

## TODAY'S BRIEFS

## U.N. to study if deaths violate law

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — A United Nations expert said Friday he plans to study whether members of the U.S. military or government contractors such as Blackwater USA violate international law when they kill civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Philip Alston, a professor at New York University law school who has been an adviser to the UN's commission on human rights since 2004, said the U.S. had invited him to look into the issue. He said he would begin work in the spring and did not yet have an itinerary or list of people to interview.

U.S. service members in Iraq have faced prosecution under American law over the killings of 24 civilians by Marines in Haditha and the rape and killing of a 14-year-old girl and the slaying of her family south of Baghdad. However, Iraqis have accused the American soldiers of other unnecessary killings or abuse which has not been prosecuted.

## Pakistan's Bhutto ventures on trip

SUKKUR, Pakistan (AP) — Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto arrived in a town near her ancestral home today, her first trip outside Pakistan's biggest city since an assassination attempt against her killed 143 people nine days ago.

Her flight landed at the heavily guarded airport where throngs of supporters waited outside, waving the flags of Bhutto's party.

She is due to travel to her ancestral home near the southern city of Larkana, where supporters were readying a hero's welcome for the opposition leader. It is her first visit since she ended her eight-year exile more than a week ago. Bhutto is expected to pay respects at the tomb of her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto — Pakistan's first popularly elected leader, who was hanged three decades ago.

Villagers had been expecting Bhutto days ago but the deadly suicide bombing on Oct. 18 shattered her plans. Since the bombings at a procession to greet her, she has spent most of her hunkered down behind reinforced doors in her Karachi residence.

## 50 Myanmar party members released

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — The military government released 50 members of Myanmar's pro-democracy party on the same day it met with their leader in a response to international pressure over the crushing of peaceful demonstrations, a party spokesman said Friday.

Ibrahim Gambari, the U.N. envoy trying to broker a compromise between party leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the junta, told reporters in Japan the meeting was a good beginning. "But it's only the first step, so this should lead to early resumption of talks that will lead to tangible results," he said.

## Iraqi lawyer defends death sentences

BAGHDAD (AP) — An Iraqi prosecutor on Friday defended the death sentence ordered for a Saddam Hussein-era defense chief, saying Friday that the former general personally planned and supervised a military crackdown on minority Kurds that killed 180,000 people in the 1980s.

Speaking in a television interview, Munqith al-Faroun rejected the argument put forward by Iraq's president and parliament speaker that Sultan Hashim al-Tai should be pardoned because he was only following orders under the threat of death from Saddam. Al-Faroun also disputed that President Jalal Talabani and his two vice presidents, serving as Iraq's presidential

council, had the authority to block the execution of al-Tai and two other Saddam regime officials who received death sentences in the same trial.

Al-Tai and the other two defendants — Saddam's cousin "Chemical Ali" al-Majid and Hussein Rashid Mohammed, former deputy operations director for the Iraqi military — were convicted in June of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity for their part in the 1986-88 crackdown.

## Dems ask Bush to OK water spending

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democratic leaders in Congress have sent President Bush a veto-proof bill to authorize spending \$23 billion in water projects, having waited more than a month to request his signature on a measure he has threatened to veto. Democrats have more than the two-thirds majority votes in both chambers of Congress needed to override Bush if he vetoes the bill. The Senate passed it Sept. 24 by a vote of 81-12; the House passed it Aug. 1 by a vote of 381-40.

The bill funds work to restore the hurricane-ravaged Louisiana coast and Florida's Everglades, projects the Bush administration supports. But the president threatened a veto after the bill's anticipated cost ballooned by \$9 billion as projects were added in negotiations between the House and Senate.

## Japan to fingerprint visitors next month

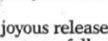
TOKYO (AP) — Japan hopes to thwart potential terrorists from entering the country by fingerprinting and photographing all foreigners aged 16 or over on entry starting next month, an official said Friday.

Only some permanent residents, diplomatic visitors, and children under 16 will be exempt from the measures after the system goes into effect Nov. 20, Immigration Bureau official Takumi Sato said.

Under the new system, all adults will be photographed and fingerprinted on arrival in Japan. Incoming aircraft and ship operators also will be obliged to provide passenger and crew lists before they arrive. Resident foreigners will be required to go through the procedure every time they re-enter Japan.

## Ex-Philippine leader freed after 6 years

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Free for the first time in 6 1/2 years, ousted President Joseph Estrada thanked his successor for pardoning him and vowed Friday to stay out of "dirty politics" while dedicating the rest of his life to helping the poor.



Joseph Estrada

Estrada's joyous release from house arrest was followed by a speech to thousands of cheering supporters in Manila's San Juan district, where he once served as mayor. Estrada, 70, was convicted last month on graft charges and given a life sentence. Arroyo pardoned him Thursday.

## Congo fighting concerns U.S.

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush expressed concern on Friday about renewed fighting in Congo where the government has struggled with little success to establish authority over lawless eastern regions of the African nation.

Security issues topped Bush's Oval Office meeting with Congo President Joseph Kabila.

The mineral-rich nation has been wracked by years of war and decades of dictatorship. Last fall's presidential polling marked Congo's first free elections in over 40 years, but Kabila's government remains fragile. Kabila said he stressed the need for continued U.S. support to achieve peace throughout the nation.

## Putin: U.S. missile plan like Cuban crisis

MIKE ECKEL  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

MAFRA, Portugal — President Vladimir Putin evoked one of the most dangerous confrontations of the Cold War on Friday to highlight Russian opposition to a proposed U.S. missile defense system in Europe, comparing it to the Cuban missile crisis of 45 years ago.

The comments — made at the end of a summit between Russia and European Union that failed to resolve several festering disputes — were the latest in a series of belligerent statements from the assertive Putin.

Emboldened by oil- and gas-fueled economic clout, Russia is increasingly at odds with Washington and much of Europe on issues ranging from Iran and Kosovo to energy supplies and human rights.

Putin used a news conference at the summit's conclusion to reiterate Russia's stalwart opposition to U.S. plans to put elements of a missile defense system in the former

Soviet bloc countries of Poland and the Czech Republic — both of which are now NATO members.

"Analogous actions by the Soviet Union, when it deployed missiles in Cuba, prompted the 'Caribbean crisis,'" Putin said, using the Russian term for the Cuban missile crisis.

"For us the situation is technologically very similar. We have withdrawn the remains of our bases from Vietnam, from Cuba, and have liquidated everything there, while at our borders, such threats against our country are being created," he said.

The October 1962 crisis erupted when President John F. Kennedy demanded that Soviet leader Nikita S. Khrushchev remove his country's nuclear missiles from Cuba because they could have been used to launch a close-range attack on the United States. The Americans imposed a naval blockade on Cuba and the world teetered on the edge of war before the Soviets backed down.

Putin also suggested that



ARMANDO FRANCA / AP

Russian President Vladimir Putin addresses journalists at the end of the summit between Russia and the European Union in Mafra, Portugal, on Friday.

the tension was much lower than in 1962 because the United States and Russia are now "partners," not Cold War enemies. His relationship with President Bush, Putin said, helps solve problems, calling him a "personal friend."

The Russian leader said

there has been no concrete U.S. response to his counter-proposals for cooperation on missile defense, but added that the United States is now listening to Russia's concerns about its plans and seeking to address them.

In Washington, White House press secretary Dana Perino underscored those remarks rather than the Cuban missile crisis analogy, saying, "there's no way you could walk away without thinking that he thinks that we can work together."

The U.S. plan is part of a wider missile shield involving defenses in California and Alaska which the United States says are to defend against any long-range missile attack from countries such as North Korea or Iran.

Russia strongly opposes the idea, saying Iran is decades away from developing missile technology that could threaten Europe or North America, and it says the U.S. bases are aimed at spying on Russian facilities and undermining Russia's missile deterrent force.



DARKO BANDIC / ASSOCIATED PRESS

A Turkish soldier gestures to a photographer not to take photos during a patrol in the area near the Turkey-Iraq border, in the province of Simak, Turkey, on Friday.

## Turks reject Kurdish guerrilla standoff proposal from Iraqis

SEBNEM ARSU  
ANDREW E. KRAMER  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey's prime minister on Friday rejected an Iraqi proposal that included a military role for the United States in resolving a standoff over raids by Kurdish guerrillas across the rugged border into Turkey.

The offer, made by a delegation of senior Iraqi officials, was rejected by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who said it failed to meet his country's demands in dealing with the guerrillas, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK. In its latest raid, on Sunday, the group killed 12 Turkish soldiers and took eight captive.

"I can say that there is not really anything positive or anything that met our expectations," Erdogan said, after his foreign minister, Ali Babacan, met with the Iraqi delegation here.

The Iraqis proposed positioning American soldiers in border forts in the Qandil Mountains, a jagged area that has never been fully un-

der the control of any government. Although American military officials were part of the delegation participating in the meetings, it was unclear what role, if any, the military might ultimately agree to.

The offer was intended to avert an incursion by Turkey's military into Iraq's Kurdish region to fight the rebels. The Turkish parliament has approved the use of troops to follow the fighters into Iraq if necessary, and the United States and Iraq have been trying at all costs to avert a conflict in the region, which is one of the few relatively peaceful areas of Iraq.

Turkish troops continued to pour into staging areas near the border Friday, while Turkish officials said that airstrikes had already been carried out inside Iraq.

In spite of the rejection of the Iraqi offer, the head of the Turkish army, Gen. Yasar Buyukanit, said Friday that no broad attack was imminent. He said Turkish troops would wait until after Nov. 5, when Erdogan is to return from a visit to the United States, according to the Ana-

tolian News Agency.

His comments were quickly qualified by the prime minister, however. "I cannot tell what will happen before my visit to the United States," Erdogan said in a televised news conference. "We are now momentarily sensitive."

Meanwhile, a senior U.S. general in Iraq played down the chances of any new U.S. military commitment in the conflict. The officer, Maj. Gen. Benjamin R. Mixon, the top American commander in northern Iraq, said that he had no plans to order his troops to confront Kurdish rebels in the mountains.

The general, speaking to reporters in Washington over a video link from Iraq, was asked what American forces plan to do about fighters of the PKK.

"Absolutely nothing," he responded.

His comments underscored a deep apprehension among administration officials and U.S. military officers about playing any direct role in the tense cross-border situation that pits PKK fighters against the Turkish military.

## Army looks for bribes in contracts

Investigators searching for fraud among \$2.8 billion worth of Iraq jobs

WASHINGTON (AP) — A team of specially trained investigators will hunker down in an Army office north of Detroit on Monday to begin poring over hundreds of Iraq war contracts in search for rigged awards.

This team of 10 auditors, criminal investigators and acquisition experts are starting with a sampling of the roughly 6,000 contracts worth \$2.8 billion issued by an Army office in Kuwait that service officials have identified as a hub of corruption.

The office, at Camp Arifjan, buys gear and supplies to support U.S. troops as they move in and out of Iraq. The pace of that operation has exploded since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003.

Based on what the team finds, the probe may expand and the number of Army military and civilian employees accused of accepting bribes and kickbacks could grow. U.S. officials told The Associated Press. Nearly two dozen have been charged so far.

Signs of trouble include contracts continually awarded to vendors without the usual competition and awards that were competed but went to the bidder with the highest price rather than the lowest. A mismatch between the original product to be purchased and what was actually delivered is another red flag.

"Is there anything in there that might indicate to us that there might be some potential fraudulent activity?" Jeffrey Parsons, director of contracting at Army Materiel Command, said in an AP interview. "If there are patterns that we start to identify, then we're going to do further review."

## Senators show opposition to Mukasey nomination

PHILIP SHENON  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — The nomination of Michael Mukasey as attorney general encountered resistance on Friday, with Democratic senators suggesting for the first time that they might oppose Mukasey if he did not make clear that he opposed waterboarding and other harsh interrogation techniques that have been used against terrorism suspects.

The ranking Republican on the Senate Judiciary Com-

mittee, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, joined in the expressions of concern about Mukasey. Specter said in an interview Friday that the nomination could hinge on Mukasey's written responses to questions posed to him this week about the Bush administration's anti-terrorism policies, including its use of interrogation techniques like waterboarding, which simulates drowning, and about his larger views on executive power.

At his Senate confirmation hearings last week, Mukasey, a retired federal judge from New York, declined to say

whether he agreed with many lawmakers and human rights groups that waterboarding is a form of torture and is unconstitutional.

He said he did not know the details of how waterboarding, which has been used by the CIA against senior leaders of al-Qaida, was conducted. In waterboarding, interrogators pour water onto cloth or cellophane that has been placed over the face of a suspect, creating the sensation of drowning.

In an initial letter to the Judiciary Committee that was dated Wednesday and

made public Friday, Mukasey repeated the assertion he had made at his confirmation hearings that torture was unconstitutional and a violation of American obligations under international treaties. But once again, he did not address the question of whether waterboarding was torture.

In the letter, he also repeated his suggestion that the administration's program of eavesdropping without warrants was legal despite criticism by lawmakers that it violated terms of federal surveillance laws.