

THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM

BRIEF
NATION

WASHINGTON

Official: No-fly list is being reduced by half

The Bush administration is checking the accuracy of a watch list of suspected terrorists banned from traveling on airliners in the United States and will probably cut the list in half, the head of the Transportation Security Administration said Wednesday.

Kip Hawley told Congress that the more accurate list, combined with a new passenger screening system, should take care of most incidents of people wrongly being prevented from boarding a flight or frequently being picked out for additional scrutiny.

A "no-fly" list of suspected terrorists and criminals considered too dangerous to travel on commercial airliners in this country has existed for decades. But since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 the list expanded. Tightened security procedures have led to closer scrutiny of air travelers and resulted in many complaints.

BRIEFS
WORLD

UNITED NATIONS

U.N. rejects proposal for larger presence in Iraq

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Wednesday he couldn't agree to President Bush's request to increase the U.N. presence in Iraq because of security concerns amid rising violence.

Ban, who took over as U.N. chief on Jan. 1, said the United Nations would, nonetheless, try to increase U.N. participation in the International Compact for Iraq, a five-year plan to ensure that Iraq's government has funds to survive and enact key political and economic reforms.

Ban spoke to reporters on his return from a two-day visit to Washington, where he conducted talks with Bush and met congressional leaders, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

"President Bush wanted to see an increased presence and role of the United Nations in Iraq," Ban said.

"I told President Bush that ... the U.N. presence and operations in Iraq is actually constrained by the situation on the ground. I mean the security concerns, but we will try to continue to participate and increase our role in Iraq, including the International Compact with Iraq," he said.



BAN

LONDON

Witness: Police watched London bombing suspects

Police were watching and photographing five of the men charged with plotting to bomb London's transport system more than a year before the failed attacks, when they were camping in northwestern England, prosecution witnesses said Wednesday.

One of the alleged plotters also was questioned by British police as he tried to board a flight to Pakistan the same year but was later allowed to travel.

It was the first day of testimony in the trial of six men accused of conspiring to bomb subway trains and buses on June 21, 2005, two weeks after four suicide bombers killed themselves and 52 bus and subway passengers in London.

Jurors were shown police surveillance photographs of 20 men and boys who had gathered in Langdale in England's Lake District in May 2004.



Relatives cry after collecting the bodies of their loved ones from al-Kindi hospital in Baghdad, Iraq, on Wednesday. Twin car bombs tore through a Baghdad university Tuesday in the deadliest attack in the country in nearly two months.

AP PHOTOS

Bombing kills 17 in Shiite marketplace

Female U.S. civilian killed in separate attack

By KIM GAMEL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq

American female civilians in Iraq often wear head scarves and robes when they go outside and, like most foreigners, travel only with bodyguards.

But even the most careful precautions are no guarantee of safety.

On Wednesday, gunmen in a mostly Sunni area of the capital shot up a Western convoy of democracy workers who were returning at midday from a program elsewhere in Baghdad. An American woman and three bodyguards lost their lives in the ambush.

The three-car convoy belonged to the Washington-based National Democratic Institute.

"It appeared to be an attack with fairly heavy weapons, we don't know what kind," said Les Campbell, the nonprofit group's Middle East director. "We have some information that a fire-fight ensued. Our security company responded to the attack."

The ambush took place in Yarmouk, a predominantly Sunni neighborhood in western Baghdad, according to an Iraqi army officer who

spoke on condition of anonymity because of security concerns.

Campbell, who was in Washington, identified the bodyguards as a Hungarian, a Croatian and an Iraqi. Two other people in the convoy were wounded, one seriously. The victims' names were withheld until their families could be notified.

Few foreigners and even fewer women have been caught up in Iraq's recent wave of violence as many Western groups have left and those who remain have tightened security and curtailed their movements after a series of kidnappings and beheadings. Before Wednesday, the last known American female civilian to be killed was Marla Ruzicka, a 28-year-old rights activist from California who died in a car bombing in April 2005.

Meanwhile, in the capital's Sadr City district, a more common type of tragedy unfolded Wednesday: A suicide car bomber killed 17 Shiites and wounded 33 others at a market.

The explosion took place just before 4 p.m. near a popular commercial area in the sprawling Shiite district of some 2.5 million people in eastern Baghdad.

The blast shattered the windows of

nearby shops and restaurants, and blood pooled in the street. Angry Iraqis surrounded the charred mass of twisted metal, all that was left of the explosives-packed car. They tipped the remains on its side and picked off pieces of blackened upholstery.

The attack on the marketplace came one day after car bombings killed scores of university students just two miles away, indicating that al-Qaida-linked fighters are bent on a surge of bloodshed as U.S. and Iraqi forces gear up for a fresh neighborhood-by-neighborhood security sweep through the capital.

Although nobody claimed responsibility for either day's car bombings, such attacks are the hallmark of Sunni militants, who appear to be taking advantage of a waiting period before the security crackdown to step up attacks on Shiites. There had been a relative lull in Baghdad violence since the first of the year.

In many parts of the capital, streets were crowded with cars and minivans carrying wooden caskets of the victims from Tuesday's car bombings, which killed at least 70 people and wounded more than 130 at Al-Mustansiriyah University.

Senators unveil resolution against escalating Iraq war

By ANNE FLAHERTY
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

A Senate resolution opposing President Bush's war plan on Iraq put the White House and Republican leaders on the defensive Wednesday as they scurried to prevent a trickle of GOP support for the measure from swelling into a deluge.

Eager to avoid an embarrassing congressional rebuke of the president's new war strategy, the administration seemed to hint that the effort, led chiefly by Democrats, might somehow be of assistance to terrorists. They also herded GOP skeptics to the White House, where they tried to allay the concerns of Republican lawmakers including Sens. John Warner of Virginia, Sam Brownback of Kansas, Norm Coleman of Minnesota and Susan Collins of Maine.

"What message does Congress intend to give?" asked White House spokesman Tony Snow. "And who



Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Sen. Joe Biden, D-Del., center, accompanied by Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., left, and Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., meets reporters Wednesday.

does it think the audience is? Is the audience merely the president? Is it the voting American public or, in an age of instant communication, is it also al-Qaida?"

Initially announced by Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin, D-Mich., and possible 2008 presidential candidates Sens. Joseph Biden, D-Del., and Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., the

nonbinding resolution states that "escalating the United States military force presence in Iraq" is not in the national interest. Bush has proposed adding 21,500 U.S. troops to the roughly 132,000 already in the country.

Moderate Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, also quickly signed on.

Hagel's and Snowe's support for the measure is a major victory for Democrats, who believe their support will open the door for other Republicans to jump on board and challenge Bush.

The resolution does not call for a withdrawal of troops or threaten funding of military operations, as many Democrats have suggested. Instead, it says the United States should transfer responsibility to the Iraqis "under an appropriately expedited timeline" that is not specified.

Republicans who attended the White House meetings said they emerged unconvinced more troops were the answer in Iraq but were unsure whether signing on to the resolution was the answer.

Gates favors Afghanistan troop boost

Defense chief: Increase needed to fight Taliban

By ROBERT BURNS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGRAM AIR BASE, Afghanistan

The Taliban are on the attack in Afghanistan, and U.S. commanders want more troops to fight them at the same time the military is straining under President Bush's plans to send more to Iraq.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates, visiting Afghanistan to see conditions for himself, suggested Wednesday he would indeed ask Bush for reinforcements.



GATES

Gates spent two days in talks with American, NATO and Afghan officials and said he was impressed with progress toward stabilizing and rebuilding Afghanistan. Yet he also said U.S. commanders want to add troops to the 24,000-strong American force now there, the highest level of a five-year-old war.

While Gates used no figures, a senior official traveling with him said the prospective increase would not be large, possibly one or two battalions, no more than a couple of thousand soldiers. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because no decision had been made.

Gates stopped short of saying he would recommend the increase. Yet he offered a rationale for reinforcing the war effort.

The war in Afghanistan went well at first. The Taliban rulers of a country that had been a sanctuary for al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden were toppled. But now there are renewed Taliban attacks.

"I think it is important that we not let this success here in Afghanistan slip away from us and that we keep the initiative," Gates told reporters traveling with him. "There's no reason to sit back and let the Taliban regroup."

A U.S. troop increase in Afghanistan would come on top of Bush's decision to send 21,500 more soldiers and Marines to Iraq over the coming four months, adding to the roughly 132,000 already there. That boost had been opposed by many officers, who worry that it would be too much stress on a force that is already sending soldiers to Iraq for multiple tours.

Secret court to oversee Bush spy program

By LARA JAKES JORDAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON

The Bush administration changed course and agreed Wednesday to let a secret but independent panel of federal judges oversee the government's controversial domestic spying program. Officials say the secret court has already approved at least one request for monitoring.

The shift will likely end a court fight over whether the warrantless surveillance program was legal.

The program, which was secretly authorized by President Bush shortly after the Sept. 11 terror attacks, was disclosed a little more than a year ago, resulting in widespread criticism from lawmakers and civil libertarians who questioned its legality.

The program allowed the National Security Agency, without approval from the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, to monitor phone calls and e-mails between the United States and other countries when a link to terrorism is suspected.

In a letter to senators Wednesday, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales said that "any electronic surveillance that was occurring as part of the Terrorist Surveillance Program will now be conducted subject to the approval of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court."

Gonzales said Bush would not reauthorize the program once it expires. Justice Department officials later said authorization for one investigation under the warrantless program was set to expire soon, but they would not specify when.

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