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# Foreign leaders to condemn U.S. actions

Leaders from 58 nations write a draft denouncing American actions inside Iraq and against Cuba

By Karen Brooks  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

GUADALAJARA, Mexico — A meeting here of diplomats from Latin America and Europe became another opportunity Thursday for the international condemnation of the United States' presence in Iraq and the prison abuse scandal there.

Foreign ministers from 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries, as well as 25 European nations, meeting this week in Guadalajara, denounced the abuse of prisoners in Iraq and delivered a veiled criticism of the United States for its refusal to cooperate with the United Nations.

In a declaration to be issued today, officials attending the Third Summit of Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union condemned unilateral actions that go against

international law and outlined "our horror at the recent evidence of mistreatment of the prisoners in Iraqi prisons."

"We energetically condemn all forms of abuse, torture and other cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment against people, including prisoners of war, in whatever location they occur," the draft reads. "We express our horror at the recent evidence of the mistreatment of the prisoners in the Iraqi prisons. These abuses go against international law, including the Geneva Conventions."

Late Thursday, the European Union and Latin America were still at odds over whether to name the United States and the so-called Helms-Burton law — part of a package of sanctions against Cuba — in what has become known as "Paragraph 73" of the 106-part draft.

Latin American countries want to mention the law, which punishes foreign companies that profit from confiscated U.S. properties in Cuba, with a statement exhorting "the govern-

ment of the United States to put an end to its application."

"We reiterate our energetic rejection of the unilateral and extraterritorial application of laws and actions contrary to international law, the free market and world commerce," the draft reads. "We express our profound concern with additional actions" that threaten the sovereignty of states, including the Helms-Burton law.

The European Union has proposed weaker language that says "unilateral actions against international law represent a serious threat to multilateralism," but doesn't name the United States specifically.

In the previous two summits, the countries have implicitly denounced the effects of the law but have never named it specifically. An approval Friday by the presidents and prime ministers of those nations would mark the first explicit criticism of U.S. policy against Cuba.

The draft also backs the international criminal code, which the Clinton administration supported but the

Bush administration does not. The document must be approved when the heads of state of the countries meet today. European Union External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten said he expected the leaders would support a clause condemning prisoner abuse, but didn't say whether the final version would include a specific reference to U.S. policies.

In Mexico City, President Vicente Fox and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder also professed their support for multilateralism and the condemnation of prisoner abuse. They did not say whether the United States would be mentioned.

The summit, the third such gathering between European and Latin American countries, is designed to increase ties between Latin America and Europe and to boost trade.

But the United States quickly became a target as Patten and other officials publicly condemned the abuses of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib in Baghdad, and any country whose

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# Mergers to blame for gas price increases

A report conducted by the General Accounting Office studied eight mergers within the oil industry

By Seth Borenstein and Ken Moritsugu  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — Consumers face higher gasoline pump prices today in part because a wave of oil industry mergers over the past decade reduced competition, according to a government study released Thursday.

The merger of oil giants Exxon and Mobil in 1999 — when the two companies were number one and two in the industry — added up to 5 cents to the price of a gallon of gasoline sold by the combined company.

The General Accounting Office, an arm of Congress, looked at eight major oil industry mergers between 1994 and 2000 and found that six of them led to higher gasoline prices.

Some 2,600 mergers swept the oil industry since 1990, as firms sought to cut costs through economies of scale.

"Market concentration has increased substantially in the industry, partly because of these mergers," the 240-page GAO report says. "GAO's econometric analyses indicate that mergers and increased market concentration generally led to higher wholesale gasoline prices."

In retrospect, the Clinton administration may have erred in allowing Exxon to take over Mobil, said Joseph Romm, who was the principal deputy assistant energy secretary at the time.

"Was it a mistake to let Exxon and Mobil merge? Probably," he said in a phone interview with Knight Ridder.

At the time, oil prices had collapsed and the industry was in trouble, so mergers seemed like a good idea, he said.

The Federal Trade Commission, which signed off on the merger, said in a 23-page official response, which

was included in the report, that the GAO analysis had "fundamental methodological flaws," such that "the report cannot provide a reliable basis for addressing the issues it claims to study."

The American Petroleum Institute, a Washington-based group representing the oil industry, issued a brief statement citing only the FTC's finding that the study was flawed.

Officials at Irving, Texas-based Exxon-Mobil didn't return a call seeking comment.

In six of eight mergers studied, the report found that prices rose an average of 2 cents a gallon for conventional gasoline, which is used in most of the United States. Prices also rose generally for reformulated gasoline, which is used to reduce pollution in some urban areas.

In two mergers, gasoline prices fell about 1 cent.

The Exxon-Mobil deal added 5 cents to the price of conventional gasoline sold to other retailers and 3.7

cents to gasoline sold at Exxon and Mobil stations.

The study was requested in May 2001 by Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., who was concerned about rising gasoline prices. He had no immediate comment on the report Thursday, his office said.

The oil industry sold the idea of mergers to the federal government on the concept that mergers would make them more efficient and thus could reduce prices, which makes sense in principle. But the realities of the energy markets may prevent that, said Harvard University professor Henry Lee, a former Massachusetts state energy secretary for Republicans and Democrats.

"Any one merger doesn't affect (prices)," he said. "If they all merge, it begins to constrain the market."

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# Scientists study brain activity of poor readers

Researchers hope to use brain mapping to discover better ways to teach reading

By Ronald Kotulak  
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

CHICAGO — Teachers can only wonder what's going on in the heads of their students, but Yale University researchers are looking directly into the brains of poor readers with new imaging technology to measure how reading lessons reorganize the structure and function of young minds.

As the slow readers leap ahead in only one school year, areas of their brains that meld sounds with letters to give meaning to words physically change to resemble those of good readers.

"Now that we can show that these

changes take root in the brain and that they're sustainable, poor reading doesn't have to be a life sentence," said Dr. Sally Shaywitz, a professor of pediatrics and child study at Yale. She and her husband, Dr. Bennett Shaywitz, reported their findings in the journal *Biological Psychiatry* this month.

In what is being hailed as a new era in learning how children learn, scientists are using high technology which is safe and modified to accommodate fidgety youngsters to open windows into the changes that occur in the brains of infants and youngsters when good and bad things happen to them.

The goal is to find out what educational strategies or other interventions rewire the brain in ways that enhance learning. The studies suggest that most schools are teaching reading in the wrong way.

With the aid of magnetic resonance

imaging technology, scientists for the first time are documenting the dramatic rearrangements that take place in the brains of young poor readers as their reading skills catch up to those of their peers, and in pre-term infants as their minds quickly mature in a dark, warm, nurturing environment.

The findings add considerable weight to the mounting evidence of the brain's great capacity to grow and adapt to the outside world, and they show that early experiences are especially crucial.

Harvard scientists, for example, employ the new imaging technology to show that replacing hectic neonatal intensive care with nearly stress-free environments significantly accelerates brain development in premature infants. Researchers hope to reduce the high risk of learning disabilities faced by one in eight babies who come into the world

before their brains are ready.

"This paper is important because for the first time it shows that not only do you improve behavior, but we may be able to get at the underlying hard wiring of the brain," said Harvard's Heidi Altschuler, who reported her findings in the journal *Pediatrics*.

Her imaging study of babies who were seven to 12 weeks premature showed that when they are cared for under conditions that mimic the womb, their brains form more normal neural tracts compared with preemies routinely exposed to the bright lights, loud noise and hubbub of neonatal intensive care units.

G. Reid Lyon, chief of child development and behavior at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, said the new

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