

Powell plans talks in Syria with Assad

By Barry Schweid
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Colin Powell said Wednesday the Bush administration had begun a "very vigorous diplomatic exchange" with Syria and he intended to go to Damascus for talks with President Bashar Assad on tensions with Iraq's wartime ally.

Insisting anew that Syria expel officials of the fallen Iraqi government who crossed the border, Powell said in an interview, "Syria does not want to be a safe haven in the aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom."

But rather than distancing the Bush administration from the Arab government that aligned itself with Saddam Hussein, Powell said, "Lots of messages have been passed back and forth" between Washington and Damascus through U.S. Ambassador Theodore Kattouf, and via Britain, France and Spain.

In fact, Powell told Associated Press Television News he had spoken earlier in the day with Spanish Foreign Minister Ana Palacio "about messages she might deliver" when she goes to Damascus this weekend.

Beyond that, Powell said, "I would expect to travel to Syria to have very candid and straightforward discussions with my foreign minister colleague (Farouk al-Sharaa) and with President Bashar Assad."

He did not say when he intended to visit

Damascus, but indicated the stop would be part of a broader trip designed to spur peacemaking between Israel and the Palestinians.

Powell said once a roadmap for such peacemaking was announced, "we will see a much more active American engagement for the simple reason we now have a prime minister on the Palestinian side that we can work with."

"We do have a new situation," Powell said, referring to Mahmoud Abbas, the designated prime minister, and Palestinian Finance Minister Salam Fayyad.

"And so you will see us become more active, both with my own involvement and travels as well as in other ways," Powell said.

"The president will be much more deeply involved and much more active," he added.

For three decades, U.S. presidents have sought to engage Syria in peacemaking with Israel. Even during a recent flurry of U.S. accusations that Syria was assisting Saddam with military technology and providing refuge to Iraqi officials, Powell spoke of such hopes.

He has been to Syria twice in what so far has been an inconclusive Bush administration attempt to reopen Mideast peace talks.

On another subject, Powell expressed sat-

isfaction that his six-month effort to promote talks with North Korea on nuclear actions in a multilateral setting had achieved results.

"This is good news," Powell said, referring to the discussions that will be held in coming days in Beijing, where envoys from the United States, North Korea and China will convene.

North Korea had been holding out for face-to-face talks with the United States but signaled last week its acceptance of a broader forum.

The administration decided to dispatch Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly for the discussions, Powell said.

Powell said he does not anticipate a breakthrough in the talks.

"We believe this is the beginning of a long, intense process of discussion," Powell said.

"We will lay out clearly our concerns about their nuclear weapons development programs and other weapons of mass destruction, of their proliferation activities, and other programs," among other issues, he said.

On Iraq, Powell said he did not know whether Saddam was dead or alive. "The matter is, though, he is gone. Whether he is dead or alive, he is gone. He is no longer in the lives of the people of Iraq."

"The president will be much more deeply involved and much more active."

— Colin Powell
U.S. Secretary of State

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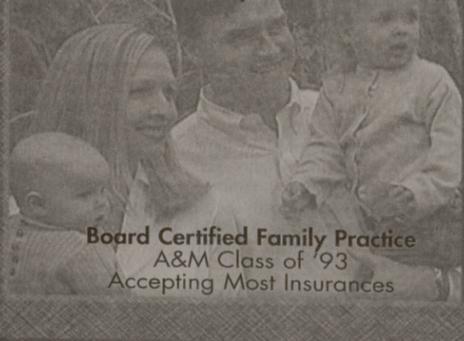
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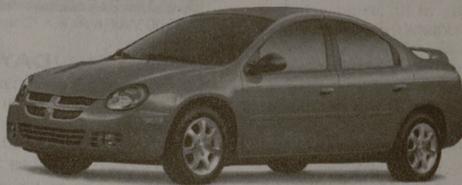
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GRAB LIFE BY THE HORNS

Service held for NBC's Bloom

By David Bauder
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK (AP) — NBC News correspondent Dan Bloom, who died while covering the war in Iraq, was eulogized at his funeral Wednesday as a modern-day Ernie Pyle with a spiritual awakening before death.

Bloom, 39, the week anchor of "Today" and a White House correspondent, died of an apparent blood clot April 6 while embedded with a military unit in Iraq.

Equipped with a special vehicle, called "Bloom-mobile," he allowed NBC to transmit remarkable clear pictures of him atop a tank in the desert, Bloom was one of the most visible correspondents covering the war.

"David was the Ernie Pyle of his generation," NBC anchor Tom Brokaw said, comparing Bloom to the legendary newspaperman who covered World War II.

Brokaw praised Bloom's "boyish enthusiasm," storytelling ability and thirst for covering big stories.

"David had a lot of ideas - none better than 'Bloom-mobile,' which transported him and transformed reporting," the veteran anchorman said.

Bloom's funeral was at New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral less than a block from his News office. New York's bishop, Cardinal Edward Sheehan, recalled Bloom attending Sunday Mass there after "Today" show duties.

Parts of the funeral were shown on MSNBC, CNN, Fox News Channel, New York Gov. George Pataki, White House press secretary Fleischer, former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, anchorman Peter Jennings, newsman Ed Bradley and other NBC on-air staff were among the mourners.

Bloom is survived by his wife, Melanie, and three daughters.

Also eulogized by his brothers and his best friend, Bloom was described as a man who battled personal problems in recent years and was at times with the prospect of dying.

Hours before he died, Bloom wrote an e-mail to Melanie about the experience of covering the war had transformed



BLOOM

WASHINGTON

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