

Bush rejects French plan to hasten Iraqi sovereignty

REUTERS, Washington

The United States on Monday rejected a French proposal to hasten Iraqi sovereignty as President Bush prepared to ask the United Nations to back his view of a gradual, US-led Iraqi transition.

"The French plan which would somehow try to transfer sovereignty to an unelected people just isn't workable," US National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice told reporters.

Underscoring his determination not to hand over authority in Iraq until the country has stabilized further, Bush met with two members of Iraq's Governing Council, who said it was too early for full Iraqi self-government.

"We are ready to be patient, we don't want to rush," Iraqi public works minister Nisreen Berwari said.

Electricity Minister Ayham Sameraei told reporters as he and Berwari met Bush in the Oval office. "If the Iraqi people and the Americans help us for the next year and a half... we will have (a) different Iraq."

Bush is to address the UN General Assembly on Tuesday. He is expected to defend his decision to go to war in Iraq last March without UN backing, and seek new support for the US-led occupation of Iraq without giving the global body the broader political role sought by some members.

World leaders seek new answers to old questions on root causes of terror

AFP, New York

The old adage of one man's terrorist being another man's freedom fighter reared its head Monday at a summit of world leaders on the root causes of terrorism.

While there was unanimity among the nearly 20 heads of state and government that terrorist acts could never be justified, there were questions raised over what separated an act of terrorism from an act of justified resistance.

In a keynote address to the summit, Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf called on the United Nations to produce a new definition of terrorism -- one that would recognise "legitimate" armed resistance movements in the Palestinian territories and Indian-controlled Kashmir.

"Those who are committing state terrorism against occupied peoples, often depict their legitimate movements for self-determination as terrorism," Musharraf said.

"While (India) persists in its violent suppression of the Kashmiri people, they have a legitimate right to resist Indian occupation. Equating their freedom struggle with terrorism is a travesty," he added.

India accuses Pakistan of arming, training and funding rebels in Indian Kashmir. Pakistan contends it provides only moral and diplomatic support to an "indigenous" uprising and charges that India is guilty of rampant human rights abuses.

India was not represented at the round-table summit, but an indirect rebuttal of Musharraf's stance was given by Jose Maria Aznar, the prime minister of Spain, which has long been battling the militant wing of Basque separatism.

Aznar said it was crucial to eliminate the "mystique" of justifiable struggle that terrorists often seek to attach to their actions in order to "divert attention from the ignominy of the act to the nobility of the cause."

Russian Foreign Minister Igor

Ivanov also appeared to back a tighter definition of terrorism as he urged the international community to work towards the "consistent eradication of double standards" over the issue.

The one-day "Fighting Terrorism for Humanity" conference was the joint brainchild of Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Bondevik and Nobel peace laureate Elie Wiesel.

The summit aimed to focus on the "root causes" of terrorism in a bid to find long-term responses beyond military or police action.

Among the nearly 20 heads of state and government attending were French President Jacques Chirac, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien.

In an opening address to the conference, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan trod a delicate line between condemning terrorism of any sort and urging the redress of injustices appropriated by terrorist groups.

"The fact that a few wicked men or women commit murder in its name does not make a cause any less just," Annan said.

"Terrorism will only be defeated if we act to solve the political disputes or long-standing conflicts that generate support for it," he said. "If we do not, we shall find ourselves acting as recruiting sergeants for the very terrorists we seek to suppress."

The US representative at the summit, the chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Richard Lugar, insisted that the top priority was to prevent militants from obtaining nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

"For the foreseeable future, the intelligence community will face an extensive threat from the intersection of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction," Lugar said. "Addressing this situation will require an unwavering commitment."



PHOTO: AFP
British Prime minister Tony Blair's official spokesmen Tom Kelly (R) and Godric Smith arrive yesterday at the Royal Courts of Justice to testify before the Hutton inquiry into the death of government scientist David Kelly.

Hoon admits giving green light for outing of Kelly

AFP, London

Grilled by a judicial inquiry, Britain's embattled Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon Monday admitted he gave the green light for the outing of David Kelly, the scientist at the centre of a BBC report that London exaggerated the threat posed by Iraq.

But in highly-charged exchanges, Hoon insisted at the probe into Kelly's death that the defence ministry had acted correctly.

Hoon had previously distanced himself from the controversial naming of Kelly, who killed himself after he was revealed to be the source of a disputed BBC radio report aired in May.

This alleged that Prime Minister Tony Blair's office had "sexed up" an intelligence report last year to boost its case for going to war against Iraq.

The suicide of Kelly, 59, a respected expert on Iraq's alleged quest for weapons of mass destruction and a former United Nations weapons inspector, hurled Blair into the biggest crisis of his six years in office.

Kelly's widow has told the inquiry that the decision to release his name had left the mild-mannered scientist under huge stress and feeling betrayed by his employer -- the defence ministry.



PHOTO: AFP
Pakistani activists of the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD), an opposition alliance, shout slogans as they participate in an anti-government demonstration in front of the gates of Parliament House in Islamabad yesterday. The ARD is seeking the resignation of President Pervez Musharraf from the post of army chief.

Iraq wanted know-how, but did not store WMD: Ex-UN arms inspector

AFP, Washington

Former UN weapons inspector Rolf Ekeus said late Monday Iraq sought the ability to produce weapons of mass destruction, but had none in storage after it destroyed them following the 1991 Gulf War.

Ekeus, who was head of the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) from 1991 to 1997, told PBS television the US-led coalition in Iraq has been unable to find any chemical, biological or nuclear weapons since the war in April because there aren't any to find.

"My feeling is very clearly that the Iraq policy long before the war was to build capabilities to produce weapons... for the conflict situation, not to produce for storage and create a problem or

storage management," he told interviewer Jim Lehrer.

He said the presence of UN weapons inspectors after Iraq was expelled from Kuwait in 1991, and the high rate of deterioration of chemical and biological weapons - as experienced during Iraq's 1980-1988 war against Iran -- dissuaded the Iraqis from storing them.

Ekeus agreed with his UNMOVIC successor Hans Blix, who last week told Australian national radio that now deposed Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein probably got rid of most of its weapons of mass destruction after the 1991 Gulf War, but pretended otherwise to deter an attack.

Ekeus said "my sense is that they did not produce anything since 1991, for several reasons," including the presence of UNMOVIC inspectors.

Millions of Iraqis go hungry: FAO

REUTERS, Rome

Several million Iraqis remain desperately hungry despite a better cereal crop and the lifting of economic sanctions, UN food agencies said yesterday.

"While starvation has been averted, chronic malnutrition persists among several million vulnerable people," the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) said in a statement about a new report on Iraqi food supplies and nutrition.

"The situation of mothers and children in central and southern Iraq is of particular concern," Rome-based FAO said.

The agency said the hardest hit included some 100,000 refugees and 200,000 displaced people.

The report published by FAO and the World Food Programme (WFP),

the UN food aid agency, said nearly half of Iraq's 26.3 million people are estimated to be in need of humanitarian aid despite a better cereal harvest and the removal of sanctions.

This year's cereal production in Iraq is forecast at 4.12 million tonnes, 22 per cent more than in 2002.

"Production increased mainly due to favorable rains in the north, increased irrigation and timely distribution of seeds and tools in the main producing areas," FAO said.

War, sanctions and drought have seriously eroded living standards in Iraq.

About 60 per cent of the Iraqi population is unemployed and depends largely on public food rations.

UN faces blizzard of bleak AIDS statistics

REUTERS, United Nations

Despite more money and a myriad of programs, most nations are unable, unwilling or too impoverished to provide treatment or prevention plans that could reverse the AIDS pandemic by 2015, UN officials said.

At an all-day conference on Monday, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said new reports from 103 governments delivered a series of bleak statistics, showing action fell "far short of what is needed."

Some 136 delegates, including heads of state and foreign ministers addressed the General Assembly, with representatives from Chile, Benin and others speaking well after midnight.

Dr. Peter Piot, head of UNAIDS, which coordinates programs among UN agencies, told a news conference, said "there isn't a single A in the report card."

US strike kills 3 Iraqis

AP, Fallujah

Iraqi police said US forces carried out a combined air and ground attack north of Fallujah early yesterday, killing three people and wounding three others. The military said it knew of only one death.

The fight involved the 82nd Airborne Division and started after US soldiers were attacked, according to the military. Spec. Nicole Thompson said the attackers ran into a building and ground troops called in air support. One guerrilla fighter was killed.

The incident occurred in al-Sajr, a village nine miles north of Fallujah, one of the most dangerous cities in the so-called "Sunni Triangle," the region where support for Saddam Hussein runs strongest and where US troops have met stiffest resistance.

"At 2:10 a.m., we heard three explosions at different times. About 20 min-

utes later, two martyrs arrived at the hospital. They died before they arrived. The third died in the hospital. There were three injured," a police lieutenant at the Fallujah General Hospital, who gave his name only as Nabil, told Associated Press Television News.

Helicopters could be seen over the region of the fight at dawn Tuesday. There were two big craters in courtyards of the houses that were involved, indicating bombs of some sort had been dropped.

At the Fallujah hospital, Abed Rasheed, 50, a retired Iraqi service member and one of the wounded, said he was sleeping with his family on the roof of his house when he heard small arms fire. He ran downstairs just as the American aircraft raced overhead, firing what he believed were rockets. He was hospitalised with wounds in the chest and left foot.

"There never was any trouble in our village and the Americans have never been inside it," he said from his hospital bed. "This is genocide. This is not about overthrowing a government or regime change."

The injured included two boys - Hussein, 11, and his brother Tahseen, 9. Their father Ali Khalaf Mohammed, 45, was killed. Hussein lay in his hospital bed wearing a blood-soaked gown. His brother was a few yards away, his face swollen from facial cuts.

In Baghdad Monday, the US-picked Governing Council voted to evict two Arab satellite broadcasting companies from Iraq, said Iraqi National Congress spokesman Entifadh K. Qanbar. The Qatar-based Al-Jazeera and Dubai-based Al-Arabiya have given blanket coverage of events in Iraq, often highly critical of the US-led occupation.

Iraqis must request for troops: India

THE STATESMAN/ ANN, New York

The USA is unlikely to table its draft resolution seeking greater international participation in Iraq this week, senior officials indicated. But in the unlikely event that it is, India has a variety of concerns, including "domestic compulsions", that would need to be addressed before any decision could be taken on sending troops to that war-ravaged country.

"We would like to see a request from the Iraqis through the UN and not from the 'occupying power person', India's Permanent Representative to UN, Vijay Nambiar said. The Iraqi request "should be from within an Iraqi political process" even if it is the Governing Council. This should be part of "an overall political process" which leads to the "gradual restoration of Iraq's sovereignty" within Iraq.

Spanish-led troops take control of Najaf from US

AFP, Najaf

US Marines yesterday handed over control of the troubled Iraqi holy city of Najaf to Spanish-led troops, including contingents from Latin America, after resolving a spate of logistic headaches.

Marines commander General John Kelly transferred authority to Spanish General Alfredo Cardona, head of the Plus Ultra brigade of Spanish, Salvadoran and Honduran troops at a joint parade in the military headquarters here.

Cardona said his men would work "body and soul" to ensure security and quality of life in the region.

"Security is our priority in this province but we also have a mission to meet the needs of the people and

rebuild their infrastructures", he added.

US marines have been withdrawing from the province for several days ahead of the handover. From Tuesday the holy city of Najaf was being patrolled by some 720 Honduran and Salvadoran troops, assisted by some of the 1,200 Spanish soldiers deployed in the region.

"Over the last two days the Salvadorans and Hondurans have received their vehicles and communications equipment that they needed to function correctly," Spain's Major Jose Luis Sanchez Falero told AFP.

The Latin brigade will take responsibility for one of Iraq's most sensitive corners, which is still reeling from an August 29 car bombing that killed a revered Shiite cleric, Ayatollah

Mohammad Baqer al-Hakim and 82 other people at a main shrine.

Najaf, 180 km south of Baghdad, posed a delicate problem for the Americans, who insisted on disarming the Iraqi militias that poured out onto the streets after the bombing and for the funeral three days later.

But a looming showdown appeared to have been averted with agreement on a special force to protect Muslim holy places, and the militias have taken a low profile in the last week.

Cardona also said in a recent interview that when his men take control of Najaf, the "only armed force that will be authorised will be the coalition on the one hand and the Iraqi police on the other."

'Iran to limit cooperation with IAEA'

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran will give the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) less cooperation than in the past after the agency set Tehran a deadline to prove its nuclear aims are peaceful, a senior Iranian diplomat said late on Monday.

Ali Akbar Salehi, Iran's representative to the UN nuclear watchdog, said Tehran had previously allowed IAEA inspectors to take environmental samples and visit non-nuclear sites "to show our good will and transparency."

"This was beyond our obligations but from now on we will act according to the current regulations," he said in an interview with state television. He was referring to Iran's obligations as a signatory of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The IAEA has said concerns remain about Iran's nuclear aims and has given Tehran until October 31 to dispel any doubts that it is secretly seeking to develop nuclear arms.

No state if Palestinians don't fight terror: Bush

New govt must be independent of Arafat: US

AFP, Washington

US President George W. Bush warned in an interview aired Monday that there will be no Palestinian state unless the Palestinian leadership fights terrorism.

"I believe it's in everybody's interest that there be a Palestinian state," Bush told Fox's Brit Hume. "But it will not happen so long as the interlocutor, the so-called representative of the people, won't fight terror."

He added that the problem with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was his reluctance to do just that.

Middle East politics were thrown into turmoil early this month, when Palestinian prime minister Mahmud Abbas resigned in frustration with his inability to implement desired reforms

and move the stalled regional peace process forward.

Arafat nominated Ahmed Qorei to replace Abbas, but massive demonstrations of support prompted by Israeli threats to deport or assassinate Arafat showed the Palestinian remained a force to be reckoned with.

However, Bush reiterated US determination not to deal with Arafat.

"No question Arafat has failed," he said. "The Palestinians have suffered under his leadership, and hopefully new leaders will emerge that will be committed to peace, willing to fight terror, and out of that will come a Palestinian state."

But the president expressed opposition to suggestions to forcibly remove Arafat through intervention from outside.

"In America, we believe in getting rid of people through a peaceful, orderly process," he said. "And the Palestinian people should make that decision by their will."

Meanwhile, the United States said late Monday that any new Palestinian government must be independent from what it called "machinations" of Yasser Arafat, if it wanted to move toward an independent Palestinian state.

The warning, delivered by Secretary of State Colin Powell, followed a massive outpouring of popular support for the embattled Palestinian leader prompted by Israeli threats earlier this month to either send him into exile or assassinate him.

Saudi envoy defends actions over Sept 11

REUTERS, Los Angeles

Saudi Arabia had tried to move against potential "terrorist" elements at home well before Sept. 11, 2001 but had met resistance from the State Department, a leading Saudi diplomat said on Monday.

Saudi Arabia's long-time ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdul Aziz told a foreign affairs group here that the resistance came from State Department officials who were "telling us we were terrible to these dissidents."

Speaking to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, he suggested the Saudi government was aware of and sought to act against potential terrorism in the country but that State Department officials concerned with human rights labeled the people "dissidents" and criticized Saudis for trying to crack down on them.



PHOTO: AFP
US Marines Commander General John Kelly (L) gestures as Polish Major General Andrzej Tyszkiewicz (C) and Spanish General Alfredo Cardona, head of the Plus Ultra brigade of Spanish, Salvadoran and Honduran troops, shake hands at the end of a joint parade in the military headquarters in Najaf in central Iraq yesterday. US Marines handed over control of the troubled Iraqi holy Shiite city to Spanish-led troops, including contingents from Latin America, after resolving a spate of logistic headaches.

Brother of Hambali held in Pakistan

THE STRAITS TIMES/ ANN, Jakarta

The security authorities in Pakistan have arrested a brother of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) mastermind Hambali, along with another Indonesian national and 13 Malaysians, during raids against what is being described as a JI sleeper cell in Karachi.

All 15 attended the Abu Bakar Islamic University, a suspected hub for Muslim militants.

Rusman Gunawan, also known as Gungun, who was identified by sources here as one of Hambali's younger brothers, has been in Pakistan since 1999.

Indonesian news website detikcom reported that Gunawan sold vegetables in a West Java market before he went to Pakistan that year on a Pakistani government scholarship.