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## WORLD NEWS

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### US wants to take over

#### Arab world: Belgium

BRUSSELS: Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, whose country is fiercely opposed to the war on Iraq, slammed the United States as "very dangerous" Sunday, saying it wanted to take over the whole Arab world, the Belga news agency said.

Verhofstadt, in an address in Antwerp to his party which is preparing for legislative elections, reiterated his disagreement with the "logic" of the US administration. "America is a deeply hurt power which has...become very dangerous (and) which thinks that it must take over the whole Arab world," he told a meeting of his liberal VLD party, Belga said.

Speaking in Antwerp, which has a relatively large Muslim population, he said he disagreed with Washington over a link between the war on Iraq and the fight against terrorism.

"That is a logic which I absolutely do not share," he said, addressing his party in the northern port city, where the far-right Vlaams Blok is electorally strong.

The war on Iraq turns out, everything must be done to restore the international legal framework which has been shaken by the crisis which preceded the conflict, Belga said.

But he also called for efforts to bridge the transatlantic gulf opened up by the Iraq crisis, saying that NATO should be built on two equal pillars, America and Europe.

Belgium, which is home to NATO and European Union headquarters, was among three countries -- along with France and Germany -- which plunged NATO into an unprecedented crisis in February by refusing to approve a US request to boost Turkey's defences in preparation for a war on Iraq.

Verhofstadt, who has led a rainbow coalition of liberals, socialists and greens since 1999, is facing national elections set for May 18. The far-right Vlaams Blok scored 33 percent in 2000 municipal ballots in Antwerp. Speaking on national radio, he said: "Above all what we need to do now is to help the Iraqi people with humanitarian means, and secondly we have to avoid this war disrupting the global economy too seriously."

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