

U.S. not planning on action against Syria

By Barry Schweid
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Colin Powell, seeking to tone down hawkish rhetoric toward Syria, said Tuesday the Bush administration has expressed concerns about Syrian actions, but has no plan for a military move against the Damascus government.

In an appearance at the Foreign Press Center, Powell said Iraq was "a unique case" that required U.S. military action.

He rejected the suggestion that the administration has a list of countries against whom it might also retaliate militarily.

"There is no list, there is no war plan," he said. Powell acknowledged that the administration has informed both Syria and Iran that their actions during the Iraq war

were not helpful. He specifically cited reports that Syria has given sanctuary to Iraqis wanted for human rights crimes.

The administration accused Syria of sponsoring terrorism and harboring remnants of Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime and told Damascus to stop it or face diplomatic or economic sanctions.

"It is time to sign on to a different kind of Middle East," national security adviser Condoleezza Rice said Monday as Syria took another public pasting from the administration.

In New York, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said he was "concerned that recent statements directed at Syria should not contribute to a wider destabilization of a region already affected heavily by the war in Iraq."

Syrian officials denied having chemical weapons and said the United States has yet to prove similar charges against Iraq. They also accused Israel of spreading misinformation about Syria.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer rejected those denials, calling Syria a rogue nation.

Rice, in a parallel thrust at Damascus, said Syria's support for terrorism and "harboring the remnants of the Iraqi regime" were unacceptable. But she indicated the administration was not contemplating military action.

Using the same formula the administration has applied to North Korea and its aggressive nuclear weapons program, Rice told the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "The president has made clear every problem in the Middle East cannot be dealt with the same way."

Powell signaled

President Bashar Assad that the administration still would like to include Syria in the Mideast peacemaking it intends to accelerate between Israel and the Palestinians.

"As we go down the road to peace, we want it to be a comprehensive peace, and ultimately, of course, that would have to include finding a way to settle the outstanding issues with Syria, as well," Powell said at a State Department news conference.

Army Gen. Peter Pace, vice chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, was asked Tuesday if the administration has instructed the joint chiefs to draw up plans to capture former Iraqi government leaders now believed to be in Syria and to destroy chemical weapons in that country.

"The joint chiefs right now are very much focused on our current mission inside of Iraq," Pace said on CBS's "The Early Show." What Syria does is important, he said. But Pace also said "that's a policy issue between the governments."

Syria seeks to recover the Golan Heights, a strategic area it lost to Israel in the 1967 Mideast War.

Although it long has been listed by the State Department as a sponsor of terrorism, ever since Richard Nixon's presidency 30 years ago the United States has sought to interest Syria in peacemaking with Israel.

Itamar Rabinovich, who was Israel's chief negotiator with Syria from 1992 to 1995, said its government wanted to please a radical constituency inside Syria but also would like to protect Syria's relationship with the United States.

In a telephone interview, Rabinovich, now president of Tel Aviv University, said that over the years "the United States has been fascinated with the possibility of getting Syria to switch sides and become an ally of the United States."

Powell noted Monday that Syria had said its border with Iraq was closed. However, he said, "it might mean the main roads are closed but whether or not others are able to get across the border is something that I can't speak to."

"But once they get into Syria and start heading to Damascus I would expect that Syrian authorities would do everything they could not to provide these people safe haven," he said.

Syria finds itself under scrutiny

The Bush administration has accused Syria of sponsoring terrorism and harboring remnants of Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime. Syria's 375-mile border with Iraq, and its territory dispute with Israel over the Golan Heights, link this Arab nation to the volatile conflicts in the Middle East.

Area: 71,100 sq. miles
Population: 17,155,814
Pop. density: 241 per sq. mi.
Ethnic groups: Arab 90.3%, Kurds, Armenians and other 9.7%
Principal languages: Arabic (official), Kurdish, Armenian
Chief religions: Sunni Muslim 74%, other Muslim 16%, Christian 10%
Government: Republic under military regime since 1963
Industries: Oil, textiles, food processing, beverages, tobacco, phosphate mining



Key points in Syria's history

1920 - State of Syria formed after the fall of the Ottoman Empire; Administered by the French	in the Arab-Israeli war	invasion of Kuwait; supported Allied forces during Gulf War
April 1946 - Became independent republic	October 1976 to present - Troops stationed in Lebanon	June 10, 2000 - Hafez al-Assad, president since 1971, died and was succeeded by his son Bashar al-Assad
March 1963 - Socialist party and military leaders seized power	1986 - Promotion of international terrorism led to the breaking of diplomatic ties with Britain and to limited European sanctions	2002-2003 - Only Arab seat on the Security Council; voiced Iraqi support
June 1967 - Lost the Golan Heights to Israel	1990-1991 - Condemned Iraqi	

SOURCES: CIA; The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2003; ESRI

Group works to salvage destroyed Iraqi museums

By Joseph Coleman
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PARIS — Rallying to salvage one of the world's most treasured troves of antiquities, UNESCO and the British Museum announced Tuesday they would send experts to Iraq to restore museums and artifacts ransacked after the U.S.-led invasion.

The looting in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities in recent days has dealt a harsh blow to the Babylonian, Sumerian and Assyrian collections that chronicled some 7,000 years of civilization in ancient Mesopotamia.

Much anger at the destruction has been directed at U.S. troops who stood by and watched it happen. On Tuesday, U.S. officials acknowledged they were surprised by the rampage and said troops were too occupied by combat to intervene when they first arrived in Baghdad.

"I don't think anyone anticipated that the riches of Iraq would be looted by the people of Iraq," said U.S. Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks at a U.S. Central Command briefing Tuesday in Qatar.

The Paris-based U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization said its team would study the conditions of museums and historical sites, identify ways of restoring them and find potential donors.

UNESCO said the team would travel "when conditions permit." About 30 experts were to meet

Thursday for an initial assessment at UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

"The recent experience of UNESCO ... shows that culture can play a key role in the consolidation of the peace process," Director-General Koichiro Matsuura said in a statement.

In London, the British Museum said it would also send a team, and it called on the United Nations to ban the sale of antiquities looted from Iraq.

"Although we still await precise information, it is clear that a catastrophe has befallen the cultural heritage of Iraq," said British Museum director Neil MacGregor.

After the fall of Saddam Hussein's government last week, Iraqi looters stole and smashed priceless archaeological treasures from Iraq's National Museum.

The museum holds items of incalculable cultural value, perhaps the most famous being the tablets with Hammurabi's Code — one of mankind's earliest codes of law. It could not be immediately determined whether the tablets were at the museum when the war broke out.

Thieves smashed or pried open row upon row of glass cases and pilfered — or just destroyed — their contents. Among the missing treasures: The four millennia-old copper head of an Akkadian king, golden bowls and colossal statues, ancient manuscripts and bejeweled lyres.

The museum in the northern city of Mosul also was pillaged.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Civilian-run elections continue in Nigeria

LAGOS, Nigeria (AP) — The party of Nigeria's president did well in parliamentary elections, according to early results Tuesday, though true voter sentiment was tough to gauge because balloting was marred by fraud and violence that killed more than two dozen people.

President Olusegun Obasanjo's backers said the results were a good sign heading into Saturday's elections, in which he will seek a third term. Early

results Tuesday showed his Peoples Democratic Party won 135 of the 360 seats in parliament. Five opposition parties shared 99 seats and the other contests were not yet decided.

In the 109-seat Senate, the ruling party took 39 seats, compared with 27 for the opposition.

There were 3,000 candidates for all 469 legislative seats.

The vote was tainted by killings and allegations of voter intimidation and fraud. It was the first civilian-run ballot in 20 years in Africa's most populous nation.

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