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Experts Confirm New Iraq Missile Exceeds U.N. Limit

By **JULIA PRESTON** with **ERIC SCHMITT**

UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 12 — A panel of arms experts convened by United Nations weapons inspectors has confirmed that a missile Iraq has developed exceeds range limits set by the Security Council.

The panel's conclusion will add fuel to the United States' argument that Iraq is defying Security Council disarmament resolutions, and it is likely to deepen the discord here over whether to go to war against Iraq or allow inspections to continue, as several critical Council nations insist.

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Paul Hefros/The New York Times
 Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said Wednesday in Washington that the United Nations Security Council was "reaching a moment of truth." On Tuesday, Mr. Powell spoke about Iraq at a Senate budget hearing.

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In an atmosphere of tension, Germany, France and Russia surprised the United States today by laying plans for an open meeting of Council foreign ministers on Friday to hear the report of the chief weapons inspectors, Hans Blix and Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei.

In Washington, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said the Council was "reaching a moment of truth" with the meeting on Friday and confirmed that he would attend.

"Nobody wants war, but sometimes it's necessary when you need it to maintain international order," he said.

Pentagon officials asserted today that Iraqi forces had moved explosives into the

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southern part of the country in preparation for blowing up bridges, bursting dams and igniting oil fields in a strategy to slow an American attack. The officials said the tactic would impede an allied effort to provide emergency food and relief to millions of Iraqi civilians.

Military officials said they detected suspicious movements of explosives by rail and other means in recent days, and interpreted it as part of a strategy by President Saddam Hussein to create havoc in the opening moments of a war. Top American commanders say their war plan includes measures to prevent or mitigate Iraqi sabotage and will not hinder their assault, but some senior officers have expressed doubts privately.

The panel of independent missile experts at the United Nations reached its conclusion on Iraq's Al Samoud 2 missiles after meetings Monday and Tuesday in New York. The panel, including one American, was convened by Mr. Blix to provide additional technical support in analyzing the missile.

Mr. Blix has already told the Council that the missiles, with a range of about 180 kilometers, or 114 miles, appeared to be a "prima facie" case of a violation by Iraq of the range limit of 150 kilometers, or about 90 miles, established by the Council. The missiles have already been given to the Iraqi armed forces, he said. The panel did not reach a conclusion about a second missile, Al Fatah, but said it required further study.

Until now, the United States' argument for war has been based mainly on negatives, particularly its contention that Iraq has failed to cooperate with Council-mandated inspections and has not provided thorough proof that it destroyed weapons it was known to have in the past. Mr. Blix and Dr. ElBaradei have said repeatedly that they found no "smoking gun."

The conclusion about the missile violation seems certain to provoke new controversy. The inspectors learned of the range of the missiles from test results that were provided in the 12,000-page arms declaration Iraq delivered at the start of the inspections. The missile data was part of the relatively small amount of new useful information the inspectors found in the vast document.

Resolution 1441, the Council measure that set up the inspections, does not spell out what should be done if the inspectors find active illegal weapons. United States officials have argued that any prohibited weapons that emerge would be proof of Iraq's cheating, while French officials, among others, contend that the conclusion on the missiles is proof that the inspections are working and should be allowed to continue.

"An exceeding of the range was declared," said Yuri V. Fedotov, a Russian disarmament specialist who attended a meeting here today with Mr. Blix. It should be taken "precisely as an example of cooperation" by Iraq, he said.

Council diplomats said Mr. Blix seemed to be moving toward demanding that Iraq turn over the missiles to the inspectors for destruction, a concession many diplomats expect that Mr. Hussein will be unwilling to make as the prospect of an American-led attack grows imminent.

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Photo: Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, with his shoe before him, at the United Nations, 1960



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