

US soldiers hurt in Kuwait attack

AP, Kuwait City
Two US soldiers were seriously wounded by a gunman who fired on them as they drove along a highway in Kuwait on Thursday, the US military said.

The shooting occurred about 10:30 a.m. while the Americans were travelling between the US military base of Camp Doha and the town of Arifjan, a US official said.

One American was wounded in the face and the other in the shoulder, the official said on condition of anonymity. Both victims were airlifted to a Kuwaiti military hospital, where they were in serious but not life-threatening condition.

The US official said the soldiers did not shoot back at the lone assailant, but managed to drive to Arifjan before being airlifted for medical treatment. The attacker escaped.

The names and units of the victims were not released. Kuwaiti authorities and US military's Criminal Investigation Command were investigating.

The shooting was the latest in a series of attacks on American troops, who are training here for a possible attack on neighbouring Iraq.

US to give Israel \$ 2.16 b in military aid next year

AFP, Washington

The United States said Wednesday it had pledged to give Israel 2.16 billion dollars in military assistance next year to ensure the defense of its chief Middle East ally.

The amount of aid for fiscal 2004, which is still subject to congressional approval, was agreed to at meetings last week between senior US and Israeli officials in Washington, the State Department said in a statement.

"As part of this year's US-Israel Joint Security Assistance Planning presentation, the United States and Israel exchanged letters on November 15 which confirmed that the United States intends to provide Israel 2.16 billion dollars in foreign military assistance in fiscal 2004," it said.

Photographers face privacy trial over role in Diana crash

AFP, Paris

Three photographers who took pictures of Britain's Princess Diana and her lover Dodi Al Fayed just before their fatal 1997 crash are to stand trial in France for invasion of privacy, a legal source said on Tuesday.

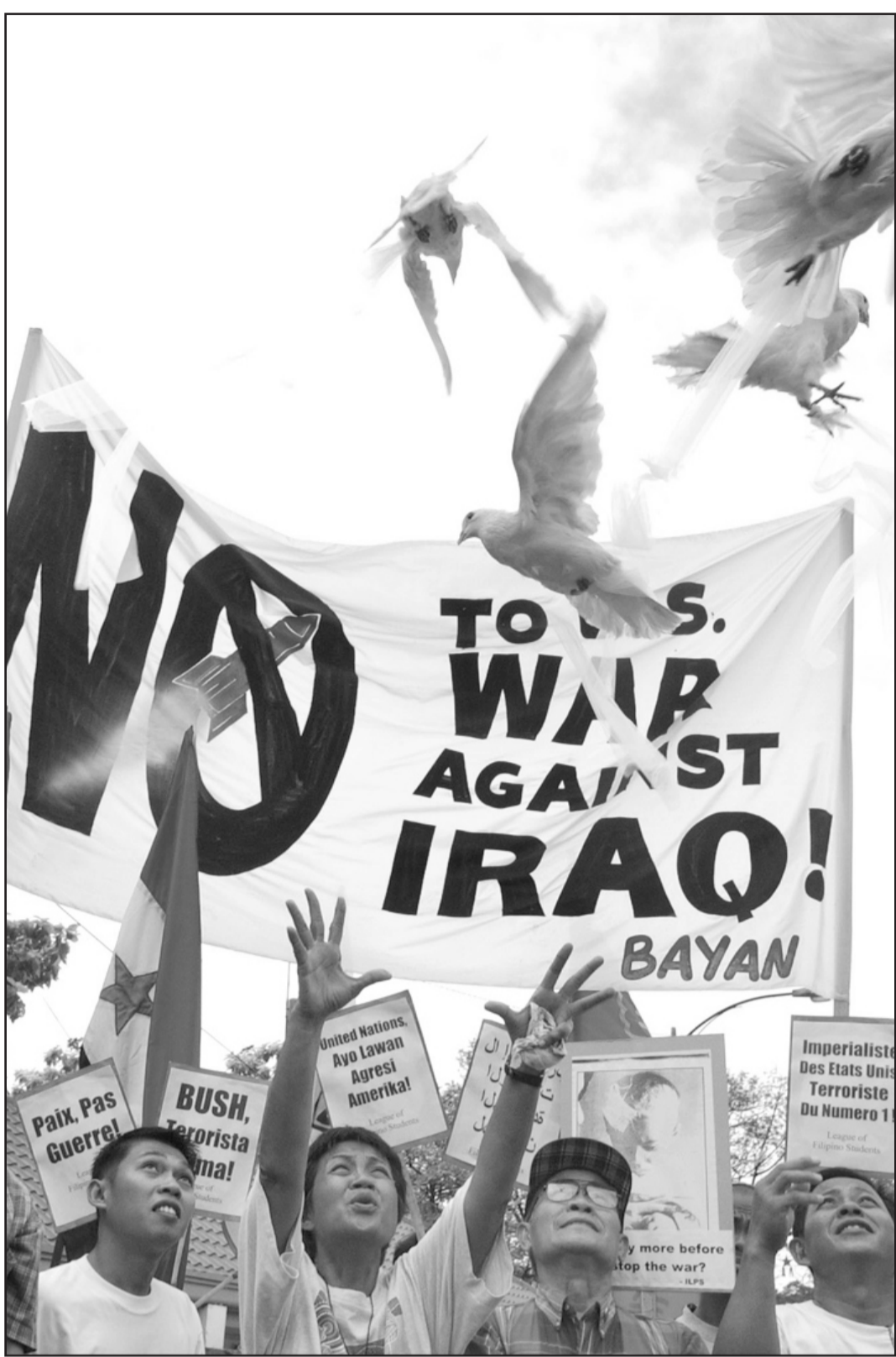
The photographers will only be tried in relation to pictures they took of Dodi Al Fayed, since Diana's family is not pressing charges, the source said.

The three men were among a group of photographers who pursued Diana and Dodi on motorbikes after they left the Ritz hotel in Paris on the night of September 30, 1997.

Diana, Dodi Al Fayed and driver Henri Paul were killed in a high-speed crash, as their Mercedes sped through central Paris.

Investigating judge Jean-Louis Peries has dropped charges against five other photographers who were placed under investigation last year for their role in the tragedy, the same source said.

Dodi's father, Egyptian tycoon Mohamed Al Fayed, lost his bid to have the photographers convicted for causing the crash when France's highest appeal court acquitted nine photographers and a motorcyclist of manslaughter last April.



A group of Filipino anti-US demonstrators belonging to a leftist organisation Bayan release white doves to dramatise their opposition to the US led war campaign against Iraq during a rally outside the US embassy in Manila on Thursday.

US renews terror warning citing Laden tape

AFP, Washington

The United States on Wednesday renewed for the second time this month a "worldwide caution" warning US citizens abroad of the continuing terrorist threat against American interests posed by Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network.

The alert was issued by the State Department amid increasing fears that al-Qaida may be plotting imminent attacks against US and other western targets around the world following the release last week of an audiotape in which a voice now believed to be bin Laden's issued new threats.

"In light of the statement released by Osama Bin Laden on November 12, 2002, the Department of State reminds Americans that US citizens and interests remain at increased risk of terrorist attacks, including by groups with links to Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaida organisation," it said.

The White House said on Monday that US intelligence officials who have analysed the tape are almost certain that the voice is that of bin Laden.

Even before that, however, Washington was convinced that the tape was genuine and two days after the tape was aired by Qatar's satellite television network al-Jazeera, the FBI issued a bulletin warning that al-Qaida may pursue "spectacular attacks" with "high symbolic value" in the United States.

In the tape, bin Laden praised recent attacks in the Middle East, Russia and Southeast Asia aimed at the United States and its allies.

And, he threatened further attacks, prompting terror warnings throughout Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Wednesday's State Department notice also said that US interests abroad may be targeted for attacks in retaliation for the November 14 execution of Mir Aimal Kasi, a Pakistani who was convicted in 1997 of the 1993 murders of two CIA employees.

Possible retaliation for Kasi's execution was the basis for the last "worldwide caution" the department issued on November 6. That notice had not been due to expire until May 7, 2003.

"The potential exists for retaliation acts against US or other foreign interests in response to the execution," it said.

The new alert, which is not set to expire until May 20, 2003, also repeats other information contained in the earlier warning.

It makes reference to the killing of a US Marine and the wounding of a second in Kuwait in early October when alleged Muslims extremists opened fire at them during US military exercises on Failaka island.

And it recalls the deaths of more than 180 people, including Americans, in the October 12 nightclub bombings on the Indonesian resort island of Bali, which have been blamed on al-Qaida associates.

Just minutes before the State Department issued Wednesday's "worldwide caution," it had released a country specific warning for Malaysia, which also cited the Bali bombings.

The new notice did not specifically mention last month's killing in Amman, Jordan, of US diplomat Laurence Foley, but noted that US diplomatic missions around the world remain at a heightened state of alert.

Bush builds Iraq coalition, warns Saddam

REUTERS, Prague

President Bush began assembling a coalition for possible war on Iraq and warned Saddam Hussein Wednesday he would be entering his "final stage" as Iraqi leader if he denied having weapons of mass destruction.

It would be folly for Saddam to repeat past defiance of United Nations demands to give up his deadly weapons, Bush said in a forceful speech on the eve of a NATO summit.

"We now call an end to that game of deception and deceit and denial. Saddam Hussein has been given a very short time to declare completely and truthfully his arsenal of terror," he said.

"Should he again deny that this arsenal exists, he will have entered his final stage with a lie, and deception this time will not be tolerated. Delay and defiance will invite the severest consequences," Bush told an audience of students in Prague.

The US president ratcheted up the rhetoric against Iraq as NATO leaders converged on Prague for a meeting dedicated to enlarging the 19-nation Atlantic alliance and transforming it to meet 21st century security threats, overshadowing the formal agenda.

The White House said the United States had begun contacting about 50 countries to assess their willingness to join a "coalition of the willing" in any action against Iraq.

Bush linked disarming Iraq with NATO's future relevance, comparing the perceived threat from Saddam to the Cold War challenges that the allies had faced down, and to the failure to oppose aggression against Czechoslovakia by Hitler's Germany that led to World War II.

Noting this would be the first NATO summit held in a former communist country, he declared: "The Soviet Union is gone, but freedom still has enemies...We're threatened by the spread of chemical and biological and nuclear weapons, which are produced by outlaw regimes and could be delivered either by missile or terrorist cell."

Bush's tough language sets up a Dec. 8 deadline for Iraq to produce a full account of its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs as a potential trigger point for the U.S.-led disarming of Saddam by force.

Iraq has said it will meet the deadline set in the U.N. resolution that sent arms inspectors back to Baghdad this week after an absence of four years. But it has also flatly denied having any banned weaponry, which Washington rejects.

"We have a lot of information and we expect to get more information but I won't go further than that," a senior U.S. official said when asked if the White House could prove Iraq was lying.

Speaking at a joint news conference with Czech President Vaclav Havel, Bush said NATO members would consider during their summit the consequences for Iraq of any failure to comply with the U.N. disarmament resolution.

"If the decision is made to use military force, we will consult with our friends and we hope that our friends will join us," Bush said.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said of the consultation process: "It's widespread, it's many nations."

Bush met President Ahmet Necdet Sezer of Turkey, a key ally for any military campaign against Baghdad.

NATO invites 7 new members

AP, Prague

In a historic eastward shift, NATO expanded its membership beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union on Thursday amid a makeover designed to answer new threats of global terrorism.

The Western alliance which for decades confronted the USSR across the barbed-wire divides of Central Europe invited seven former communist countries under its security umbrella as part of reforms that President Bush called the most significant in NATO's 53-year history.

Barely a decade since they regained independence from the Soviet Union, the Baltic nations of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania joined Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia in receiving a call to become NATO members at the alliance's first summit behind the old Iron Curtain.

"By welcoming seven members," Bush said, "we will not only add to our military capabilities, we will refresh the spirit of this great democratic alliance. We believe today's decision reaffirms our commitment to freedom and our commitment to Europe which is whole and free and at peace."

NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson said the summit was "a truly defining moment for the Atlantic Alliance. We will reinforce that essential trans-Atlantic bond on which our security and defence still depends. We have the organisation, the military capabilities and the will to deal with threats to our people wherever and whenever they may come."

The seven new countries will formally join the alliance in May 2004 after the US Senate and the parliaments of the NATO member countries ratify the expansion.

Speaking to students in the

Czech capital on the eve of Thursday's summit, Bush said the new members would reinvigorate an alliance seeking to transform itself into a force to fight the dangers of terrorism and renegade governments armed with weapons of mass destruction rather than the threat of Cold War-era tank assaults.

"Those with fresh memories of tyranny know the value of freedom," Bush said Wednesday. "In Central and Eastern Europe, the courage and moral vision of prisoners and exiles and priests and playwrights caused tyrants to fall... this spirit is needed in the councils of a new Europe."

French President Jacques Chirac took up the theme, telling Czech television the NATO expansion to be followed next month by a European Union decision to invite in eight former communist nations was "an affirmation that there can be no more splits in Europe."

As well as extending NATO's territory into the Balkans, Baltic states and Central Europe, leaders will approve an overhaul of the way the alliance does business and try to silence critics who say it has drifted into irrelevance in the post-Warsaw Pact, post-Sept. 11 world.

Among the decisions before the summit was one to pool crack troops in a 20,000-strong rapid-response force to tackle threats anywhere around the world, burying NATO's old reluctance to act outside its established European and North Atlantic spheres of influence.

European allies also will pledge to beef up their outdated militaries with smart bombs, anti-germ warfare gear and heavy-lift planes to get troops and equipment to trouble spots quickly. NATO will also streamline its command structure under a US general in a new post as strategic operational commander.

Cervical cancer vaccine holds hope

AP, Boston

A cervical cancer study with dramatic results is fanning enthusiasm that the disease can someday be routed with the same kind of weapon that stamped out diseases like smallpox and polio: a vaccine.

A cervical cancer vaccine worked on 100 percent of the women who took injections in its first trial.

"If the promise implicit in the study... is realised, we could, in our lifetime, see the gradual but progressive dismantling of the barriers to preventing cervical cancer," said Dr. Christopher Crum, a pathologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

It remains unclear how long the protection might last. Even so, researchers say a vaccine could reach the market within five years or so.

The findings were published in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine. The issue also carries separate research findings showing potential value in an experimental vaccine for genital herpes.

Vaccines work by teaching the body's immune defences to recognise invading viruses and bacteria. Most types of cancer, by contrast, are blamed largely on genetic mutations and environmental factors. However, virtually all cases of cervical cancer are caused by a sexually transmitted virus the human papilloma virus.



A collage shot on Wednesday in New York shows collectible cards called "Heroes of the World Trade Centre" depicting portraits of victims of the September 11 attacks on WTC which are due to go on sale in December. The complete set comprises 202 cards, including 170 people -- both living and dead -- and 32 subject cards. The suggested retail price for a pack of nine is 2.5 USD.

Explosions at Ecuador Army barracks kill 6

REUTERS, Riobamba

A series of explosions ripped through a munitions storage site Wednesday at an army barracks in Ecuador's Andes, leaving at least six dead and wounding more than 200, officials reported.

The blasts were touched off at 4 p.m. in a munitions store at the army's Galapagos brigade, in the highland city of Riobamba, 106 miles south of Quito, the army said in a statement.

Army spokesman Col. Arturo Cadena said two soldiers and four civilians were killed in the blasts, likely triggered when a grenade went off accidentally.

Red Cross spokeswoman Monica Menendez told Reuters the blasts severely wounded 74 people and caused light injuries in another 200, mostly from shattered glass as windows burst in buildings around the base.

Thousands of people fled the area around the barracks in panic as sections of the Andean city of 124,000 inhabitants lost phone service and power, Riobamba's mayor Fernando Guerrero told Reuters via telephone.

Some curled up to sleep on their doorsteps late on Wednesday, fearing another round of explosions. Others wandered on the highways outside the city, bundled in blankets.



Ifthikharul Karim, Bangladesh's Ambassador to China, is presenting his credentials to Jiang Zemin, President of the People's Republic of China at the Great Hall of People in Beijing recently.

US headed down wrong track: Gore

REUTERS, Los Angeles

Former Vice President Al Gore said on Wednesday the United States was headed down the wrong track economically and diplomatically, and promised to run a different kind of campaign if he seeks the White House again.

Gore, a Democrat who lost a nail-biter to President Bush in 2000, said his bitter defeat had taught him a variety of political lessons that he believed would make him a stronger candidate if he decides to run again.

"You learn more from setbacks than you do from smooth sailing," Gore said in an interview in his Beverly Hills hotel suite, adding with a laugh: "I've been blessed with a great setback."

Since Bush has taken office the country is in dramatically worse shape, Gore said. He called for repeal of the tax cuts for the country's top earners and the firing of Bush's entire economic team led by

Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill. "I think the country is headed in the wrong direction economically, environmentally, in our health care policy and in our foreign policy," Gore said. "By almost every objective measure we've lost significant ground in the last two years."

Gore said he thought war with Iraq was "likely" unless Iraqi President Saddam Hussein completely capitulated to U.S. demands, and he criticised Bush for moving valuable resources from an unfinished war on terror to a campaign against Iraq.

"I think the destruction of the al-Qaida network is the definition of success or failure in the war on terrorism, and we have so far failed to do that," Gore said.

He said Bush's unilateral foreign policy moves and intense focus on Iraq had "squandered the goodwill of the world that came after 9/11 and replaced it with apprehension about what the U.S. is going to do."