

## Bush blasts 'revisionist historians' on Iraq

REUTERS, Elizabeth

President Bush countered those questioning his justification for the invasion of Iraq on Monday, dismissing "revisionist historians" and saying Washington acted to counter a persistent threat.

"Now there are some who would like to rewrite history; revisionist historians is what I like to call them," Bush said in a speech to New Jersey business leaders.

Referring to the ousted Iraqi president, Bush said, "Saddam Hussein was a threat to America and the free world in '91, in '98, in 2003. He continually ignored the demands of the free world, so the United States and friends and allies acted."

## Retd commander tapped to lead US Army

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush on Monday nominated retired General Peter Schoomaker to the post of army chief of staff, passing over active-duty generals in favor of a former commander of US special operations.

The announcement by the Pentagon ended weeks of speculation over who would succeed General Eric Shinseki, who retired from active duty last weekend.

Shinseki had clashed with US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on issues ranging from funding for a mobile artillery system to the size of the US force in Iraq.

In a succinct statement, the Pentagon said: "The president has nominated Army General (retired) Peter J. Schoomaker for appointment to the rank of general and assignment as chief of staff, US Army, Washington, D.C."

## US senator calls on CIA to release WMD data

AFP, Washington

A senior Democratic senator Monday accused CIA director George Tenet of discrepancies between his public statements on Iraq's suspected arsenal of banned weapons and classified information provided by his agency to UN officials.

Senator Carl Levin of Michigan, top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the Central Intelligence Agency failed to provide a complete list of suspected Iraqi weapons sites to UN weapons inspectors, although Tenet made public statements saying it had.

He called on Tenet to provide a complete accounting of the information given to UN weapons inspectors for public scrutiny.

# Abbas pushes militants to end attack on Israel

## US envoy meets Palestinian PM

AP, Gaza City

Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas stepped in to try to persuade militant groups to stop attacks against Israel, the key to implementing a US-backed Middle East peace plan, after Egyptian mediators went home empty-handed. Abbas met late Monday with members of his own Fatah faction and hoped to meet Tuesday with leaders of the militant Hamas and other factions. The move came after Egyptian officials left for Cairo without a truce accord, failing to extract a pledge from Israel to stop targeting Hamas leaders for assassination.

Instead, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon pledged to continue an offensive against Hamas and said his government would pursue terrorists "in every place and at every time until victory."

The Hamas-Israeli duel, including a suicide bombing in Jerusalem and helicopters strikes in Gaza over the past week, has caused dozens of casualties on both sides and

endangered the "road map" peace plan.

Palestinians involved in the truce talks on Monday said Egypt would invite all the factions to Cairo. Previous rounds there have not produced results.

In another development, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat called the wife of imprisoned West Bank leader Marwan Barghouti early Tuesday, and told her Israel would release Barghouti in the next two days. Barghouti is on trial for murder, charged with complicity in terror attacks that killed 26 Israelis.

Israeli officials declined to comment on the report. There has been no hint that Israel would free Barghouti during his trial.

Abbas' task in Gaza is daunting. Not only does he face the recalcitrant Hamas, but also the military wing of his own Fatah, which is defying his call to stop attacks against Israelis.

After Monday's session with the Egyptian mediators, top Hamas official Ismail Abu Shanab said it was premature to talk about a

cease-fire. "Now is not a time for truce. It is time for solidarity and standing united against Israeli attacks on our people," he said.

A source close to the talks said US mediators would press Israel to agree to end the targeted killings, and that if this succeeded, the militant groups would then agree to a truce.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the Egyptians were asking for a written American guarantee of Israel's commitment on this issue, and on troop withdrawals and other steps implementing the road map.

But Israeli officials insisted that they would continue targeting the militants and rejected the idea of a cease-fire that did not include a dismantling of the militias.

Speaking to his parliament, Sharon did not mention the cease-fire effort in Gaza, declaring that his government would "pursue and catch every initiator of terrorism and its perpetrators in every place and at every time until victory."

He charged that Hamas had

unleashed a "new wave of terror," noting Wednesday's suicide bombing on a Jerusalem bus that killed 17 people. He said Israel would continue targeting terrorists. He noted the recent helicopter strikes also killed Palestinian civilians, but said, "This was not our intention."

Reuters adds: New US envoy John Wolf met Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas on Tuesday in an effort to save a "road map" to peace with Israel that has been rejected by Islamic militants and battered by a flare-up of violence.

Wolf arrived under heavy guard at Abbas' compound in Gaza City, where he was also expected to hold talks with Palestinian security chief Mohammed Dahlan, officials said. The road map envisages a Palestinian state founded in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by 2005, alongside a secure Israel. Wolf was to have overseen steps to implement the plan but has been thrust into an initial troubleshooting role after Israeli-Palestinian bloodshed killed more than 50 last week.



PHOTO: AFP  
US envoy John Wolf (L) shakes hands with Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas in Gaza City on Tuesday. The senior US diplomat, who heads a 12-member team named by US President George W. Bush to monitor the Middle East peace process, is holding talks with Israeli and Palestinian officials on the plan aimed at creating a Palestinian state by 2005.



PHOTO: AFP

School children carrying their shoes slog through flooded streets on their way home after schools suspended afternoon classes in Navotas, a town north of the Philippine capital Manila on Tuesday. Heavy rains triggered by tropical storm Soudelor flooded many parts of the Philippines, leading to 11 deaths and stranding thousands of commuters.

## Iranian leaders under fire on domestic front

AFP, Tehran

Iran's clerical regime was bombarded Monday with pressure from all sides, including mounting US-backed street protests at home and pressure from the UN atomic energy agency and European Union over its suspected nuclear weapons programme.

After six consecutive nights of student-led demonstrations by thousands of people here, Iran lashed out at the United States.

Tehran sent a "vigorous protest" over Washington's "interference" in its internal affairs, in a letter conveyed through the Swiss embassy here.

In an ongoing bid to stem the tide of dissent on the streets of the capital, a massive police presence ensured demonstrators remained quietly confined to their cars and hardline vigilantes did not further

enflame tensions as protests continued into the early hours of Monday.

A top police commander told state news agency IRNA that 30 "miscreants and hooligans" were arrested overnight around Tehran university's main campus, the scene of nearly a week of often violent nocturnal protests.

The deputy interior minister in charge of security, Ali Asghar Ahmadi, also told the news agency more than 250 people were arrested at the protests since Tuesday, but that all but about 90 "counter-revolutionaries or thugs" had been released.

He added that among those detained were some of the vigilantes who violently smashed the demonstrations. "Their actions were not approved," he said.

## 150 detained in crackdown on Iranians in France

AFP, Paris

French police have arrested more than 150 people in a crackdown on the People's Mujahadeen, the main Iranian opposition group, including a woman seen by the group as the future president of the country, police said.

The crackdown, ordered by anti-terrorist judge Jean-Louis Bruguiere, was launched simultaneously in 13 locations in Paris and the surrounding area early on Tuesday. It involved over 1,200 police officers, including the anti-terrorist squad.

Maryam Radjavi, wife of the group's leader, Massoud Radjavi, were among those arrested, police said. She is seen by the People's Mujahadeen as the "future president of Iran".

## British troops may stay 4 yrs in Iraq

AFP, London

British troops could be in Iraq for up to four years if pro-Saddam Hussein fighters continue to undermine attempts by the US-led coalition to eliminate his former regime. The Times newspaper said Tuesday.

Britain has deployed a 17,000-strong ground force in Iraq for between one and two years, but the duration could double if attacks by Iraqi militia on allied forces become more frequent, defence ministry sources told The Times.

On Monday Major-General Freddy Viggers, a British commander appointed to serve at the US military headquarters in Baghdad, told The Times that coalition forces risked becoming bogged down in a Balkans-style policing mission unless they can capture or kill Saddam and prove his regime is

finished. Some 1,600 British troops are still in Bosnia, 11 years after the end of the conflict.

Major-General Patrick Cordingley, commander of Britain's 7th Armoured Brigade or 'Desert Rats' in the 1991 Gulf War said that the longer coalition forces remain in Iraq, the more resentful the Iraqis will become.

"But the American and British troops cannot possibly leave Iraq until the country is absolutely secure and back in Iraqi hands," he said.

But sources close to Britain's Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon told The Times that he was determined to avoid a Bosnia-style commitment.

"The Iraqis have to take responsibility for themselves," the source said.

# War on terror accelerates world military spending

REUTERS, Stockholm

World military spending rose by six percent last year, growing twice as fast as in 2001 to reach \$794 billion, largely as a result of the US-led war on terrorism, a respected think-tank said Tuesday.

Washington accounted for three quarters of the increase, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) said in its Yearbook, a defense and security policy publication widely recognized for the reliability of its data.

Russia overtook the United States as the world largest arms exporter while China was the largest importer followed by India, locked in an arms race with impoverished nuclear rival Pakistan.

But with outlays up 10 per cent year-on-year at \$336 billion, the United States accounted for 43 per cent of global military expenditure in

2002, up from 36 per cent in 2001.

"The rest of the world is not prepared, or cannot, follow the USA's example in increasing military expenditure," SIPRI said, noting that combined arms expenditure of the West European members of the NATO defense alliance fell by three percent in real terms between 2000 and 2002.

"While in the USA the war on terrorism was a major factor in the huge growth in military expenditure in 2002, this was not the case in Europe."

US defence budget estimates for fiscal year 2003 showed a planned increase in arms procurement of 32 per cent over the 2002-2007 period to \$78 billion this year. Total US defence spending was set to rise by just over six per cent in 2003.

Russia's defense budget was flat in 2002 but looked set to increase by 7-8 per cent in real terms this year,

SIPRI said.

The value of Russian arms exports, on the rise since 1999, increased by more than \$1 billion to \$4.8 billion last year. With 36 per cent of global deliveries, Russia overtook the United States as the world's largest supplier of arms to other countries, primarily China and India.

China's military spending was estimated by SIPRI to have risen by 18 per cent in 2002 and would grow 9.6 per cent in 2003.

China was the No. 1 arms importer last year with 14 per cent of the world's total.

India's arms imports increased 72 per cent in 2002, making it the second largest buyer of arms from abroad. Arms imports by Pakistan also grew considerably last year, SIPRI said.



PHOTO: AFP

A US Army soldier guards Iraqis kept under arrest for weapon concealment and lack of documents at a road block in the Abu-Jarab district, west of Baghdad on Monday. US forces pressed on with Operation Desert Scorpion against pro-Saddam loyalists, as a top adviser to Secretary of State Colin Powell warned it could take years to establish a democratic government in Iraq.