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Thursday, February 28, 2002



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Troops may train Georgian military to fight terrorism

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) — With U.S. military advisers already in Georgia — and with the prospect of hundreds more American troops being sent to Russia's doorstep — Georgian and U.S. officials denied Wednesday that American soldiers would go into combat against terrorism in the small Caucasus nation.

Russia, however, was clearly alarmed.

President Bush said the U.S. troops could be sent to Georgia to help train its military to fight guerrillas linked to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terrorist network. U.S. and Russian officials say the militants including several dozen who had been in Afghanistan — are in the area of the Pankisi Gorge, near Georgia's border with Russia's breakaway republic of Chechnya.

The head of the Georgian Defense Ministry's information department, Раара Gaprindashvili, said several U.S. military advisers arrived in Georgia Tuesday to discuss military training.

Putting troops in Georgia would bring the U.S. military to Russia's doorstep, unlike the deployment of U.S. and other Western troops at remote bases in Central Asia, which Russia considers part of its historic sphere of influence. Russia raised relatively little objection to those deployments.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said the U.S. military presence in Georgia could "further aggravate the already complicated situation" in the region.

Alexei Arbatov, the deputy head of the Russian parliaagainst terrorism, it should con-

ment's defense committee, said that if the United States wants Russian cooperation in the war sult with Moscow about its mil-

itary deployments in the region. U.S. and Georgian officials insisted U.S. forces would not

take direct part in anti-terrorist operations. A senior U.S. diplomat,

speaking on condition of anonymity, said there were no plans for U.S. forces to engage in military action in Georgia. And Georgia's Deputy Security Minister Iraklii Alasaniya told Rustavi 2 television: "Georgia has not discussed this question with the United States or with other friendly countries."

Those assurances did little to mollify Russia, which often accuses the United States of acting arrogantly and unilaterally.

Russia and Georgia have long been at odds over Georgia's desire to become closer to the West and an eventual NATO member. The Kremlin has accused Georgia of allowing rebels fighting in Chechnya to shelter just across the border in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge region; Georgia in turn has accused Russia of repeatedly violating its airspace to chase

down rebels. Georgia recently refused Russian suggestions of help in fighting against insurgents in the region. The Georgian government's willingness to let the United States offer training and advice while giving the cold shoulder to Russia is seen as an insult in Moscow.

The U.S. diplomat suggested that Russia should welcome U.S. involvement because it would improve Russian security. "We're trying to enable Georgia to make the border (with Chechnya) less porous,'

the diplomat said. He added that Russian President Vladimir "Putin and the Russian leadership understand what we're doing Putin made no comment on

Expanding the war on terrorism

U.S. military advisers have arrived in the former Soviet republic of Georgia. Hundreds of U.S. troops might be on the way to help train local forces to fight militants with links to al-Qaida.

Area: 26,900 sq. miles Population: 4,989,285 (2001) Ethnic groups: Georgian 70.1 %, Armenian 8.1%, Russian 6.3%, Azeri 5.7%, Ossetian 3%, Abkhaz 1.8%, other 5%





OURCES: "Terrorism: Near Eastern Groups and State Sponsors, 2002," by appeth Katzman, CRS: CIA World Factbook: 2002 World Almanac; ESRI

the controversy Wednesday. Putin surprised many in the West by his firm cooperation with the U.S.-led anti-terrorism campaign in Afghanistan and by his non-objection to Western forces using Central Asian bases.

The United States intends to bolster Georgia's security, yet a U.S. deployment could equally destabilization. threaten Georgia has been shaken by civil wars since the collapse of the Soviet Union a decade ago. Two regions — Abkhazia and South Ossetia - have been de facto independent following separatist wars.

Abkhazia's unrecognized prime minister, Anri Dzhergeniya, was quoted by the news agency ITAR-Tass on Wednesday as saying growing U.S. involvement in Georgia would spur Abkhazia to seek

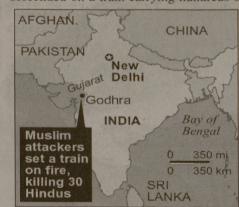
closer relations with Russia. A U.S. deployment would be the second large-scale training operation undertaken by the Pentagon in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, following the deployment of special forces trainers to the Philippines.

Russian officials portray their war in Chechnya as a fight against international terrorism and allege that rebels were using the Pankisi Gorge as a staging ground. Some have even suggested that Osama bin Laden could be in the Pankisi Gorge — an allegation Georgian officials have denied.

Georgia has been a key U.S. ally in the region since the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union, and Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze has appeared eager to secure U.S. help, which would check Russian power in the region.

Muslim attackers kill 57 in India train fire

attackers armed with stones and kerosene descended on a train carrying hundreds of



AP

GODHRA, India (AP) — Muslim Hindu nationalists on Wednesday, setting fire to four cars and killing 57 people.

Fourteen of the dead were children and 43 other people were injured, many critically, when a mob attacked the train as it pulled out of Godhra shortly after 6:30 a.m., Gujarat state officials said.

Fearing the attack would ignite sectarian riots. Indian officials immediately stepped up security across this vast, religiously divided nation. The prime minister urged Hindus not to retaliate. The nationalists belonged to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, or World Hindu Council, a group seeking to build a temple at the disputed holy site of Ayodhya. Ten years ago, fighting between Muslims and Hindus over Avodhya killed 2,000 people. Most of the 2,500 Hindu activists on they said.

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board the Sabarmati Express were returning from Ayodhya and were bound for Ahmadabad, 95 miles to the south.

Smoke was still pouring from the train Wednesday afternoon as relief workers gingerly removed the charred bodies, which were piled on top of one another, their limbs entangled.

State officials and witnesses said the

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SOURCE: ESRI

Muslims appeared incensed by Hindu chanting on the railroad platform in Godhra.

The cars they destroyed were detached, and the train continued on to Vadodara, 60 miles to the south. There, a Hindu crowd that had gathered at the station fatally stabbed a man as he got off the train, hospital officials said. Several other people were beaten with sticks,

NEWS IN BRIEF Bomb explodes near Israeli roadblock

JERUSALEM (AP) - A bomb went off near an Israeli military roadblock in the West Bank on Wednesday, police said. Military sources said a suicide bomber set off explosives inside a car, killing herself and wounding three policemen.

Two of the policemen suffered moderate injuries and one was lightly injured, the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The bombing took place on a road between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv that passes through the West Bank. Israel radio said the roadblock marks the entrance to the West Bank, near the Israeli town of Maccabim.

In late January, Wafa Idris, a 27-year-old paramedic, set off a bomb in Jerusalem, killing herself and an 81-year-old Israeli man. A branch of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement claimed responsibility.

Idris was the first woman bomber since the outbreak of Israeli-Palestinian fighting 17 months ago. More than 30 Palestinian men have blown themselves up in suicide attacks, killing dozens of Israelis.

Earlier Wednesday, Israeli troops killed four armed Arabs in gun battles and a Palestinian employee shot dead an Israeli factory manager in an attack that was apparently politically motivated.

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