

# Bush says 'game is over' with Hussein

Howard Witt and Bob Kemper  
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

WASHINGTON — Declaring "the game is over," President Bush on Thursday said the United States would take "whatever action is necessary" to disarm Iraq now that the world has seen Washington's evidence that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has lied about possessing weapons of mass destruction.

In his harshest terms yet about the crisis in the Persian Gulf, Bush rhetorically took the world to the brink of war but stopped short of declaring it. Bush said Hussein is throwing away his last chance for peace and challenged the U.N. Security Council to approve a new resolution authorizing the use of force to disarm Iraq.

"The United States, along with a growing coalition of nations, is resolved to take whatever action is necessary to defend ourselves and disarm

the Iraqi regime," Bush said after meeting with Secretary of State Colin Powell, one day after Powell presented the Security Council extensive U.S. evidence of Iraq's efforts to hide its chemical, biological and nuclear weapons materials.

"Saddam Hussein has the motive and the means and the recklessness and the hatred to threaten the American people," Bush said. "Saddam Hussein will be stopped."

Even as the president spoke, the Defense Department was ordering the Army's storied 101st Airborne Division to deploy to the gulf region to join an estimated 110,000 troops already in position for a possible war. The elite rapid deployment division played a key role in the ground phase of the 1991 gulf war.

The Turkish parliament, meanwhile, voted Thursday to allow U.S. troops to renovate Turkish bases for

use in a possible war. Turkish officials said they expected the parliament would also soon approve the stationing of tens of thousands of U.S. combat troops, which would permit the Pentagon to open a crucial northern front in any war against Baghdad.

With war preparations accelerating, the State Department issued a "worldwide caution" to all Americans that they faced a growing danger of attacks from terrorist groups everywhere in the world.

Bush dramatized the potential threat as he recounted Powell's evidence of Iraq's continuing weapons programs. The president warned that a single unmanned Iraqi aircraft, rigged to spray biological agents, could be launched off the American coast and "reach hundreds of miles inland."

Bush did not specify a deadline for the Security Council to act, or for his own decision whether to launch a war.

But White House officials noted that the president pointedly refrained from repeating his earlier timeline of "weeks, not months," suggesting that further consultations might not last even that long.

Nor did Bush repeat that Hussein still had time to come into compliance with U.N. disarmament demands.

"Saddam Hussein was given a final chance. He is throwing that chance away," Bush said. "The dictator of Iraq is making his choice. Now the nations of the Security Council must make their own."

Powell, testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he was confident that Washington was beginning to sway skeptical allies.

After speaking with a dozen Security Council foreign ministers following his U.N. presentation, Powell said, he sensed a "shift in attitude" that Iraq can no longer be permitted to defy the

world body. "I think there might be perhaps more support for a second resolution than some might think," Powell said.

Publicly, however, the leading Security Council critics of the use of force — France, Russia and Germany — did not back down from their opposition Thursday.

"We refuse to think that war is inevitable," French President Jacques Chirac said.

But Washington's closest ally, Britain, indicated that it was preparing to introduce a Security Council resolution authorizing force shortly after chief U.N. weapons inspectors Hans Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei make their next report to the council Feb. 14.

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# NASA chief says damage at liftoff not ruled out

R.A. Dyer  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

HOUSTON — In a seeming rebuke to one of his own top administrators, NASA chief Sean O'Keefe on Thursday kept open the possibility that falling debris on liftoff may have doomed the space shuttle Columbia.

On Wednesday, shuttle program manager Ron Dittmore all but dismissed foam debris impact as the probable cause for the shuttle disaster. But on Thursday, O'Keefe said only an independent panel has the authority to draw any definitive conclusions.

"We will not have competing positions on this," O'Keefe said without making specific reference to debris or other theories about the catastrophe.

"We will be guided by the board's findings. The intention is that they will reach conclusions, and the conclusions will come from them and only them."

O'Keefe said the independent Space Shuttle Mishap Interagency Investigation Board, which was created a day after Saturday's disaster, would be the final arbiter of what happened to Columbia. He said the board would likely add members and change its charter to further assure its independence.

O'Keefe made his brief declaration from Washington only moments before Dittmore announced from Houston that the agency had turned over leadership of the probe to the interagency panel.

Dittmore said members of the panel, which is chaired by retired U.S. Navy Admiral Harold W. Gehman, received a daylong briefing Thursday from NASA officials in Houston. "We will follow (Gehman's) leadership," Dittmore said.

Dittmore also appeared to step away from his earlier comments regarding the loss of foam debris 80 seconds after liftoff. That debris fell from the vehicle's external fuel tank and struck the orbiter's left wing, leading to speculation that it could have caused the disaster.

Dittmore said Wednesday that an earlier analysis by NASA technicians would seem to discount the debris impact as a likely cause. On Thursday, he

stressed that investigators had not ruled out any possibility.

"It's had to understand how a piece of foam falling off the tank could have been the root cause, but that is not stopping us from investigating that particular event," said Dittmore.

Also Thursday, Dittmore raised more doubts that technicians would glean useful information from 32 seconds of corrupted data transmitted from Columbia moments before it disintegrated over North Texas, killing all seven astronauts aboard.

He said that technicians continue reviewing the transmission, but may end up reconstructing just two

or three seconds of it.

He also said the crew received an alarm message related to the loss of sensor data related to their left wheel well. He said the crew members were aware of the sensor reading — a crew member pushed a button that sent an electronic acknowledgment to mission control.

"We were in the process of calling them (back) when we received loss of (communication)," said Dittmore. He said investigators may never know what happened to the wheel well.

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# Lingering Venezuelan strike creates surreal, ironic life

Frances Robles  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

CARACAS, Venezuela — Deep in the throes of a political crisis, Venezuela is a place of absurdities and ironies.

There's a strike, but most places are open. (Just because the lights are out, it doesn't mean a business is closed.) There's a severe gas shortage — and traffic jams, too.

More than nine weeks into a nationwide strike aimed at toppling President Hugo Chavez, it's increasingly clear that the opposition can't win the quick victory it once expected. But it is

equally evident that while the strike persists, the president can't govern.

Meanwhile, the routine of civil society has been transformed into a surreal drama of long lines, boisterous demonstrations and daily confrontations.

Predictions of mass chaos, looting and violence haven't materialized. But there is very little gasoline, and rarely a bottle of beer.

Life goes on, but it is not the life most Venezuelans are accustomed to. Nearly everyone talks politics, the national obsession, but no one seems capable of finding a political solution.

And Chavez remains in power, so

far refusing to capitulate to opposition demands for an early presidential election.

The defining moment for Monica Martinez came in October, when her 9-year-old daughter asked: "What's the difference between communism and dictatorship?"

"Why's a kid asking such questions?" Martinez wondered, recalling that her own pressing issues at that age were roller-skating and hair ribbons. If little Mariana had known the result of her innocent inquiry beforehand, maybe she'd have switched subjects.

Armed with anger, Martinez decided she was through with Hugo Chavez, and joined dissident military officers protesting at Caracas' Plaza Francia.

That was on Oct. 22. More than three months ago. Martinez is still there.

"Everyone does what they have to do in the place they have to do it," Martinez said. "My place is here. I am a warrior. We are our country's new soldiers."

Martinez lives in a tent city set up in Plaza Francia, headquarters for the opposition movement where a

gunman shot down three people in December. She quit her job managing a restaurant to join what she considers a fight for freedom.

She hasn't stopped by her house since Dec. 16. The scariest part, she said, is the fear that hangs heavy in the dark of 3 a.m.


"I spent Christmas here — talking to my kids on the telephone," she recalled. "What do my kids need a mother for if they have no country?"

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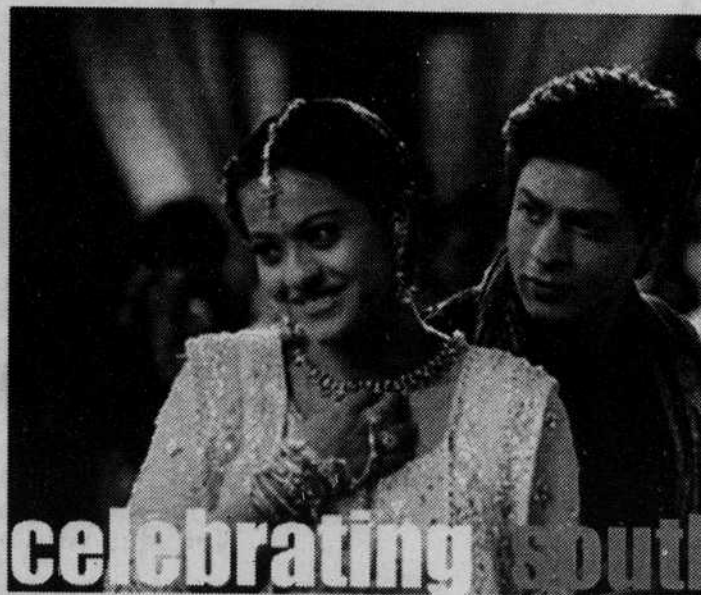
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