelude to the Saturday assault, a U.S. warplane dropped a 500-pound bomb on an insurgent tunnel network in the city, CNN embedded correspondent Jane Arraf reported.

U.S. and Iraqi forces also have begun moving against insurgent sympathizers among Iraq's hard-line Sunni religious leadership, arresting at least four prominent clerics and raiding offices of religious groups that had spoken out against the Fallujah assault.

U.S. officials said they hoped the latest attack would finish off the last pocket of significant resistance in Fallujah. Next was a planned house-to-house clearing



ANJA NIEDRINGHAUS / Associated Press

A U.S. Marine rests on a bed after searching a house in the western part of Fallujah, Iraq, on Saturday. Iraq's national security adviser, Qassem Dawoud, said Saturday that the massive military operation to retake Fallujah "is accomplished" with about 1,000 insurgents killed and 200 captured.

operation to find boobytraps, weapons and guerrillas still hiding in the rubble.

In Baghdad, Iraqi National Security Adviser Qassem Dawoud proclaimed the Fallujah assault — code-name Operation Al-Fajr, or "Dawn" — was "accomplished" except for mopping up "evil pockets which we are dealing with now."

"The number of terrorists and Saddam (Hussein) loyalists killed has reached more than 1,000," Dawoud said. "As for the detainees, the number is 200 people."

However, Dawoud said al-Zarqawi, whose al-Qaida-linked group was responsible for numerous car-bombings and beheadings of foreign hostages, and the main Fallujah resistance leader, Sheikh al-Janabi "have es-

caped." The United States has offered a \$25 million reward for al-Zarqawi.

As U.S. forces pressed their attacks in southern Fallujah, Marines in the northern districts were hunting for about a dozen insurgents dressed in Iraqi national guard uniforms who were reportedly roaming the city.

"Any (Iraqi national guard) or (Iraqi special forces) not seen with the Marines are to be considered hostile," Lt. Owen Boyce, 24, of Simsbury, Conn., told his men.

U.S. and Iraqi officials want to restore control of Fallujah and other Sunni militant strongholds before national elections scheduled by Jan. 31.

In the southern city of Nasiriyah, interim Prime Minister Ay-

ad Allawi said he expected the operation in Fallujah to conclude by Sunday with a "clear-cut" victory over the insurgents and the terrorists.

"We have captured their safe houses, where they killed people," Allawi said. "We have captured the masks they wore when they slaughtered and decapitated people."

Allawi, a Shiite Muslim,

brushed aside suggestions the operation would create a backlash among the Sunni minority.

"There is no problem of Sunnis or Shiites," he said. "This is all Iraqis against the terrorists. We are going to keep on breaking their back everywhere in Iraq. We are not going to allow them to win."

Despite the evident military success in Fallujah, U.S. commanders have warned that the insurgency in Iraq will continue — evidenced by the recent spike in violence in the remainder of the Sunni Muslim regions of central Iraq.

The U.S. command withdrew a battalion of the 25th Infantry Division in Fallujah and sent it to Mosul after insurgents attacked police stations, bridges and government buildings Thursday in clashes that killed 10 Iraqi troops and one U.S. soldier.

Mosul was quieter Saturday, but a car bomb exploded as an Iraqi national guard convoy passed, witnesses said. Seven guardsmen were wounded.

The region's governor blamed the uprising on "the betrayal of some police members" and said Iraqi reinforcements — many of them ex-members of the Kurdish peshmerga militia taken from garrisons along the Syrian and Iranian borders — had arrived to help end the violence.

The fighting in Fallujah and elsewhere in Iraq has taken its toll on the Americans. More than 400 wounded soldiers have been transported to the U.S. military's Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, a hospital spokeswoman said.

COBURN:

One GOP senator says she doesn't think there should be a litmus test for chairmen.

FROM A-1

The physician-turned-politician just won a hard-fought victory for the state's open U.S. Senate seat and made abortion one of his major issues.

Coburn said at one point in the campaign he favored the death penalty for abortionists, but later clarified that statement, saying he was talking not about current law but one in the future that outlawed abortion.

Given that kind of stance, it would seem the current controversy over Specter would be tailor-made for Coburn.

"I am not going to get into that," Coburn said. "I don't want to stake out any territory right now publicly."

Specter sparked a firestorm of controversy almost immediately after Bush's re-election victory

by suggesting the president's judicial nominees with anti-abortion rights views could not be confirmed.

Conservatives viewed Specter's comment as a warning to Bush, and they have launched an all-out battle to deny him that key chairmanship.

Dr. James Dobson of Focus on the Family, a leading conservative group, described Specter's comments as "one of the most foolish and ill-considered comments that a politician has made in a long time."

"He is a problem, and he must be derailed," he said.

Dobson came to Oklahoma and campaigned for Coburn in the days leading up to the election.

Coburn, who is scheduled to be in Washington over the next few days to attend orientation sessions for new senators, said he has not sat down and looked at the controversy surrounding Specter.

"I am the senator-elect, not the senator," he said.

Coburn, who continues to work out of his Muskogee medical office, said he has not received calls from conservatives on the controversy.

Specter, who has it made it

clear he will fight for the committee chairmanship, has reminded critics he has supported Bush's judicial appointments in the past, including those who disagree with the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion.

Other Republican senators have come to his defense, saying his chairmanship should not be denied him because of a political stance.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine., predicted any anti-Specter effort

would fizzle.

"I don't think there ought to be a litmus test for judges but I also don't think there ought to be a litmus test for chairmen," Collins said.

Specter reportedly hopes to argue his own case before members of the Judiciary Committee in the coming days.

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