World and Nation

U.S. to stop escorting ships in gulf

From Associated Press reports

NEW YORK — Citing the Iran-Iraq cease-fire agreement, the Reagan administration said Monday it will end America's ship-escorting operation in the Persian Gulf while maintaining a presence there.

President Reagan's decision to terminate the close-quarter convoying of neutral commercial ships came after U.S. officials reviewed how the Aug. 20 cease-fire was working, said White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater.

The move substantially lowers the U.S. profile in the troubled waters nearly three months after a U.S. Navy Regis cruiser shot down an Iranian civilian airliner with 290 people on board. The United States said it regretted the accident, and officials have been weighing a program to compensate relatives of the victims.

Talking to reporters aboard Air Force One while Reagan flew here from Washington, Fitzwater said the administration decided to relax the Persian Gulf sea-lane policing operation only after "consulting with allies and friends in the region."

Fitzwater said it would take a few days to revamp the U.S. military presence in the region. He said there would be no formal announcement when that takes place.

In effect, the United States will replace its close-quarter escorting of commercial ships with a sort of arms-length surveillance operation. The formation was likened by U.S. officials to a "zone" coverage of shipping rather than a "man-to-man" coverage.

The analogy to a kind of coverage used in football means that U.S. ships will watch selected areas of the gulf for trouble, rather than focusing the protective operation on individual vessels.

In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly, Reagan said the world can feel "the uplift of hope" in the gulf war, which he called "one of the bloodiest conflicts since World War II."

During a brief exchange with reporters after a private meeting with U.N. Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar, Reagan also said he hoped the easing of tensions in that part of the world could lead to the release of nine Americans held hostage by pro-Iranian elements in Lebanon.

But Fitzwater told reporters "there is no new morsel of information" to encourage U.S. officials, and said "there is no new signal" indicating a hostage release.

In announcing the phase-down of the U.S. ship protection operation, Fitzwater stressed that "the U.S. intends to maintain in the gulf the forces required to protect U.S.-flagged shipping and support our national objectives."

American testifies in trial of accused Arab hijacker

From Associated Press reports

FRANKFURT, West Germany — American Clinton Suggs said Monday he figured he had just five minutes to live after Arab hijackers shot a fellow Navy diver and threw him out of a commandeered TWA jetliner.

"I made up my mind that if my turn was next — I'm ready, but I'm not going to scream," Suggs said at the murder and air piracy trial of Mohammed Ali Hamadi. The Lebanese Shiite Moslem is charged in the June 1985 hijacking in which Robert Stethem, 23, was killed and 39 Americans held hostage for 17 days.

Suggs testified that Stetham was alive when the hijackers threw the mortally wounded man on the runway at Beirut airport in 1985.

"I could hear him moaning," Suggs said. "I fixed my mind on him. I tried to hear everything I could because I was blindfolded and couldn't see."

The court indictment states that Stethem died of his wounds a short time after being thrown from the airplane.

Minimum wage bill dies

WASHINGTON — Senate Democrats said Monday that Republicans have effectively killed chances of raising the $3.35 minimum wage this year through a five-day filibuster.

News in Brief

"There is no point in our continuing to pound on their door," said Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd, D-W.Va. "I'm now conceding that the Republican filibuster was successful. I regret that. I would have liked to have seen this bill passed by the 100th Congress."

The bill by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., would have raised the wage floor, which has been at its present level since 1981, to $3.75 in January, $4.15 in 1990 and $4.55 in 1991.

Kennedy said it would have directly benefited some 15 million workers now paid less than $4.55 an hour.

"I think it's a pretty good result," said Republican Leader Bob Dole of Kansas. "This bill couldn't pass the House. It wasn't going to pass the Senate unless it was modified."

Senate Democrats had attempted twice, the last time on Friday, to invoke cloture to end the filibuster. Both attempts failed.

Republicans launched delaying tactics after Kennedy effectively used a parliamentary maneuver to deny a vote on Vice President George Bush's proposal for a subminimum training wage.

Federal judge rules Hatcher could act as own attorney

From Associated Press reports

RALEIGH — A federal judge ruled Monday that accused newspaper hostage-taker Eddie Hatcher could act as his own attorney after the Tuscarora Indian refused representation by anyone other than attorney William Kuntsler.

Hatcher, 31, and Timothy Jacobs, 20, are charged with taking hostages and possessing illegal firearms. They have never denied that they walked into The Robesonian newspaper office Feb. 1 in Lumberton, chained the door shut and held up to 20 people for 10 hours.

The trial opened with a confusing courtroom scene — Jacobs sat with his lawyer while Hatcher argued that he would be represented by no one but Kuntsler. Hatcher and Jacobs claim membership in the Tuscarora tribe, an Indian faction affiliated with the Lumbee tribe.

Jury questioning began in the afternoon with the judge questioning 28 prospective jurors.

But before jury selection could start, Hatcher argued that the trial should be delayed. He wanted the proceedings delayed until Kuntsler finished a trial in New York.

U.S. District Court Judge Terrence Boyle denied Hatcher's request for a delay. Then Boyle ruled that Stephanie Moore, an associate of Kuntsler, would be Hatcher's trial attorney. But he changed that ruling after talking to Hatcher.

"Mr. Hatcher, do you want to fire (local attorney Barry) Nakell or keep him," Boyle asked. "If you want him to stay and try this case, I'll force him to stay."

Hatcher replied, "Bill Kuntsler is my attorney, and I feel like I'm being forced to make this decision, and my constitutional rights are being violated."

Nakell, a law professor from Chapel Hill, said he would be willing to advise Hatcher but would not serve as his trial attorney. Boyle wouldn't allow that and Nakell withdrew as Hatcher's attorney.

Reagan delivers farewell speech to United Nations

From Associated Press reports

UNITED NATIONS — President Reagan told the United Nations in a farewell speech Monday that this was "a moment of hope" for peace in the world and that a new U.S.-Soviet treaty to sharply reduce nuclear arms may be concluded next year.

He called for an international war on drug traffickers, terrorism and hostage-taking, and vowed to maintain U.S. support for an armed insurgency against the leftist government of Nicaragua.

He said the Sandinistas were pursuing "the oldest, most corrupt vice of all — man's age-old will to power, his lust to control the lives and steal the freedoms of others."

But with his presidency nearing an end, Reagan struck a mostly philosophical stance as he told the 43rd General Assembly session of 159 nations that civil wars and foreign occupations were giving way around the world.

Reagan said the trend was spurred by "a new era in Soviet-American relations" marked by the continuing withdrawal of the Red Army from Afghanistan and a treaty last year to abolish intermediate-range nuclear missiles.

He said U.S. and Soviet negotiators were making steady progress on another accord to sharply reduce long-range bombers, missiles and submarines. While completion of the pact this year was "highly doubtful," Reagan said, "I can tell you a year from now (it) is a possibility, more than a possibility."

On the conventional front, Reagan said East-West talks to reduce nonnuclear forces, tanks and other mobile weapons in Europe "will begin soon."

The United States had demanded a Soviet commitment to give equal attention to human rights. Reagan met last week in Washington with Soviet Foreign Minister Edward A. Shevardnadze.

Afterward, U.S. officials said the Soviets had promised to release 27 additional political prisoners, to make changes in their emigration procedures and to undertake other reforms. Reagan's statement indicated the human rights obstacle had been removed.

From Angola to Cambodia, and in the Persian Gulf, where U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar is trying to formalize a cease-fire to end the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq, prospects for peace are bright, Reagan said.

Presidential spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said earlier Monday that Reagan had decided to end the 14-month program of providing U.S. Navy escorts to re-flagged Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Persian Gulf, but he still would maintain a naval presence there to aid threatened ships.

Fitzwater told reporters that Reagan acted "after reviewing the current cease-fire . . . which has been in effect since August 20, and consulting with allies and friends in the region."

In his speech, Reagan said, "I stand at this podium, then, in a moment of hope — hope not just for the peoples of the United States or the Soviet Union, but for all the peoples of the world."

In arms control, he said, "the logjam is broken" by the ban on U.S. and Soviet intermediate-range missiles, progress toward a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and the onset of negotiations between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact on conventional forces.

"History teaches caution," Reagan said. But his speech was upbeat, and he traced the improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations to the first summit meeting he had held with Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev in Geneva nearly three years ago.

Bush, Dukakis renew campaigns after debate

From Associated Press reports

Michael Dukakis and George Bush exchanged post-debate jabs from a distance Monday, with the Democrat saying his rival would "lead America nowhere" and the vice president charging his opponent with trying to obscure a liberal past.

The two candidates renewed campaign hostilities as their aides waited for the impact of Sunday night's nationally televised debate to show up in the close race for the White House. The first polls rated the 90-minute confrontation a toss-up.

"One debate down. How'd I do?" Bush asked a cheering crowd of supporters at a railroad amusement park in Jackson, Tenn.

Republican running mate Dan Quayle swiftly declared Bush the winner. But overhead, a small plane carried a banner of dissent. "Dukakis 1, Bush 0," it read.

"After last night, for most people the notion of President Dukakis is a very, very troubling notion today," said Quayle. That was an attempt to reverse Dukakis' debate-night declaration that the prospect of a President Quayle was a troubling idea for many people.

The vice president devoted much of his debate time to depicting Dukakis as a liberal. "We're going to keep on doing it," Bush said as he left Winston-Salem.

Despite the outward display of confidence, Bush and his aides sought to deflect any repercussions from the vice president's debate comment that he hadn't decided whether women who obtain abortions should face legal penalties.

Campaign manager James A. Baker III told reporters that after giving it more thought overnight, Bush was opposed to the idea. Bush told reporters he had "no change" on the subject, although during the debate he said he hadn't "sorted out" the subject of possible penalties.

Dukakis' first appearance of the day was in Cleveland, where he said the debate provided "the best moments of this whole campaign."

In remarks intended to rebut Bush's charges of liberalism, the Massachusetts governor said: "We heard a lot of talk last night from Mr. Bush about the mainstream. But it's clear that he's willing to leave American families high and dry."

Bush, he said, "offers the easy way. He sees no challenges, he offers no solutions, and he will lead America nowhere as president of the United States."

Addressing a crowd of 3,000, Dukakis said he had asked Bush to explain how he'd bring down those massive federal deficits without raiding the Social Security trust fund. "And what did he say? Not one word," Dukakis said.

Just as Bush's managers sought to minimize damage from the abortion issue, Dukakis' aides tried to deflect controversy about the ACLU, a civil rights organization that counts Dukakis among its members. Bush has criticized Dukakis for joining the group, and said during the debate that the ACLU favors relaxing child pornography laws, wants to eliminate the current system for movie ratings and opposes the Catholic Church's tax exemption. Dukakis spokesman Dayton Duncan said the governor disagreed with the ACLU's position on each of the issues cited by Bush.

Bush and his Democratic rival clashed sharply on a variety of domestic and foreign issues Sunday, and public opinion polls said the debate was roughly a draw. That type of outcome traditionally favors the out-of-power candidate, and one analyst said that was exactly what happened.

"In essence, the debate served to restart the campaign," said Lee Miringoff, director of the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. "Overall, it was a net plus for Dukakis in that it leveled the playing field for both of them."

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