## Nation & world briefing North Korea threatens to drop treaty that ended Korean War

## Michael Zielenziger Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

TOKYO — North Korea threatened Tuesday to abandon the 1953 armistice that ended the Korean War if the United States launches sanctions to punish the country for trying to develop nuclear weapons.

The threat came a day after reports that the Bush administration is developing plans for sanctions against Pyongyang that would include halting its weapons shipments and cutting off the flow of money from Koreans living in Japan. Such money is crucial to North Korea and helps to keep its economy afloat.

North Korea's threat increases tensions in Asia while the United States would prefer to focus on another troublesome adversary, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Pyongyang upped the ante in its war of words with the United States,

charging that Washington is poised to launch a military blockade that would cripple the country.

A spokesman for the North Korean People's Army said such a move would force his nation to abandon the cease-fire that has left the Korean peninsula divided for 50 years.

"The KPA (Korean People's Army) side will be left with no option but to take a decisive step to abandon its commitment to implement the armistice agreement as a signatory to it and free itself from the binding force of all its provisions, regarding the possible sanctions to be taken by the U.S. side against the DPRK (North Korea)," said the statement, issued by the Korea Central News Agency, quoting a military spokesman.

The spokesman said the "grave situation created by the undisguised war acts committed by the U.S. in breach of the armistice agreement compels the Korean People's Army side, its warring party, to immediately take all steps to cope with it.

"If the U.S. side continues violating and misusing the armistice agreement as it pleases, there will be no need for the (North) to remain bound to the armistice agreement uncomfortably."

North and South Korea remain technically at war, and North Korea's withdrawal from the armistice would theoretically leave Pyongyang free to launch new assaults against South Korea. Its withdrawal also would force the United Nations to abandon its peacekeeping mission in the demilitarized zones. U.S. soldiers stationed along the tense border between the countries technically serve under U.N. Gommand. U.N. forces signed the original treaty with North Korea and China.

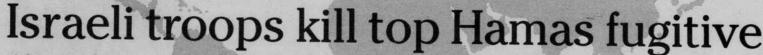
Last week, the International

Atomic Energy Agency voted to ask the U.N. Security Council to explore ways to force Pyongyang to comply with an international treaty banning proliferation of nuclear weapons. North Korea recently bowed out of the treaty and booted international inspectors out of the country, saying it intends to start producing electricity from its tiny reactor at Yongbyon. Weapons experts think the country intends to reprocess spent plutonium to develop nuclear bombs.

The North Koreans fear that the Bush administration intends to attack its regime after concluding a military campaign against Iraq, and they say that only face-to-face talks with Washington can resolve the standoff.

The country demands a non-aggression pact promising North Korea's sovereignty.

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Christine Spolar Chicago Tribune (KRT)

JERUSALEM — Israeli troops killed a top Hamas fugitive and destroyed the home of another militant in the Gaza Strip on Monday in what appeared to be a second day of retaliation against the influential Islamic militant group.

The attacks followed other violence in Gaza over the weekend, including the deaths of six members of Hamas in an explosion Sunday and the killings of four Israeli soldiers in an attack on a tank Saturday for which Hamas claimed responsibility.

Monday's action was characterized by some Israeli media as the launch of a fierce operation in Gaza against Hamas, which is blamed for dozens of deadly assaults. Israeli army officials would not discuss the breadth of the latest army assault.

In the death of the Hamas militant, Israeli troops leaped from a van filled with vegetables as Riyad Abu Zeid traveled along Gaza's coastal road, the Associated Press reported. In an exchange of gunfire, Abu Zeid was wounded, the army said.

Israeli troops seized Abu Zeid, who died as he was being taken by helicopter to an Israeli hospital, the army said.

The army described Abu Zeid, 32, as a senior member of Hamas' military wing who had organized attacks against Israeli targets in the Gaza Strip and suicide bombings inside Israel.

Earlier Monday, Israeli tanks and helicopters surrounded the five-story home of Ahmed Ghandour, reportedly a top aide to a Hamas bombmaker. Ghandour, who remains in hiding, allegedly is linked to planning the weekend tank attack in which four Israeli soldiers died.

Army officials said troops ordered people out of the building in Gaza City, and Palestinian gunmen attacked. Soldiers returned fire, the army said. Hospital officials later said a Palestinian policeman and a suspected militant were killed and five people wounded. The house was destroyed.

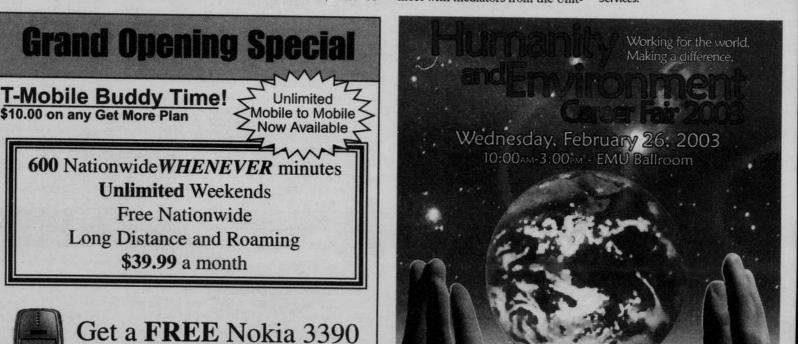
The focus on Hamas comes three weeks after Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz hinted that Israel might take over Gaza. Pressure is mounting on Gaza and Hamas amid failed attempts at a cease-fire among Palestinian factions.

On Monday, Israel and the Palestinians sent delegations to London to meet with mediators from the United States, Russia, the United Nations and the European Union to discuss a possible peace plan. The Mideast mediators have been working for months with little success.

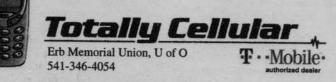
Israel appeared to be preparing other fronts in its war against Palestinian militancy. According to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, the Israeli army plans to double the capacity of the Ketsiot detention center east of Gaza, to 2,400 prisoners.

Israel's detention centers are packed after more than two years of arrests in the West Bank and Gaza since the outbreak of the violence in September 2000 and, according to media reports here, about 5,000 Palestinians are held by Israel.

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