

Rice, Blix Confer On Iraq Briefing

Acknowledgment Of Violation Urged

By Colum Lynch

Washington Post Staff Writer

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UNITED NATIONS, Feb. 11 -- National security adviser Condoleezza Rice flew to New York this morning to press chief U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix to acknowledge in a Security Council briefing Friday that Iraq has failed to voluntarily scrap its prohibited chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs, according to U.S. and U.N. diplomats.

The visit coincided with U.S. and British consideration of a new Security Council resolution that would formally declare Iraq in violation of its disarmament obligations, paving the way for a possible U.S.-led military invasion of Iraq. U.S. officials said that Britain could introduce such a resolution as early as next week.

Rice's unannounced meeting with Blix underscored the Bush administration's concern that the Swedish diplomat's report to the council on Friday, while critical of Iraq, may not be decisive enough to persuade wavering Security Council members to support an immediate move to war.

Sources said Blix's report will be much briefer than the one he gave to the council on Jan. 27 and that, as of today, will not contain a declaration that Iraq is in clear violation of its obligations, which the United States has sought.

The meeting came as NATO diplomats in Brussels stepped up efforts to head off a diplomatic rift between the United States and Europe's two leading opponents of a war, France and Germany, which have blocked a NATO decision to prepare for the defense of Turkey in the event of a war against Iraq.

"We are reaching the moment when the Security Council can no longer look away," Secretary of State Colin L. Powell told the Senate Budget Committee today. "It is clear that a moment of truth is coming with respect to Iraq and with respect to the Security Council, as to whether it will meet its responsibilities. This is not just an academic exercise or the United States being in a fit of pique. We're talking about real weapons. We're talking about anthrax. We're talking about botulinum toxin. We're talking about nuclear weapons programs."

At the New York meeting, which was held at the U.S. mission to the United Nations, Rice told Blix that Iraq is in violation of a Nov. 8 Security Council resolution that gave the Baghdad government "a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations" before it would face "serious consequences," U.S. officials said.

Rice also said Iraq's agreement this week to permit U-2 reconnaissance flights over Iraq contained conditions that belied Baghdad's expressed willingness to fully cooperate with U.N. inspectors, the officials said.

Administration officials cited a Feb. 10 letter to the U.N. inspectors from Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's chief science adviser, Amir Saadi, agreeing to surveillance flights by



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Secretary of State Colin L. Powell says "a moment of truth is coming . . . with respect to the Security Council." (Ray Lustig -- The Washington Post)

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American U-2s, French Mirages and Russian Antonovs. The letter stressed the need for inspectors to provide Iraq "with a timely notification of each flight, including the time and point of entry, speed and call signal that ensure communication with the pilot when necessary."

"This is not a serious concession," said a U.S. official. "It's conditioned."

Although Blix has not officially responded to the letter, U.N. officials said he agreed during a Jan. 20 visit to Baghdad to notify the Iraqis each time the inspections agency conducts a reconnaissance flight. The officials defended the accord on the grounds that the Security Council endorsed the inspectors' plans to follow the guidelines used by the previous U.N. inspection agency, which notified Iraq when it conducted U-2 flights.

France, meanwhile, sought to build support for a proposal to reinforce the U.N. inspections. The French proposal, which is intended to stave off U.S. military action, calls for doubling or tripling the size of the U.N. inspection agency, increasing the frequency of surveillance flights and expanding the role of U.N. security guards in the monitoring of suspected weapons sites.

The French proposal, which was outlined in a four-page paper distributed to reporters today, calls for the recruitment of accountants, archivists and teams of custom officers who would be granted the authority to monitor the goods entering Iraq to prevent the importation of weapons-related material. A new intelligence bureau, employing as many as 10 analysts, would be established to analyze reconnaissance imagery and to assess intelligence provided by national intelligence agencies.

"Our approach is based on the need to compel Iraq to cooperate by taking the peaceful approach of intrusive inspections," the paper states. "They must be more intensive, more carefully targeted, more intrusive."

Powell said the French proposal for more monitors would not bring about Iraqi compliance. "The answer is Iraqi compliance, Iraqi full, active, complete cooperation," he said. "And if we had that, we could probably do it with fewer inspectors, because we would not be running around looking for needles in haystacks."

Blix also expressed skepticism over the French initiative, telling Radio France International that many of France's proposals had already been proposed by the United States, in November. "Yes, we can use more inspectors," Blix said. "But what is more important is cooperation on substance if Iraq declares, explains, presents documents, offers some witnesses. That's even more important."

Blix called together a team of international missile experts over the past two days to help determine whether Iraq has been developing missiles capable of traveling beyond the 93-mile limit imposed by the Security Council after the Persian Gulf War in 1991. He is expected to receive a report on their findings before he briefs the council Friday. He will then report to the council whether Iraq is to be required to destroy its Al Fatah and Al Samoud 2 missile programs and missile components capable of advancing the range of Iraqi missiles.

Blix is scheduled to meet Wednesday with a college of commissioners, including key Security Council representatives, who serve as his board of directors, to go over the results of his weekend trip to Baghdad.

He plans to preview his already stated views that -- despite the apparent acceptance of U-2 flights, the transfer of some documents and a few unmonitored interviews -- "more cooperation is needed from the Iraqis," one U.N. official said yesterday.

The UNMOVIC commissioners, which include Washington's chief liaison with the U.N. inspection agency, John S. Wolf, will also get a preview of Blix's Friday presentation to the Security Council.

Staff writers Walter Pincus and Glenn Kessler in Washington contributed to this report.

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