



United Kingdom's permanent representative at Nato, Peter Ricketts (L), US Secretary of State, Colin Powell (R) and US Permanent Representative to Nato Nicholas Burns (C) sit at the beginning of a meeting of Nato Foreign Ministers in Brussels yesterday.

US can't accept EU defence plan, says Powell

NATO urged to take greater role in Iraq

AFP, Brussels

US Secretary of State Colin Powell said yesterday that Washington could not accept EU defence plans which double up with NATO, while welcoming any proposals which boost Europe's military muscle.

Speaking to his NATO counterparts, he recalled that US President George W. Bush was committed to "a mutually-reinforcing relationship between NATO and the EU, grounded in the essential NATO-EU agreements, which underpin it."

"The United States supports a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) that improves Europe's capabilities to act and develops in a way that is fully coordinated, compatible and transparent with NATO," he said, according to the text of a prepared speech.

But he warned: "That said, the United States cannot accept independent EU structures that dupli-

cate existing NATO capabilities."

The row over Europe's defence initiative has been simmering for months, ever since a group of four countries opposed to the Iraq war - France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg -- unveiled plans in April for an autonomous military planning cell outside Brussels.

The United States at one stage warned that the plans represented a "significant" threat to NATO, which has long been dominated by the US.

The issue resurfaced last weekend when foreign ministers from France, Germany and Britain, meeting in Naples for talks on the EU's first-ever constitution, said they had agreed draft plans for an autonomous planning cell.

They stressed that the plans would not duplicate NATO capabilities. On Monday this week US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, also meeting his coun-

terparts in Brussels, sought to downplay the row, saying he was confident the Europeans would agree to arrangements which would not compete with NATO.

Meanwhile, Colin Powell called on NATO yesterday to take on a greater role in Iraq, while also welcoming a "more robust" role for the United Nations.

"We urge the Alliance to examine how it might do more to support peace and stability in Iraq, which every leader has acknowledged is critical to all of us," he said, according to prepared remarks to NATO foreign ministers.

The Iraq war and the diplomatic battles which preceded it sparked the biggest crisis in NATO's 54-year history, as three anti-war countries -- France, Germany and Belgium -- opposed Alliance help for Turkey.

Powell noted that the 19-member Alliance has already provided logistical support to the

Polish division of a multi-national force in Iraq, and that 16 NATO members are part of the coalition in the war-scarred country.

He also recalled that UN Security Council resolution 1511 passed on October 16 "encourages the engagement of multilateral and regional organizations in this effort."

Washington has two key objectives in Iraq, he said: a rapid return of sovereignty to the Iraqi people and the creation of a "free, democratic and stable Iraq at peace with its neighbours and within its own secure borders."

"In pursuit of these goals the United States welcomes a greater NATO role in Iraq's stabilization," he said.

"We welcome a more robust role for the United Nations as well," he added.

Cincinnati death blamed on police

BBC ONLINE

The coroner in the US city of Cincinnati says a struggle with police caused the death of black man whose beating was videotaped on Sunday.

The coroner said Nathaniel Jones, 41, suffered obesity, heart problems and had illegal drugs in his blood.

But he gave a homicide ruling, saying the stress caused by the struggle directly led to Jones's death.

Police say they were defending themselves, but civil rights leaders accuse them of using excessive force.

Sunday's incident started when police were called to a fast-food restaurant after reports that a man was being disorderly.

Two officers were seen on the videotape hitting the man with clubs after he ignored orders to "stay back" and tried to punch one of the officers in the face.

The officers knocked the man to the ground and struck him several times until they managed to handcuff him.

World facing 'decisive moment' says Annan

UN reform panel presented

AFP, Paris

The world is facing a "decisive moment in history," UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said in a newspaper article yesterday, announcing that a panel set up to review the role of the United Nations in the light of recent global divisions will hold its first meeting this weekend.

In a commentary in the daily International Herald Tribune Friday, Annan said the panel would "focus primarily on threats to peace and security" and the challenges ahead for the world body.

Although he did not explicitly mention the war in Iraq, he noted that "The events of the past year have exposed deep divisions among members of the United Nations on fundamental questions of policy and principle."

Annan, who was opposed to the US-led campaign to topple Saddam Hussein, said in his com-

mentary. "When is the use of force permissible - and who should decide?"

"Does it have to be each state for itself, or will we be safer working together?" he added. "Is 'preventing war' sometimes justified, or is it simply aggression under another name?"

He said the 16-member panel, which is being headed by former Thai prime minister Anand Panyarachun, would hopefully complete its report by autumn 2004, in time for the UN General Assembly.

Other members of the panel include former Russian prime minister Yevgeny Primakov, Arab League Secretary General Amr Musa, former Chinese foreign minister Qian Qichen and Brent Scowcroft, the national security advisor to former US President George Bush.

US al-Qaeda supporter gets 10 years jail

AFP, New York

One of six accused members of a terrorist "sleeper cell" in Buffalo, New York, was sentenced Wednesday to 10 years in prison for providing material support to the al-Qaeda Islamist militant group.

Mukhtar al-Bakri, 23, was the first of the so-called "Lackawanna Six" -- all US citizens of Yemeni descent -- to be sentenced. They were arrested more than a year ago.

All six eventually pleaded guilty to the charge of providing material support to al-Qaeda and agreed to cooperate with US authorities, providing information on their stint in an al-Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan.

Al-Bakri's plea stated that while all the defendants were at the camp, Osama bin Laden appeared and spoke about the alliance of al-Qaeda and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and threatened the United States and Israel.

US court strikes down part of anti-terror law

REUTERS, San Francisco

A federal appeals court on Wednesday struck down part of a 1996 federal anti-terrorism law, saying the government's definition of what constituted "material support" to foreign terror groups was too vague.

At issue is a statute that was the first to criminalise offering "material support" to foreign terror groups. That law was the precursor to the controversial 2001 Patriot Act which expanded the government's intelligence-gathering powers and increased penalties for activities classified as terrorist.

In their decision, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld an earlier preliminary ruling that prohibited the provision of "personnel" and "training" to groups designated by the United States as "terrorist organisations."

The court also ruled that before

applying the law the government must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that a donor to a group branded as a "foreign terrorist organisation" knew of its unlawful activities.

"The prohibition on providing "training" and "personnel" is impermissibly overbroad and thus void for vagueness under the First and Fifth Amendments," the court ruled.

That "personnel" provision was used to indict "American Taliban" John Walker Lindh and six people in Buffalo, New York known as the "Lackawanna Six," said David Cole, a lawyer for the Center for Constitutional Rights which brought the case.

He added the ruling that covers the Western states in the 9th Circuit could make it tougher for the Bush administration to prosecute individuals charged with aiding designated terrorist groups.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth II (R) shakes hands of Nigerian dignitaries at a reception in her honour at the State House shortly after her arrival Wednesday. Queen Elizabeth II arrived in Nigeria Wednesday ahead of the Commonwealth summit that begins today, on her first state visit since the country won its independence from her rule in 1956.



Twenty-three-year-old Iraqi grocer Hajem Mohammed shows his destroyed house in the northern Iraqi town of Hawijah Wednesday after a US raid on the town. Paratroopers from the 173rd Airborne Division carried out a massive sweep in this restive mainly Sunni Muslim town of 80,000 people, closing it off to the outside world for more than 16 hours on December 2.

'Cracks in Earth's magnetic shield let solar winds through'

AFP, Washington

Large cracks that can open in the Earth's protective magnetic shield allowing solar winds to blast through remain open for longer than experts had believed, according to researchers who announced their findings.

"Before, scientists thought the cracks would open and close on a timescale of just a few minutes," physicist Harald Frey of the University of California at Berkeley explained Wednesday.

"We have seen that these cracks can stay open continuously for many hours, these observations solve an old controversy about the nature of the crack forming process," Frey said.

The new observations were made possible with the use of NASA's Image satellite launched in March 2000. Tai Phan, a physicist at the same university, explained at a NASA press conference that the spacecraft "can detect the continuous presence of a proton spot" generated by solar winds.