

US admits its terror report was wrong

Attacks actually increased sharply worldwide

REUTERS, Washington

The State Department said on Thursday its report that the number of international "terrorist" attacks fell last year was wrong and in fact had risen sharply.

The Department also said the number of resulting deaths was expected to be higher for 2003 than the 307 initially reported, but officials said it may not exceed 2002's 725 fatalities.

The admissions dented the claim by President Bush's administration that Washington is winning the "war on terrorism," an argument critical to his reelection strategy.

The State Department's "Patterns of Global Terrorism Report" released on April 29 said "terrorist" attacks fell to 190 last year, their lowest since 1969, from 198 in 2002.

It also said those killed dropped to 307, including 35 US citizens, from 725 in 2002, including 27 Americans.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said both totals were understated because of errors in compiling the data by the Terrorist Threat Integration Center. The interagency group was set up last year to address the failure of US intelligence agencies to prevent the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

Boucher told reporters the terrorism experts appeared to have made a series of mistakes, failing to count attacks for the full year and possibly misinterpreting the definition of such attacks to exclude incidents included in the past.

"The data in the report are incomplete and in some cases incorrect," he said, admitting his department failed to catch the mistakes. "We got the wrong data and we didn't check it enough ... That's the simplest explanation for what happened."

Secretary of State Colin Powell said he was "very disturbed" that errors had made it into the report

but denied the numbers were manipulated for political benefit.

When the report was released, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said it provided "clear evidence that we are prevailing in the fight" while State Department coordinator for counterterrorism Cofer Black hailed its "good news."

Boucher said the department learned of the report's errors in the first week of May and began an investigation. He said a May 17 letter from Rep. Henry Waxman, a California Democrat and frequent critic of the administration, spurred its efforts.

The State Department did not publicly acknowledge the report's errors until they were reported in the media.

Boucher said the State Department asked the Terrorist Threat Integration Center to review the numbers and would publish revised figures when they were available.

People have realised BJP's 'true colours', says Sonia

PTI, Rae Bareilly

Congress president Sonia Gandhi yesterday attacked Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for ridiculing her party's ability to firm up a coalition before the elections and said that the ease with which it formed the Government and formulated a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) dashed its hopes.

"Some people were saying that we would not be able to form a coalition easily. But their hopes have been dashed. We formed the Government without any difficulty and also finalised the CMP in no time," Sonia, who is on a thanks giving tour of her constituency, said addressing a meeting.

She prefaced her remarks saying that Congress was sharing power for the first time at the Centre, which is both a challenge as well as an experience.

Sonia told her electorate that she listened to her inner voice and did not accept Prime Ministership. "Today I have got so much happiness which I would not have got if I had become Prime Minister."



PHOTO: AFP

US military vehicles secure the area close to the wreckage of a car bomb yesterday in the Saydiya district south of Baghdad. Three US soldiers were wounded in a car bomb attack on the military convoy.

Reagan's state funeral caps days of mourning

REUTERS, Washington

Six days of mourning and rosy remembrance for Ronald Reagan approached a climax yesterday as world leaders and veterans of the Cold War gathered at Washington's National Cathedral to take part in the former president's state funeral.

Many past and present international leaders and veterans of the Cold War struggle against communism that Reagan helped end were attending the service, billed as one of the largest gatherings of international dignitaries in years.

Government departments, the US stock exchange and many businesses were closed as Americans paused to pay tribute to their 40th president.

President Bush was set to deliver a 15-minute eulogy at the funeral. "This will be the president speaking on behalf of the nation as we say good-bye to a great leader," said White House spokesman Scott McClellan.

Former British Prime Minister

Margaret Thatcher, a staunch Reagan ally whose health is too frail to permit her to speak, will attend. She recorded a message in advance that will be played to the congregation.

Bush's father, former president George Bush who was Reagan's vice president, was also expected to deliver remarks. Other dignitaries in the congregation of 4,000 include former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who crossed swords with Reagan at memorable summits in the 1980s and then allowed the Cold War to end peacefully months after Reagan left office in 1989.

Lech Walesa, the one-time Polish shipyard electrician who led the Solidarity labor movement and later became president of a post-communist Poland, was also attending.

Tens of thousands of Americans filed past Reagan's body as it lay in state at the US Capitol. The public viewing ended on Friday morning, as officials prepared to transport the body to the Cathedral.

US to widen Iraqi prison abuse probe

REUTERS, Washington

The Pentagon plans to widen a probe into the abuse of Iraqi prisoners to include actions of the top US commander in Iraq while Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld requested that autopsies be conducted when detainees die, officials said on Thursday.

Rumsfeld wrote in a memo released by the Pentagon that he must be notified personally of the death of an enemy prisoner of war, civilian internee or anyone else in military custody.

In a move apparently aimed at preserving evidence, he also directed that remains not be washed before being placed in a clean body bag, and that any objects with the body other than weapons or ammunition be "left undisturbed."

Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, who commands US-led forces in Iraq, asked to be removed as the officer who reviews the ongoing investigation by Maj. Gen. George Fay in order to allow his own conduct to be scrutinized, defence officials said.

Pak troops pound militants with artillery in tribal belt

53 killed on both sides

REUTERS, Wana

Pakistani forces hunting al-Qaeda-linked Islamic militants bombed and shelled a remote tribal region yesterday, where the military said more than 53 people been killed in three days of fighting.

The Pakistan army said it had killed more than 35 militants but lost 15 of its men in fighting since Wednesday in South Waziristan, a rugged mountain territory bordering Afghanistan. It has reported three civilian deaths.

On Friday, the army pounded militants in the Shakai area, about 250 miles southwest of Islamabad and 11 miles west of the regional capital, Wana, where the flare up began this week.

Pakistan has said up to 600 foreign militants, including Arabs, Chechens and Uzbeks linked to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, have been hiding out in tribal areas close to the Afghan border protected by Pakistani tribesmen.

Many people, including women and children, walked for miles to safety after authorities ordered residents of Shakai to evacuate the battle zone, where government jets bombed houses where militants were thought to be holed up.

Intelligence officials said it appeared supporters of al-Qaeda were carrying out attacks in other parts of Pakistan in response to the army crackdown in the tribal region.

On Thursday, the army commander in the southern port city of Karachi narrowly survived an assassination attempt when suspected Islamic militants attacked his motorcade.

Ten people, including several soldiers, were killed in the attack, which came six months after two attempts to kill Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf.

Nek Mohammed, a supporter of the foreign militants in South Waziristan, told the British Broadcasting Corp's Pashto-language service on Thursday that the attack in Karachi was a response to the military's operation on the border and more attacks were planned.

US probes if Gaddafi ordered Saudi leader's killing

REUTERS, Washington

The United States is investigating allegations Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi ordered the assassination of Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, US officials said on Thursday.

President Bush, who has presided over improving ties with Libya, vowed to discover the truth about the accusations and warned Gaddafi he would make him honor his commitment last year to renounce terrorism.

Washington raised its concerns directly with Gaddafi after an American Muslim in custody in the United States alleged last year that the leader instructed Libyan intelligence agents to kill Crown Prince Abdullah, US officials said.

Libya denied the accusation.

"What I can tell you is that we are going to make sure we fully understand the veracity of the plot line. So, we are looking into it," Bush told

reporters in Sea Island, Georgia, where he attended a Group of Eight summit. "When we find out the facts, we will deal with them accordingly."

The US investigation began as the United States and Britain were welcoming back into the international community their longtime adversary Gaddafi after he decided to dismantle his illegal weapons of mass destruction.

"I have sent a message to him that if he honors his commitments to resist terror and to fully disclose and disarm his weapons programs we will begin a process of normalization, which we have done. ... And now we will make sure he honors his commitment," Bush said.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Libya "assured us that they would not support the use of violence for settling political differences with any state."

Coup bid thwarted in Congo

Kabila safe, rebels surrounded in a military camp

AFP, Kinshasa

A coup attempt by members of the Democratic Republic of Congo presidential guard was thwarted overnight, and troops loyal to President Joseph Kabila were pursuing the would-be putschists yesterday as they fled the capital, officials and witnesses told AFP.

A small group of soldiers from the presidential guard, led by Major Eric Lengue, who had announced overnight that they had seized power, were seen at 9:00 am (0800 GMT) in four vehicles heading out of the capital, reliable sources said.

The security forces were hot on their heels, and a military helicopter was flying over Kinshasa, they added.

The would-be putschists had stormed the national radio station at around 2:00 am to announce that the transitional government, led by Kabila, had failed and been suspended, the officials said.

Information Minister Vital

Kamerhe said the "commando", as he called it, then headed to the national electricity company, SNEC, where they caused a power cut in Kinshasa that lasted some three hours, before electricity was restored at around 6:00 am.

Officials said several hours later that the coup bid had been thwarted, and reassured that Kabila -- who came to power after his father, Laurent, was assassinated in January 2001 by a member of his presidential guard -- was safe, and those behind the revolt were surrounded in a military camp.

Residents of the area reported hearing about six outbursts of heavy weapons fire coming from near the military camp shortly before 0600 GMT.

A few moments later, automatic weapons fire was heard in Kinshasa's Gombe neighbourhood, where Kabila's residence and office are located.

But by mid-morning Friday, witnesses said the renegade sol-

diers were on the run.

Kamerhe said on private Kinshasa radio station Top that the attempted takeover had failed, Kabila had been informed and order had been re-established.

Presidential spokesman Kudura Kasongo told AFP a few hours after the abortive putsch that the president "is fine" and under no threat.

"It was just someone trying to throw his weight around and who got inside the radio station," Kabila's spokesman Kudura Kasongo told AFP a few hours after the incident.

"The president is fine, I am in regular contact with him and there is no threat," Kasongo said.

The power cut engineered by the would-be putschists affected the entire capital and fueled rumours of trouble in the sprawling city, which two-and-a-half months ago saw another apparent coup bid, when assailants launched simultaneous attacks on four military bases in the capital.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian protestors set a fire and remove concrete blocks after praying in the place where the Israeli separation fence will be built in Al-Ram on the edges of Jerusalem yesterday. Palestinians protested against the controversial "security barrier" Israel is building on their land to separate Jerusalem from the West Bank.

UN resolution may save US from 'hell it created' in Iraq: Rafsanjani

AFP, Tehran

The UN Security Council resolution passed this week enshrining the terms of Iraqi sovereignty could save the United States "from the hell that it created," an influential former Iranian president said yesterday.

"The Security Council resolution is a step forward toward saving the Iraqi people and the United States from the hell it created," Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said in a sermon during weekly Friday prayers here.

"The United States is beginning to accept the fact that it got itself into a mire and is looking for a solution for an honorable way out."

However, he added that the "oppressive nature" of the United States is preventing it from setting a date for withdrawal from Iraq.

Rafsanjani characterised as "positive" American action in overthrowing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and Saddam

Hussein in Iraq, but pointed out that Washington had failed to provide security in the two countries.

In Iraq, he said, "the situation is worse today than it was under the rule of Saddam."

On Wednesday, Iran welcomed the Security Council's unanimous endorsement of the new Iraqi government's sovereignty, saying it was a step towards an end of the US-led occupation of its neighbourhood.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran welcomes favourably all action that leads to reinforcing the sovereignty of the Iraqi people," foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi said.

"Resolution 1546 is a step towards the total sovereignty of the Iraqi people over their future and their control over their natural resources, and it recognises the Iraqi government's authority to end the mission of foreign forces and bring a total end to the occupation of the country," he added.