

Bush proposes security accord to North Korea

The agreement promises North Korea security from U.S. attack if it halts its nuclear weapons program

By G. Robert Hillman
The Dallas Morning News (KRT)

BANGKOK, Thailand — President Bush on Sunday offered the prospect of a written agreement with North Korea that would satisfy its security concerns in return for scuttling its nuclear weapons program.

But the president made clear that any such accord must also involve China, Japan, Russia and South Korea, the other nations involved in discussions with North Korea.

"We will not have a treaty. ... That's off the table," Bush told reporters during a brief question-and-answer session with Thailand's prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra. "Perhaps there are other ways we can look at to say exactly what I said publicly on paper, with our partners' consent."

What Bush has said repeatedly — and reiterated again Sunday — is that the United States has no intention of attacking North Korea and that the communist nation must abandon its nuclear ambitions.

Later Sunday, Bush, who is in Bangkok for the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, met privately with Chinese President Hu Jintao to discuss North Korea, among other issues, and to thank him for hosting the last round of talks in Beijing.

"We have a mutual goal, and that is the (Korean) Peninsula be free of nuclear weapons," Bush said.

Hu said he was willing to push for more discussions involving the six nations, which are now stalled, in part because North Korea has objected to Japan's continued involvement.

For Bush, the talk about North Korea overshadowed his move to push the APEC agenda more toward terrorism issues than economic ones.

At nearly every stop so far on his weeklong trip through the Pacific, in his public speeches and in his private meetings, Bush has sought more international help in rebuilding war-torn Iraq and, more generally, in the ongoing war against terrorism.

"One terrorist camp in the mountains of Central Asia can bring horror to innocent people living far away, whether they're in Bali, in Riyadh or in New York City," Bush told troops at the Royal Thai Army Headquarters.

"One murderous dictator pursuing

weapons of mass destruction and cultivating ties to terror could threaten the lives of millions."

The president made no specific mention, though, of North Korea, which he has lumped into an "axis of evil," along with Iraq and Iran. Nor did he name the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il, who has pushed ahead with a nuclear weapons program despite an agreement with the United States to abandon it.

In his brief meetings with reporters, Bush offered no timetable for resuming the six-party talks or of formalizing his ideas for a written agreement — something short of a formal treaty that would have to be ratified by the Senate.

Afterward, Secretary of State Colin Powell said the administration was "anxious to move forward" within the six-party framework to "find ways to provide North Korea the kind of security assurances they're looking for in return for them abandoning their program."

"We are not interested, however, in a treaty or in a non-aggression pact," Powell said from Bangkok on Fox News Sunday. "But there are other models of security assurances and agreements that have been entered into over the years that should give us

some basis to work from and to explore ideas."

Whatever the model, Bush re-emphasized that he was not returning to the bilateral "agreed framework" that the Clinton administration had negotiated with North Korea because the "North Koreans cheated," meaning they had pushed ahead with a nuclear weapons program despite an agreement with the United States to abandon it.

"So, we're trying another approach," Bush said. "I'm hopeful this will work. ... We're making good progress."

Administration officials said they hoped, too, that China would convene a new round of six-party talks, perhaps by the end of the year. One of the officials, briefing reporters on the condition of anonymity, emphasized that any moves by the United States to reach an agreement with North Korea would have to be "conditioned on verifiable progress on their part."

"The question is," the official asked, "are there things that we can see happening on the ground, as opposed to just hollow assurances that we don't like nuclear weapons any more because we woke up today in a good mood?"

Regarding another issue on the

U.S.-China agenda, the official said Hu had agreed in his meeting with Bush to assemble a panel of experts to determine how China could "move more rapidly toward a genuine floating exchange rate."

Bush has been pressing China, as well as Japan, not to keep their currencies undervalued compared to the U.S. dollar, a policy that hurts the U.S. economy by making foreign goods less expensive than American ones.

Instead, Bush, who is heading into a re-election campaign in which Democrats are making jobs a central issue, wants the countries to move toward a strong dollar policy where currency exchange rates move with the market.

When Bush reiterated his stance, the official said, Hu offered an "interesting" response.

"He said that is, indeed, China's goal, too," the official said. "But China is cautious about moving too quickly toward that goal and feels that rapid changes ... could lead to unstable conditions not only in China, but in Asia more generally."

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Two U.S. soldiers killed by guerilla fighters in Iraq

The two deaths in Kirkuk bring the total number of American soldiers slain in action to 103 since May 1

By Jeff Wilkinson
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Two more U.S. soldiers have been killed and another wounded in continuing violence in Iraq, the military announced Sunday.

The deaths occurred when a patrol from the 4th Infantry Division was ambushed southwest of Kirkuk Saturday night. The attackers fired

small arms and rocket propelled grenades at the Americans at about 8:40 p.m. Kirkuk is about 160 miles north of Baghdad.

The Task Force Ironhorse patrol returned fire, but no further contact was made with the guerilla fighters, the military said. The names of the dead were withheld pending notification of families.

The deaths brought to 103 the number of U.S. soldiers killed in action since May 1.

On Sunday guerrillas also attacked a stalled convoy west of Baghdad, exploding an ammunition truck, but in-

cluding no one.

In the holy city of Karbala, 50 miles south of Baghdad, U.S. troops overnight withdrew a dozen tanks and a large body of troops from an area near two important Shiite mosques where three U.S. soldiers and two Iraqi police officers were killed Thursday when they attempted to disarm bodyguards of a radical cleric who were violating curfew.

The attack on the stalled convoy occurred about 35 miles west of Baghdad. While no one was injured, the attack detonated an ammunition truck, setting off a spectacular blast

The incidents were two of 15 attacks by guerilla fighters in a 24-hour period throughout Iraq. A senior U.S. official called the total "pretty low." An average of 22 attacks a day have occurred on coalition forces in recent weeks.

A senior military official said that the coalition still is determined to bring to justice those responsible for the attacks in Karbala, which occurred just before midnight on Thursday.

Coalition officials blamed the incident, in which an American lieutenant colonel was killed, on bodyguards of cleric Mahmoud

al-Hassani, one of Karbala's lesser-known ayatollahs.

But a coalition official said the incident is still being investigated that no decision has been made on whether to arrest Hassani. A key Shiite cleric said Saturday that Hassani and his remaining gunmen had fled the city.

Hassani was an associate of the father of Muqtada al Sadr, a 30-year-old cleric who also is suspected in a string of suicide bombings and attacks on U.S. soldiers in the capital city.

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Israeli soldiers killed in ambush during army patrol

Palestinian gunmen killed three Israeli soldiers and wounded a fourth in a West Bank attack on Sunday

By Joel Greenberg
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

JERUSALEM — Palestinian gunmen ambushed an Israeli army patrol near a Jewish settlement in the West Bank on Sunday, killing three soldiers and wounding a fourth, the army said.

Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a militant offshoot of the mainstream Fatah movement, claimed responsibility for the attack, calling it a "response to Zionist massacres against our people" and retaliation for Israeli raids in the southern Gaza Strip town of Rafah in which 14 Palestinians have been killed in recent days.

Hiding behind a wall after dark, the gunmen fired from close range at a foot patrol in the Palestinian village of Ein Yabrud north of Ramallah, a military official said. The three attackers fled in a car, taking the guns of the dead soldiers.

Ein Yabrud is near the Jewish settlement of Ofra and overlooks a highway used by settlers to reach their communities. The village is patrolled regularly by the military in an effort to prevent attacks on the settlers. There have been several deadly shootings of settlers traveling in the area in the past three years of Israeli-Palestinian violence.

After Sunday's ambush, troops searching for the attackers clamped a curfew on Ein Yabrud and army bulldozers arrived on the scene, Israel Television reported. The army has bulldozed Palestinian farmland and razed buildings near the sites of fatal

shootings after previous attacks.

In the Gaza Strip on Sunday, Israeli troops pulled out of the Brazil refugee camp in Rafah, along the border with Egypt, after a sweep for arms-smuggling tunnels, but they remained nearby, witnesses said.

In a clash in the camp Saturday, two Hamas gunmen and a bystander were killed, bringing to 14 the total number of Palestinians killed in the 10-day-old Israeli operation in Rafah, which has encountered armed resistance. The army says that it has uncovered and destroyed three smuggling tunnels.

The army said that in Saturday's incident, troops fired at militants planting a bomb and at another group of people who tried to recover the explosive. Palestinians said that Widad Ajrami, 30, a mother of four, was killed and her husband and brother-in-law were wounded when their car

was raked with gunfire as they tried to ferry wounded people to a hospital.

The United Nations' relief agency for Palestinian refugees said that more than 100 dwellings have been destroyed in the Israeli operation, leaving more than 1,200 people homeless.

In apparent retaliation for the Israeli operation, militants in the Gaza Strip fired eight crude Qassam rockets at the southern Israeli town of Sderot and neighboring Kibbutz Nir-Am on Sunday, but there were no casualties or damage, the army said.

Palestinian security officials said they had detained another suspect in last week's bombing of an American diplomatic convoy in the Gaza Strip that killed three security guards.

At least eight people have been held on suspicion of involvement in the attack, the first lethal assault on a U.S. target in the Palestinian areas.

An FBI team investigating the bombing is to meet Monday for a second time with Palestinian security officials.

In another development, the Israeli army called up several hundred reservists to serve in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to meet what it called heightened threats of Palestinian suicide attacks.

In the West Bank town of Jenin, meanwhile, troops backed by tanks and armored jeeps raided offices of the militant group Islamic Jihad, confiscating computers and documents, witnesses said. Two militants were arrested, witnesses and the army said.

The militants were planning suicide attacks in Israel, the army said.

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