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Rumsfeld says Iraqis 'lying' about its weapons of mass destruction

KUWAIT (AP) — Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld on Monday dismissed claims by the Iraqi government that it has no nuclear, chemical or biological weapons and is making no effort to acquire them.

"They are lying," he told a news conference at Kuwait's international airport before flying to Bahrain.

The Iraqi Foreign Ministry in Baghdad issued a statement Sunday asserting the government of Saddam Hussein has neither made nor possessed weapons of mass destruction in more than a decade.

"Iraq has said on many occasions that it is not concerned with entering the mass destruction weapons club. ... We left it in 1991," the official statement said.

Rumsfeld said the Iraqi claim cannot be trusted.

"It is false, not true, inaccurate and typical," the defense secretary said, adding that Iraq remains a destabilizing factor in the Gulf region.

"They have had an active program to develop nuclear weapons," Rumsfeld said. "It's also clear they are actively developing biological weapons" and used chemical weapons against their own Kurdish population in the 1980s.

Vice President Dick Cheney cited that same threat in making the case for a pro-active U.S. stance against terrorism. President Bush plans to formalize the "strike-first" policy when he presents his first national security strategy to

Congress later this year.

U.S. officials are especially concerned by "any possible linkup" between Saddam's government and terrorist networks, Cheney said, given Saddam's propensity for using chemical weapons. A policy of containment is not effective when "unbalanced dictators" are willing to secretly supply terror groups with such weapons.

"He used them in his war against Iran, and he's used them against his own people," Cheney said in a speech to the International Democrat Union, a group of mostly conservative officials from several countries.

"We have a responsibility to answer this growing peril. ... Deliverable weapons of mass destruction in the hands of terrorists would expose the civilized world to the worst of all possible horrors, and we will not allow it."

Rumsfeld met Monday with senior Kuwaiti government officials, including Defense Minister Sheik Jabir al-Mubarak. He said they discussed Iraqi violations of the United Nations resolutions that Baghdad agreed to live up to as a condition of ending the 1991 Persian Gulf War. He said they

discussed "the way ahead" in the global war on terrorism but not potential military actions against Iraq.

A reporter asked Rumsfeld what he thought of Iraq's recent pledge to respect Kuwait's sovereignty and to restore full relations with the Kuwaiti government. He said that accepting Iraq's word of good intentions toward Kuwait "would be like the lion inviting the chicken to embrace."

"What good, in the past, have Iraqi representations of goodwill to its neighbors been? Precious little," he said. "Should hope spring eternal? Maybe, maybe not. It depends on the risks."

Rumsfeld also said he invited Kuwaiti government representatives to meet with a dozen Kuwaitis who are among the more than 300 Taliban or al-Qaida fighters captured in Afghanistan and held prisoner at a U.S. Navy base in Cuba.

Rumsfeld told reporters the Kuwaitis' meeting at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, would have two purposes: to glean additional intelligence from the prisoners and to determine "if there is any law enforcement interest" in them.

It marked the first time Rumsfeld has publicly

acknowledged the nationality of any Arabs held at Guantanamo Bay and specified how many of any specific nationality are imprisoned.

On Sunday at Kuwait Camp Doha, a desert encampment 35 miles from the Iraq border, Rumsfeld told American troops that state sponsors of terrorism must be punished.

Without mentioning Iraq by name, Rumsfeld said the soldiers are on the front line against a dangerous foe.

"You are the people who stand between freedom and the forces of evil, and a dangerous adversary that cannot be ignored cannot be allowed to win," he told about 1,000 troops assembled in an air-conditioned gymnasium on a 110-degree afternoon Sunday.

Rumsfeld left little doubt he was aiming his words at Iraq, which he often says is among the nations that support international terrorist groups and could help them gain access to weapons of mass destruction.

These states, he said, need to be stopped so they cannot threaten or hold people hostage to blackmail terror."

He again alluded to Iraq, describing the ultimate goal of President Bush's war on terrorism.

"It will not end until sponsors of terror are made understand that abetting terrorism is unacceptable and we have deadly consequences for the regimes that do so," Rumsfeld said.

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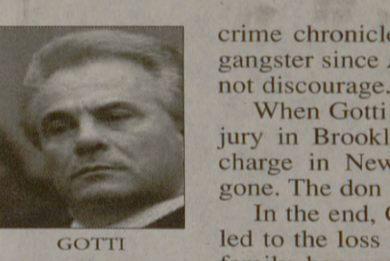
Former mafia boss dies of throat cancer in prison

NEW YORK (AP) — John Gotti, who swaggered, schemed and murdered his way to the pinnacle of organized crime in America only to be toppled by secret FBI tapes and a turncoat mobster's testimony, died at a prison hospital Monday. He was 61.

The U.S. Medical Center for Federal Prisoners in Springfield, Mo., announced the death of the former Mafia boss. Gotti had suffered from throat cancer and had been moved to the prison hospital from the maximum-security federal prison in Marion, Ill.

Once known as the "Dapper Don" for his fine double-breasted suits and confident bearing, and as the "Teflon Don" after a series of acquittals, Gotti was sentenced to life in 1992 for racketeering and six killings. His victims included "Big Paul" Castellano, whom he succeeded as boss of New York's Gambino crime family in 1985.

Gotti reigned for six years as the nation's most high-profile mobster, passing himself off as a plumbing supply salesman while strutting about in \$2,000 Brioni suits and sneering at law enforcers who kept trying to put him behind bars. Some



GOTTI

crime chroniclers called him the most important gangster since Al Capone, a comparison Gotti did not discourage.

When Gotti finally was convicted by a federal jury in Brooklyn, James Fox, the FBI agent in charge in New York, declared: "The Teflon is gone. The don is covered with Velcro."

In the end, Gotti's leadership of the Gambinos led to the loss of power and money for the crime family, because his high profile attracted so much attention from prosecutors.

His undoing was Salvatore "Sammy Bull" Gravano, his onetime closest confidant and underboss who turned government witness.

When Gotti moved to take over the Gambinos, they were the biggest and most powerful of the city's five Mafia families, with 300-plus "made" members, 2,000 "associates" and fingers in every pie, including the garment district, garbage hauling, construction, extortion and loan sharking.

He took charge by murdering Castellano, who had angered Gotti and others with, among other things, his ban on drug trafficking. By some accounts, Gotti feared Castellano was plotting to eliminate him, so he carried out a pre-emptive strike.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Weapon used to murder Selena destroyed

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas (AP) — The weapon used to murder Tejano singing star Selena was destroyed on Monday under a judge's orders, despite protests from historians who said the revolver was a priceless piece of Mexican American history.

The .38-caliber Taurus revolver was run through a shredding saw and scheduled to be thrown into the Corpus Christi Bay. Selena, 23, was killed by the gun seven years ago, just as she was on the verge of crossing over to the English-language market.

The destruction of the weapon was bemoaned by some who said it should be kept for posterity.

Six dead when SUV smashes into parked truck

MESQUITE, Texas (AP) — A Fort Worth woman and five of her young children returning from a family reunion died Monday when the family's Chevrolet Suburban smashed into an 18-wheeler parked alongside Interstate 20.

Israel Lane Joubert, 35, the woman's husband and father of the children, was driving the SUV and is in critical condition.

He's expected to survive, according to Mesquite Fire Department spokesman Mark Noble.



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Wildfire forces 40,000 to evacuate

DENVER (AP) — A wind-driven wildfire closing in fast on Denver prompted authorities to order the evacuation of up to 40,000 people Monday from their homes along the southwestern edge of the metropolitan area.

The 61,000-acre fire roared to within 10 miles of residential neighborhoods, spreading toward Denver at about a mile an hour.

Firefighters were pulled off

the lines in front of the fire because it was too dangerous.

"They just cannot see the front of this fire because of the smoke," said U.S. Forest Service spokeswoman Barb Masinton.

Homes near Roxborough State Park were ordered evacuated.

"It was our lifelong dream to live up here," said evacuee Carol Simone, whose home is about 30 miles south of

Denver. "It isn't about the house, it's the woods and the environment. If that's destroyed I'm going back to Florida."

The fire was started by an illegal campfire Saturday in the Pike National Forest 55 miles southwest of Denver and had doubled in size since Sunday. Campfires have been banned in national forests and most counties because of severe drought.

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