

THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM

Gore raps Bush for spying, wants program investigation

Former Vice President Al Gore called Monday for an independent investigation of President Bush's domestic spying program, contending the president repeatedly and insistently broke the law by eavesdropping on Americans without court approval.



GORE

Gore charged that the administration acted without congressional authority and made a "direct assault" on a special federal court that authorizes requests to eavesdrop on Americans. One judge on the court resigned last month, voicing concerns about the National Security Agency's surveillance of e-mails and phone calls.

The former vice president said that Attorney General Alberto Gonzales should name a special counsel to investigate the program, citing the attorney general's obvious conflict of interest as a member of the Bush Cabinet as well as the nation's top law enforcement officer.

Pakistan prime minister will travel to U.S. despite airstrike

Pakistan's ruling party on Monday demanded an apology for a reported CIA airstrike that killed at least 17 people, but the country's prime minister said his trip to the United States this week would go ahead as planned.

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and his ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Q on Monday condemned the reported U.S. airstrike on a village near the Afghan border, which intelligence officials have said targeted al-Qaida's No. 2 leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

But Aziz said he was still scheduled to leave today for the United States, where he said he would talk about security issues but also meet business leaders to encourage foreign investment.

The leader called Friday's airstrike on a village near the Afghan border regrettable but said, "I don't think that takes away from the fact that Pakistan needs investment."

The Muslim League-Q party later issued a statement demanding an official apology from the United States.

Security appears lax between Pakistan-Afghanistan border

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan say they have stepped up security along the border between the two countries after a U.S. missile strike targeted al-Qaida's No. 2 leader, but an Associated Press reporter who went to the region Monday saw little scrutiny of travelers' bags or IDs, suggesting there's not much to stop al-Qaida militants from slipping across.

Pakistan now has more than 70,000 forces in its tribal regions, although few were in evidence in the Bajur region of Pakistan, a known militant hideout because of its inaccessible mountains and caves, after Friday's missile strike.

A senior army official, who declined to be named, maintained troops were working undercover because of residents' anger over the airstrike.

Another U.S. chopper crashes in Iraq, kills 2

Militant groups claim to have shot down aircraft

By JASON STRAZIUSO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

A U.S. military helicopter crashed north of the Iraqi capital Monday — the third American chopper to go down in 10 days — killing the two crew members. A resident said he saw the smoke trail of a missile before the aircraft plunged to the ground.

The military said the AH-64 Apache was conducting a combat air patrol when it went down in an area known for terrorist activity. Officials said it was too early to determine the cause of the crash, and the names of the dead soldiers were not released. Apaches hold only a pilot and a co-pilot.

Video footage shot by AP Television News in Mishahda, north of Baghdad, showed smoke billowing from what was reported to be the crash site. Helicopters circled nearby.

Two militant groups claimed they shot down the helicopter. Neither claim could be verified.

Rashid Khalifa, 27, who has a food and drink stand in the area, said he saw the attack.

"I saw the smoke trail left by the missile," he said. "I heard a hissing sound, looked around and saw the helicopter losing control before crashing down."

The U.S. command questioned the credibility of a video purportedly showing an attack on a helicopter that was posted on the Internet by one of the militant



SOURCES: ESRI

AP

groups, the Mujahedeen Army.

The wobbly video showed a militant firing a shoulder-launched missile toward what appeared to be a helicopter in the distance. The aircraft in the video was hit, burst into flames and crashed to the ground.

"A review of the footage on television of a missile being fired does not appear to show this incident today, which remains under investigation," said Lt. Col. Barry Johnson, a U.S. spokesman.

"This appears to be another case of terrorists attempting to manipulate a tragic incident in the international media and getting the most news value out of it by using footage of something else to gain greater attention," he added.

The other group that claimed in an

Internet posting that it shot down the helicopter was the Salahudin al-Ayoubi Brigade. Both groups have carried out previous attacks.

The number of fatal U.S. military helicopter crashes in Iraq has spiked in recent weeks, fitting a wartime pattern of more frequent accidental and combat crashes during winter months.

An OH-58 Kiowa Warrior reconnaissance helicopter crashed near the northern city of Mosul on Friday, killing two pilots. On Jan. 7, a Black Hawk with 12 aboard crashed in bad weather near the northern city of Tal Afar. All eight soldiers and four civilians aboard were killed.

The causes of those crashes have yet to be announced.

The overall safety record of Army and Marine Corps helicopters has been good, military officials and private analysts say, given the enormous amount of flying in often-harsh conditions.

Army helicopters have logged nearly 1 million flight hours since the Iraq war began in March 2003, with the UH-60 Black Hawk accounting for nearly one-third of the total, according to Army Aviation Warfighting Center records.

Seven Black Hawks have crashed during the war. The second-most heavily used Army helicopter, the AH-64 Apache, has crashed four times and the No. 3 helicopter, the Kiowa Warrior, has gone down seven times.

Some were accidents; others were caused by hostile fire; and some are still under investigation.



A Blackhawk medivac helicopter flies over a Marine convoy south of Baghdad, Iraq, on March 27, 2003. The number of fatal U.S. military helicopter crashes in Iraq has increased in recent weeks.

AP PHOTO

Suicide motorcycle driver kills 20 in Afghanistan

The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan

Spectators were cheering the final moments of a wrestling match at a holiday fair when a motorcycle weaved into the crowd and exploded in a searing fireball.

"It was like doomsday," said Abdul Samad, who was in the crowd Monday at the border town of Spinboldak. "The motorcycle went up into the air in flames."

The attacker, with explosives strapped to his body, killed 20 people and wounded at least 30. It was the third deadly bombing in just more than 24 hours in the former Taliban stronghold of Kandahar

province and the bloodiest yet in a recent wave of suicide assaults.

Samad said he fled in a stampede of terrified spectators who had gathered at the fair to celebrate the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha. But he returned to help pull out the dead and injured, then escorted a wounded wrestler across the border to a hospital in Chaman, Pakistan.

About two dozen suicide bombings have wracked Afghanistan during the past four months, a relatively new tactic for militants here that has stoked fears of an escalating siege of bloody attacks like those in Iraq.

President Hamid Karzai warned

earlier Monday that Afghanistan could again become a staging post for terrorist strikes in Europe and America if international support wavers.

The blast burned the hair, beard and left arm of Najamuddin, a 24-year-old wrestler. He also broke his right hand when he was blown to the ground.

"The explosion tossed me into the air and threw me back. When I got up, I saw people lying in blood," Najamuddin said from his bed in the Chaman hospital.

Kandahar Gov. Asadullah Khalid put the toll at 20 dead and at least 30 wounded. Rafiq Tarin, a Pakistani official in Chaman, said

more than 30 people were treated at the hospital there, including many in critical condition.

The assault came just hours after a bomb targeted a truck convoy of Afghan soldiers in Kandahar city, killing four people and wounding 16. On Sunday, a suicide car bomber in that provincial capital killed a senior Canadian diplomat and two Afghan civilians.

Qari Mohammed Yusaf, who claims to speak for the Taliban, although his ties to the group are unclear, said its fighters had planted the bomb that struck the Afghan army convoy in Kandahar city but denied involvement in the Spinboldak attack.

Group: Majority of Iraqi votes OK

Election committee throws out less than 1 percent of ballots

By PATRICK QUINN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

Iraq's electoral commission ruled Monday that more than 99 percent of the ballots from the Dec. 15 parliamentary elections are valid, opening the way for a new government to start coming together.



HENDAWI

Final election results have been delayed by fraud complaints mainly lodged by the Sunni Arab minority, and groups looking for a political edge in dealing with the Shiite Muslim majority could still make further protests and hold up the naming of new leaders for two or three months.

Iraq's electoral commission announced it was throwing out votes from 227 ballot boxes because of fraud, a tiny percentage, less than 1 percent, of the total vote that shouldn't affect the overall results.

"These boxes will not have an effect on the preliminary results that we issued last month," said Adel al-Lami, general director of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq.

Complaints by Sunni Arab and secular Shiite parties charging voting fraud and other irregularities have delayed announcement of final results, impeding negotiations on forming a new, broad-based coalition government.

Hussein Hendawi, an official on the election commission, said uncertified election results should be released in four to five days, which will give the various parties an idea of how many seats they will get in the new 275-member parliament.

No party is expected to be able to govern on its own, requiring the factions to work together in forming a coalition Cabinet. Politicians predict that will take months, just as it did after last year's election of an interim government.

Hendawi said election officials annulled some ballot boxes because fake ballots were used, while the votes of about 53 boxes were thrown out because too many votes were cast.

Iraqis voted at about 6,200 centers across the country Dec. 15, and there was an average of five ballot boxes at each. So 227 ballot boxes would be about two-thirds of 1 percent of the total vote, which was estimated at about 11 million ballots.

Hendawi said the commission studied 58 serious complaints, including 25 from Baghdad, which is Iraq's biggest election district with 59 seats. A total of 1,985 complaints were lodged, but most were considered minor transgressions that would warrant nothing more than a fine.

Fewer irregularities occurred than in the vote for an interim parliament last Jan. 30, Hendawi said.

The governing United Iraqi Alliance, a religious bloc based in the Shiite Muslim majority, held a strong lead in preliminary results announced after the election. But with an estimated 130 seats, based on those results, it wouldn't have enough to control parliament and will have to form a coalition with Sunni Arabs and Kurds.

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Volume 43, No. 157

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The Daily Journal is an award-winning
newspaper published daily
except Sundays and Christmas at
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