

## Changing world spurs end of hostage crisis

WASHINGTON — After all the frustrating years, the hostage ordeal was rushing toward an end Tuesday.

Eight Westerners have been freed in four months — their freedom a result of historic changes that include the collapse of the Soviet Union and the display of U.S. military power in the Persian Gulf.

Those and other developments accelerated policy shifts in Iran and Syria, the two nations that had to cooperate for the ordeal to end. "They understood, the Iranians, that hostages were the single main obstacle between Iran and the rest of the world," said Judith Kipper, an analyst at the Brookings Institution.

Expectations were high that journalist Terry Anderson, the last American held in Lebanon, would soon be free after more than 6 1/2 years in captivity.

He would re-enter a world politically far different than it was when he was taken prisoner in March 1985.

It was a world in which U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar was able to use the new concerns of Iran and Syria to broker deals for hostage releases that involved complex elements including Israeli release of Arab prisoners and U.S. freeing of Iranian assets.

The swift release of hostages after so many years of dashed hopes created the impression of a sudden shift.

Many analysts suggest their

release came as a result of changes that began before the Soviet collapse and the gulf war.

Shaul Bakhsh, a professor at George Mason University who specializes in Iranian affairs, said the push within Iran to normalize relations with the West took place over "a much longer period of time."

Bakhsh said the Iranians used the gulf war as a cover to accelerate their efforts to end the diplomatic and economic isolation that began when Ayatollah Khomeini ruled the country.

It was during the war that Iran restored diplomatic relations with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and England.

The desire in Tehran for a normalization of relations with the outside world would not have been enough to free the hostages.

It took an alteration in the world balance of power that existed when the hostages were taken in the mid-1980s.

In 1985 and 1986, Iran and Iraq were waging all-out war and the United States and the Soviet Union were competing for influence in the Middle East.

With an unpredictable suddenness, the Cold War ended and Soviet influence in the region dropped sharply.

The end of the Cold War was followed swiftly by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, which tested U.S. power and the will to use it.

## Sununu gives up helm Combative White House chief calls it quits

WASHINGTON — John Sununu, the combative White House chief of staff whose abrasive style earned him enemies in both parties, resigned Tuesday, telling President Bush he didn't want to be "a drag on your success."

Speculation immediately centered on Transportation Secretary Samuel Skinner as a likely successor, although the White House said no decision had been made.

Sununu handed Bush a five-page handwritten resignation note on Air Force One while Bush was on a trip to Florida and Mississippi.

Bush accepted the resignation, effective Dec. 15, and said Sununu would remain as a counselor with Cabinet rank through March 1.

Sununu's resignation ended weeks of rumor that he was on his way out.

The 52-year-old former New Hampshire governor and Bush campaign aide had come under increasing criticism in recent days from Republicans for his role in the mixed signals from the White House on the faltering economy.

Administration and Republican sources said they expected Skinner, a close political ally of the president's who played an active role in his 1988 re-election effort, to get the top White House staff job.

White House spokeswoman Judy Smith said that as far as she knew, Bush had not offered Skinner the job.

Skinner is well respected by other Cabinet members, GOP members of Congress and Republican campaign workers.

Speculation that he would get the post was fueled by revelations that he

had a private dinner with the president Sunday and breakfast at the White House on Monday with Bush's son and chief political troubler shooter, George W. Bush.

It was Bush's eldest son who delivered the bad news to Sununu last week that there was wide opposition to him among Bush's top advisers, administration and Republican sources said Tuesday.

In his letter, Sununu said that until recently he had been convinced he could be a strong contributor to Bush's efforts.

"But in politics, especially during the seasons of a political campaign, perceptions that can be effectively dealt with at other times can be converted into real political negatives," Sununu wrote. "And I would never want to not be contributing positively, much less be a drag on your success."

## Japanese military measure approved

TOKYO — Nearly 50 years after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, lawmakers Tuesday passed a controversial plan allowing Japan to send ground forces overseas for the first time since World War II.

Legislators considered drafting a formal apology in time for the anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack on Saturday.

The bill creating a peacekeeping corps of up to 2,000 soldiers still must be approved by the upper house, where its opponents plan to delay a final vote. Eventual passage is expected.

Bitter debate over the proposal underscored the raw emotions concerning any action dealing with the

military or evoking memories of the nation's World War II defeat. Last week, a brawl in Parliament erupted between opposition lawmakers and Liberal Democrats who pushed the bill through a special committee.

Lawmakers worry about the West's criticism that Japan avoids its global responsibilities by relying on "check-book diplomacy" — sending money but few personnel in world crises such as the Persian Gulf War. Japan deployed minesweepers to the gulf after the cease-fire.

Opponents say the bill violates Japan's postwar pacifist constitution, which renounces the use of military force overseas. About 3,000 anti-

military demonstrators rallied against the bill in Tokyo after it was passed by a 311-167 vote.

Also, neighbors such as China and the two Koreas, which suffered Japanese attacks this century, are uneasy about any hint of a rebirth of Japanese militarism.

"We understand the Japanese motive behind its effort to participate in the U.N. peacekeeping operations but call for prudence in sending its troops overseas because of the unfortunate experiences of the neighboring countries with Japan," said a statement from South Korea's Foreign Ministry.

## Gorbachev warns of chaos if Soviet Union disintegrates

MOSCOW — President Mikhail Gorbachev warned Tuesday that the disintegration of the Soviet Union will lead to misfortune, catastrophe and war, but Russia hastened the breakup by recognizing the Ukraine's new statehood.

Saying the country was experiencing a destructive "crisis of statehood," Gorbachev urged lawmakers across the Soviet Union to approve his proposed Union Treaty.

"The breakup of such a multiethnic community will bring misfortunes upon millions of our people, which will outbalance all possible temporary benefits from secession," Gorbachev said in a statement distributed to lawmakers in all 12 republics, not just those seven that have said they will sign the treaty.

"A breakup is fraught with interethnic, inter-republic clashes, even wars," he said. "That would be a catastrophe for the entire global community."

Coming one day after Ukrainian officials announced that voters in the republic had overwhelmingly approved a referendum on independence, Gorbachev's comments amounted to a desperate plea to save some form of union as well as what little remains of his dwindling authority.

The proposed treaty would limit the Kremlin's role to foreign affairs, strategic nuclear arms and coordination of economic policy. It also would establish a five-year, directly elected national presidency and an independent judiciary, and allow the republics to introduce their own currencies.

The Ukraine's newly elected president, Leonid Kravchuk, previously pledged not to sign the treaty. Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin said in a newspaper interview last week that if Ukraine did not sign the treaty, his republic would not sign either.

## Mideast talks are headed for uncertain next round

WASHINGTON — New Mideast peace talks Tuesday headed toward an uncertain opening round with Israel still insisting on a delay and prospects of Arab negotiators confronting an empty Israeli chair.

Secretary of State James Baker arranged for the talks to open today at 10 a.m. even if Israel failed to show up.

Delegations from Syria, Lebanon and Jordan joined with Palestinians challenging the Israelis to attend, but the Israeli Cabinet decided Sunday its negotiators needed until Monday to prepare to deal with the Arabs on three fronts.

Israel also wants to stagger the talks so that there would be an interlude between its negotiations with three Arab delegations. That, too, was rejected in the Bush administration's arrangements.

The United States and the Soviet Union called for an international conference in Moscow at the end of January to ease Arab-Israeli tensions.



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