

Sen. Helms tempers attack against U.N. officials

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Sen. Jesse Helms, who has made a career of lambasting the United Nations, kept up the attack as he addressed the Security Council yesterday, saying Americans feel "a lack of gratitude" from the world organization.

Helms, R-N.C., who has previously branded U.N. officials as "dysfunctional" and "cry babies," tempered his criticism by proposing a new spirit of cooperation with the world body and suggested formal, annual visits between members and U.S. lawmakers.

"If we are to have a new beginning, we must endeavor to understand each other better," Helms said in the first-ever address by a U.S. lawmaker to the Security Council.

Despite his courtly tone and offer of a "hand of friendship," delegates reacted coolly to Helms' litany of U.N. excesses and failings.

American tardiness in meeting its payments and Helms' insistence on a lower U.S. contribution "has hindered and not helped" peacekeeping efforts, said Jeremy Greenstock, the British envoy.

Sergey Lavrov, Russia's representative, complained that the United States failed to abide by terms of a U.N. budget that all members approved. "All the other members of the United Nations expected the

United States to keep its word," he said.

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Congress last year voted to pay \$926 million in back U.S. dues over three years.

The United States paid a \$100 million installment late last year.

But to get the rest, the United Nations must meet about a dozen conditions drafted by Helms, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman, and Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., the committee's senior minority member.

The conditions include a reduction of the U.S. share of the U.N. peacekeeping budget from the current 31 percent to 25 percent and of the regular budget from 25 percent to 22 percent.

Helms said the United Nations must also trim its spending and not draw the United States into "entangling alliances."

"A United Nations that seeks to impose its presumed authority on the American people without their consent begs for confrontation, and — I want to be candid — eventual U.S. withdrawal," Helms asserted.

The senator also accused the General Assembly of an anti-American bias. "The American people hear all this, they resent it. And they have grown increasingly frustrated with what they feel is a lack of gratitude," he said.

Helms was invited to speak by U.S. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, who holds the rotating council chairmanship.

Pope to visit Egypt in February

The Pope in Egypt

Pope John Paul II will visit Egypt, Feb. 24-26, the first of his planned pilgrimages to religious sites in the Middle East and the first papal visit to Egypt. He will meet with the president, Coptic and Muslim leaders and visit Mount Sinai, said to be the place where Moses received the Ten Commandments.



VATICAN CITY (AP) — The first of his millennium pilgrimages to the Middle East, Pope John Paul II will visit Egypt next month in a 10-day trip taking him to the very cradle of Western faith.

He will stop in Cairo and the monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai during the Feb. 24-26 trip, the Vatican announced the pilgrimage yesterday.

The trip will come a month before the major pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which will include stops in Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories.

The Egypt trip, filled with meetings, services and air travel, will be a test of the stamina of the frail, 79-year-old pope, coming at the start of celebrations in the Vatican's Holy Year and a particularly demanding schedule in the Holy Land.

The stop at Mount Sinai is one of the series of pilgrimages the pope has planned to make in the new millennium. The stops are purely for religious reasons without political significance.

He had hoped to begin with a visit to what is believed to be the birthplace of the biblical patriarch Abraham in Mesopotamia, but the Vatican dropped the plan after Baghdad said it could not organize a visit.

The February trip, the first by a pope to Egypt, will include meetings with President Hosni Mubarak, the Coptic pope Shenouda III and Egyptian Muslim cleric, Mohammed Taha.

From Cairo, he will travel by train to the foot of Mount Sinai, said to be the place where Moses received the Ten Commandments.

It is the site of a famous Greek Orthodox monastery, St. Catherine, where one of the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament was found.

The monastery houses relics of the Virgin Catherine, an Egyptian believed to have been beheaded in the fourth century for deriding idolatry.

It is not John Paul's first trip to a predominantly Muslim country. Previous visits have included Tunisia, Lebanon and Indonesia.

Parliamentary boycott continues

MOSCOW (AP) — A group of lawmakers angry over an alliance between a pro-Kremlin party and the communists said yesterday that the boycott of parliament they began two days ago would continue indefinitely.

The opposition lawmakers stalked out of the first session of the State Duma on Tuesday debated during a meeting yesterday but did not announce any new strategy.

The standoff began after the largest parties — the Communist Party of Unity, made up of acting President Vladimir Putin's supporters — agreed to deal with Communist Genнадий Leznev as the speaker.

In the meantime, the standoff stalled work in the Duma, elections were held in Washington.

The unexpectedly strong performance by pro-Kremlin forces had led to hopes that the parliament would be reformed through economic reforms that had been blocked by previous Communist-dominated parliaments.

But the Kremlin's readiness to negotiate with its longtime foes has raised questions about Putin's reform plans.

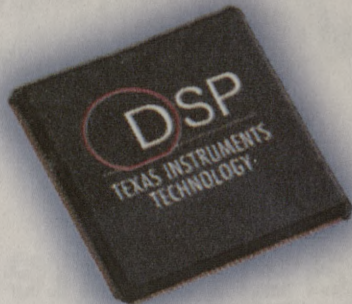
"We should energetically conduct reforms, but they should be carried out under strict control and with government participation," Putin said at a meeting yesterday.

Russian news coverage of the meeting did not elaborate.

HEADBANGERS



MEET



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