



A family hugs at the World Trade Centre site, also known as Ground Zero in New York City on Saturday as Americans mark the 5th anniversary of September 11 attacks today.

US marks 5th 9/11 anniversary today al-Qaeda still haunts America

AFP, New York

The United States marks the fifth anniversary of the September 11 attacks today with solemn ceremonies and silent tributes to the nearly 3,000 people who died, but still haunted by al-Qaeda and the war in Iraq.

President George W. Bush, who was less than eight months into his first term when al-Qaeda hijackers took over four passenger jets and flew them into New York's World Trade Centre, the Pentagon and a Pennsylvania field, will lead the commemorations.

At the start of two days of ceremonies, Bush is on Sunday to lay a wreath at Ground Zero, the gaping hole where the Twin Towers once stood and the enduring symbol of the biggest attack on US soil since Pearl Harbour 60 years before.

Bush has called for flags to fly at half mast and for people across the country to observe a moment of silence at 8:46 am (1246 GMT) on Monday, the exact time that the first of two planes ploughed into the World Trade Centre.

He is then to lay a wreath in the Pennsylvania field where a third jet crashed after passengers fought back against their hijackers and where 40 people were killed.

He will then fly to the Pentagon for

commemorations there.

In what has become an annual ritual, husbands, wives and partners of the 2,749 people who perished in the World Trade Centre will read a roll call of the dead, pausing only to mark the moments the planes struck and the towers collapsed.

As evening falls, two giant beams of light symbolising the collapsed towers will illuminate the Manhattan sky. A candlelight vigil is then planned at Ground Zero.

For only the fifth time in his presidency, Bush will deliver a televised address to the nation from the White House in the evening, in what has been billed as "a non-political speech about what September 11 has meant to the nation."

In the run-up to the anniversary, Bush has made several speeches justifying decisions made in the name of the so-called "war on terror."

"America still faces determined enemies," Bush said in the latest on Saturday. "We must take the words of these extremists seriously, and we must act decisively to stop them from achieving their evil aims."

Five years after the attacks left the world's superpower reeling, September 11 remains the defining moment of Bush's presidency and a watershed in recent American history, its shockwaves continuing to reverberate.

Abbas ready to hold talks with Olmert

REUTERS, Ramallah

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said yesterday he was ready to meet Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert as soon as possible to resume long-stalled peace negotiations.

Olmert, who voiced a willingness on Saturday to hold talks with Abbas, told the Israeli cabinet it was time to create a "new horizon" with the Palestinians, officials said.

"I stand fully ready to meet the prime minister... without prior conditions and we are ready to begin immediately the preparations for this meeting," Abbas told a news conference with visiting British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

But Olmert has made clear there could be no progress toward peace unless the Palestinians meet their obligations under an internationally-backed "road map" that calls for the dismantling of armed groups, such as the governing Hamas movement.

Israel also has failed to carry out its commitments under the peace plan, including a construction freeze in Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Signs of movement in

Middle East peacemaking could give Blair a political boost as he grapples with an unpopular war in Iraq and feuding in Britain's ruling party, which forced him to concede this week that he will leave office within a year.

"I, like you, do believe there is a window of opportunity here," Blair said after talks with Abbas in the West Bank city of Ramallah, welcoming the prospect of a meeting between the Palestinian leader and Olmert.

Blair voiced support for Abbas's efforts to reach an agreement with Hamas on a unity government in a bid to ease international pressure on the Palestinian Authority.

"I believe that such a government, based on the Quartet requirements, does offer the possibility of re-engagement by the international community," Blair said.

The Quartet of peace brokers - the United States, the European Union, the United Nations and Russia - have cut aid to the current Hamas-led government, demanding it recognize Israel, renounce violence and accept past interim peace deals.

"And I would like to say that so far as I'm concerned, that if such a

(unity) government is formed, then I believe that is right that the international community deal with such a government," Blair said.

Abbas said he would travel to Gaza later in the day for unity talks with Hamas leaders.

Hamas, which is dedicated to Israel's destruction and defeated Abbas' Fatah party in a January election, responded to Blair's comments by reiterating its rejection of the Quartet's demands to change its policy toward Israel.

"Our people want a government that is based on national requirements and not in response to foreign dictates and conditions," Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said.

"We are interested in anything that would break the siege of our people but we will never accept that at the expense of the rights of our people," Abu Zuhri said.

The recent war in Lebanon and the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier by Gaza militants, including members of Hamas, in late June have also dampened prospects for peacemaking.

The soldier, Gilad Shalit, is still being held, although there are indications he may be released soon.



British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (R) arrive for a joint press conference at the Palestinian Authority headquarters yesterday in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

Will US hard talk lead to war with Iran?

AFP, Washington

Increasingly shrill US rhetoric on Iran, reminiscent of the march to war with Iraq, has some Tehran watchers warning of a dangerous new phase in the nuclear showdown with the Islamic Republic.

Though Washington says it is committed to diplomacy, its more muscular tone, and Iran's refusal to halt uranium enrichment, mean a military confrontation cannot be ruled out, they said.

"Everything is within the realm of possibility at the moment, this is what makes the situation so harrowing," said Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran specialist with the International Crisis Group.

"In 2007 we could talk about a situation where Iran is bombed, or the US and Iran have made amends."

The administration has noticeably toughened its language in the last week at a crucial point in the global bid to convince Tehran to

suspend uranium enrichment, in return for a package of incentives.

Washington says Iran has stalled enough, and should face sanctions. Tehran denies it is making the bomb.

President George W. Bush said Iran's leaders were "tyrants" and must not be allowed "tools of mass murder."

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said the US drive for sanctions tested United Nations credibility - an argument familiar from the febrile period before the Iraq war.

The top US arms control official Robert Joseph said the notion of a nuclear-armed Iran was "intolerable" while a new US Anti-Terrorism Strategy warned of "the potential WMD-terrorism nexus that emanates from Tehran."

Administration tub-thumping does not by itself signal a slide into military action - though it set Washington's community of foreign policy think-tanks abuzz.

In a sign of the complexity of the

situation, Bush moderated his tone in a Wall Street Journal interview Friday, saying he had signed off on a US visit by Iran's ex-president Mohammad Khatami as he wanted to learn more about Iran.

Some analysts fear raising the stakes with Iran risks locking each side into dangerous positions, while Chinese and Russian reluctance to punish Tehran, and Iran's own deft political tactics offer ingredients for a deepening crisis.

Gregory Gause of the University of Vermont, said that while US rhetoric must be viewed in the light of looming congressional elections, it could not be dismissed as purely tactical.

"This is not an administration that makes idle threats, it fits perfectly into the Bush doctrine... I see no basic change in the way they view the post 9/11 world," he said, referring to the notion that the United States must confront threats preemptively - by military action if necessary.

Assad, Lahoud ordered Hariri murder, says ex-Syrian officer

AFP, Beirut

An exiled former Syrian intelligence officer has claimed that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his Lebanese counterpart, Emile Lahoud, ordered the assassination last year of former Lebanese premier Rafiq Hariri.

"Bashar al-Assad and Emile Lahoud gave the orders for Hariri's murder," Mohammed Zuhair as-Saddiq was quoted by the Beirut daily An-Nahar Sunday as saying in an interview with the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya satellite television channel.

"No other Syrian or Lebanese officer could have done this," he said in the interview broadcast Saturday night.

Saddiq also claimed that "former Lebanese officials and certain Arab officials", whom he did not identify to Al-Arabiya, "also participated in this crime".

Nepali Maoists & govt accused of HR abuses

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Both the Nepali government and Maoist rebels are killing people and violating human rights despite their truce, a leading rights group in the Himalayan nation said yesterday.

Subodh Pyakurel, chairman of rights group Informal Service Sector Centre (Insec), said the Maoists had killed 11 people while nine had died in action by security forces.

Both sides have been observing a truce since May after King Gyanendra gave up absolute rule following street protests and handed power to an alliance of seven political parties.

Insec also reported the Maoists had violated the truce 144 times compared to 22 cases involving government forces.

"The state is still carrying out killings, torture, intimidation, beating, arbitrary arrests and military action," it said in a state-

ment. "Maoists have also continued murder, abductions, physical assault, extortion of money through forced donations... torture in the name of people's courts and labour camps."

A senior government official denied systematic violation of rights by troops but added some deaths attributed to the state were being investigated.

Maoist leaders also rejected the charges of systematic abuse.

"There may have been some cases of violations unknowingly, but there are no abuses in a planned way," Maoist leader Dev Gurung said.

Nepal's key foreign donors urged the rebels last week to end extortion and intimidation, saying their actions hurt the economy of the impoverished nation.

Both the government and Maoists are holding talks to try and end the Maoist insurgency, which has killed thousands.

Rebels kill 6 In Iraq

3 al-Qaeda operatives killed, 16 more tortured corpses found

AFP, Baghdad

Insurgents killed at least six people and wounded dozens more in attacks across Iraq yesterday, while police found 16 bullet-riddled corpses, security officials said.

Three people were killed and 16 others wounded in a roadside bomb attack in central Baghdad's Tayan Square, a medic at the capital's Al-Kindi hospital said.

Interior ministry spokesman Brigadier General Abdul Karim Khalaf confirmed the attack.

Iraqi security forces yesterday killed three al-Qaeda operatives in a morning raid on a house in western Baghdad's Karrada district, an interior ministry spokesman said.

"The three belonged to a terror cell headed by Abu Jaafar al-Lybi," said Brigadier General Abdul Karim Khalaf, suggesting that the cell leader was a Libyan citizen.

Lybi was not among those killed. Khalaf said the raid was led by senior officials from the security forces. In the "ensuing one-hour

battle between them and the terrorists, the three were killed," he said, while an Iraqi soldier was wounded.

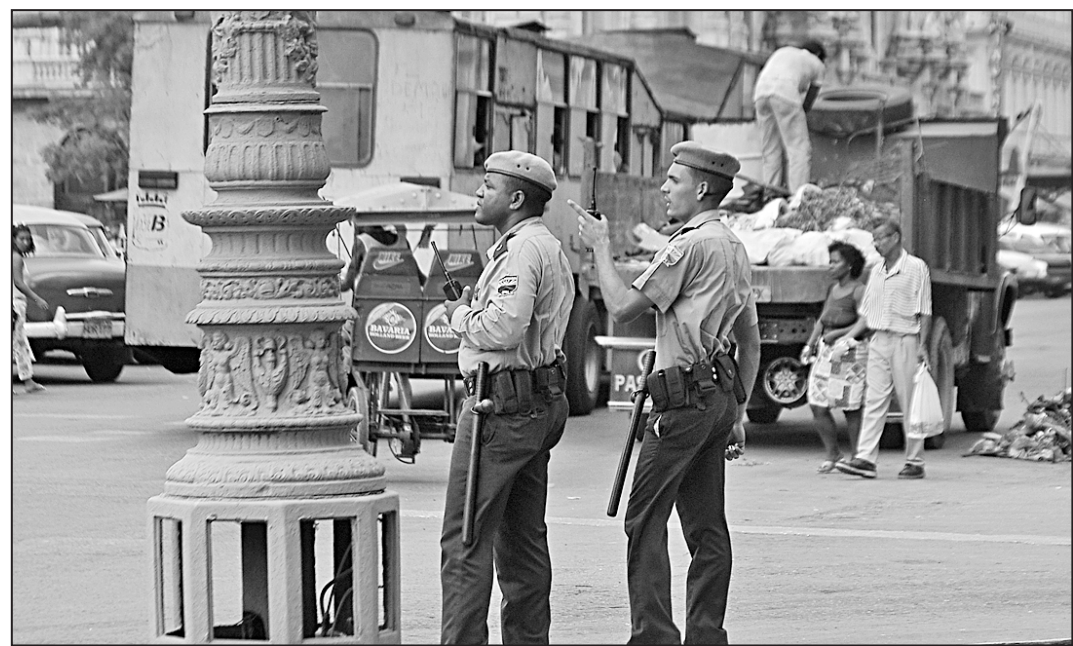
Khalaf said a large quantity of explosives and a number of suicide vests were found at the site of the raid.

Insurgents have managed to carry out massive attacks across Baghdad despite a major security crackdown by Iraqi and US forces since mid-June.

To the north of Baghdad in the restive Diyala province, attacks continued unabated.

A former general and his bodyguard were ambushed and killed by gunmen in the village of Beni Saad, near the provincial capital of Baquba, police said, adding that a 12-year-old boy was also wounded in the clash.

One policeman was similarly shot dead in the town of Muqadiyah, while four teenagers were wounded in a mortar attack in Baquba.



Cuban policemen patrol a street of Havana Saturday. Thousands of police officers have been deployed on the streets of the Cuban capital, where the five daylong 14th Non-Aligned Movement summit (NAM) begins today.

Ailing Castro to take NAM summit spotlight

AFP, Havana

Not one to shy away from the spotlight, the ailing Fidel Castro will cast a long shadow as Cuba hosts much of the developing world, including key US foes, at a Non Aligned Movement summit in Havana this week.

Castro, 80, has long been one of the most enthusiastic leaders of the NAM, and his communist regime has vowed to strengthen the movement, which has struggled to remain relevant in a post Cold War world.

The key question is whether Castro will be well enough to show up at the convention centre where dozens of leaders will gather for the September 15-16 Non Aligned Movement (NAM) summit, which is to be preceded by four days of preparatory meetings.

Brown denies plotting to bring down Blair

AFP, London

Gordon Brown, eager to become Britain's prime minister, reiterated yesterday that it was up to Tony Blair to decide when to quit the post, as he sought to calm a week of turmoil over the leadership.

The finance minister slapped down accusations that he was plotting to overthrow Blair, and welcomed a challenge to face rivals for the premiership.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Brown came out fighting after a barrage of savage assaults from detractors desperate to see that he does not become prime minister when Blair steps down within the next 12 months.

He denied he was behind a confidential letter from MPs in the governing Labour Party urging Blair to stand down - part of a chain of events which forced the prime minister to specify that he would go within a year of what he had previously only said would be his final term in office.