

Case Study

The Amiriyah Bunker-Shelter

In the early morning hours of February 13, 1991, coalition precision-guided bombs hit the Amiriyah bunker in Baghdad. Television networks broadcast gruesome footage of charred bodies being removed from the building. Iraq reported over 300 deaths, mostly women and children.

The bunker was originally constructed as an air raid shelter during the Iran-Iraq War, and later converted into a military command-and-control center. In 1991, it was used as a military communications center, complete with barbed wire, camouflage, and armed guards. Intelligence sources reported senior Iraqi military officials were using it for military communications.³

Iraq claimed it was a civilian air raid shelter that had been deliberately bombed. Unknown to the coalition was that selected civilians had been admitted to the top floor at night, while the Iraqi military continued to use the lower level as a command-and-control center. In an article in the February 14, 1991, edition of Finland's *Helsingin Sanomat*, a Finnish expert confirmed that structures in Iraq like the Amiriyah had two stories and space for a total of 1,500 people. The Finnish firm Perusyhtymä and the Swedish company ABV had built 30 of these structures in Baghdad.

Khidir Hamza, former director general of Iraq's nuclear weapons program, stated in his book, *Saddam's Bombmaker*, that during the Gulf War:

"We sought refuge several times at the [Amiriyah] shelter.... But it was always filled.... The shelter had television sets, drinking fountains, its own electrical generator, and looked sturdy enough to withstand a hit from conventional weapons. But I stopped trying to get in one night after noticing some long black limousines slithering in and out of an underground gate in the back. I asked around and was told that it was a command center. After considering it more closely, I decided it was probably Saddam's own operational base."⁴

The United States government soon learned that Saddam Hussein had decreed that, from then on, all Iraq's military bunkers would also house civilians.⁵