

NATIONAL

Bush condemns Soviet crackdown

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush condemned the Kremlin's lethal crackdown in Lithuania Sunday and said it "threatens to set back or perhaps even reverse" the new U.S.-Soviet relationship.

He appealed to Soviet leaders to stop using force to quell the independence movement in the Baltics.

"We condemn these acts which could not help but affect our relationship," said Bush upon returning to the White House from Camp David. "There is no justification for the use of force against peaceful and democratically elected governments."

Bush said he couldn't say whether he would still go to Moscow Feb. 11-13 to sign a nuclear arms treaty if the crackdown continued.

"The progress of reform in the U.S.S.R. has been an essential element in the improvement of U.S.-Soviet relations," said Bush. "Events like those now taking place in the Baltic states threaten to set back or perhaps even reverse the process of reform which is so important in the world and the development of the new international order."

But Bush said it would not jeopardize Soviet support for the United Nations resolution demanding Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait.

And Secretary of State James Baker, after meeting with British Prime Minister John Major in Alconbury, England, said the violence in the Baltics should not affect the administration's Persian Gulf policy.

Bush said he did not know whether President Mikhail Gorbachev had ordered the Soviet tanks and paratroopers to storm the Lithuanian television station in Vilnius, which resulted in a reported loss of 13 lives. He said Gorbachev had assured

him in a telephone call on Friday that he wanted a peaceful solution.

"I am concerned about the internal affairs there. And (Gorbachev) himself is very much concerned about that. But let's hope there will be a return to peace, no more use of force and that they can peacefully negotiate their differences," said Bush.

Others in the administration and Congress expressed concern about how the crackdown might change warmer relations between Moscow and the West.

"This crackdown certainly jeopardizes the capacity of the Soviet Union to continue to receive support from ... Western Europe and the United States," White House Chief of Staff John Sununu said on CBS-TV's "Face the Nation."

And Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell said "This brutality could seriously harm recent progress made in U.S.-Soviet relations."

"It is a sharp break with the general pattern since Gorbachev took power and it is deeply disturbing," said National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft.

"Violence is incompatible with the solution to this problem, it's incompatible with perestroika and it's incompatible with the move of U.S.-Soviet relations toward partnership," Scowcroft said on NBC-TV's "Meet the Press."

Scowcroft likened the action to the Soviet tanks that crushed the Hungarian revolution in 1956 — a crackdown that occurred during the Suez crisis, just as the growing turmoil in the Baltics has been overshadowed by the showdown with Saddam Hussein's army in Kuwait.

Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, who was skeptical two years ago about Gorbachev's

chances for survival, said if the Soviet leader "has decided to resort to force to maintain control over the Baltic republics, to let the tanks roll if you will, that clearly sends a very terrible signal about the prospects for future democratization and reform of the Soviet Union."

He was speaking on ABC-TV's "This Week with David Brinkley."

The Baltic states, forced into the Soviet Union against their will in 1940, declared their independence last year and sparked secessionist moves in Georgia and other Soviet republics.

The United States, which never recognized the forcible incorporation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into the U.S.S.R., has defended their right to self-determination while counseling both Baltic and Kremlin leaders to show restraint and negotiate a peaceful outcome.

Bush and Gorbachev discussed the Baltic situation just last Friday in a telephone conversation that dealt primarily with the gulf crisis. Bush also saw the Soviet ambassador twice Friday.

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