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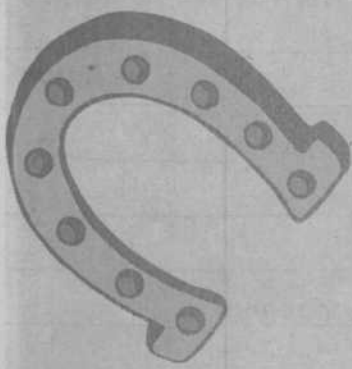
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CAROLINA SHUTTLE: MOVING  FOR 25 YEARS

# Iraq pledges U.N. cooperation, says U.S. attack is still feared at 'any minute, any second'

BY CHARLES J. HANLEY  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**BAGHDAD, IRAQ** — The Baghdad government will work more closely with arms monitors under a new U.N. accord, but the U.S. military will probably attack Iraq anyway, a senior Iraqi official said Tuesday.

"It is possible any minute, any second that while the inspectors are still here, the aggression takes place, because the U.S. administration doesn't care," Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan said.

The comments came as President Bush chided allies for their reluctance to wage war against Saddam Hussein's regime, and the White House underlined it was willing to attack without backing from the United Nations.

Saddam has "been given ample time to disarm," Bush said in Washington. "This business about more time. How much time do we need to see clearly that he's not disarming?"

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer reiterated that the Bush administration believes it doesn't need U.N. Security Council support for an attack. America would lead a "coalition of the willing" against Iraq if, in its view, the Baghdad government fails to surrender weapons of mass destruction, Fleischer said.

Security Council backing looked unlikely, after foreign ministers meeting in New York made clear their opposition to early military action. France's stand suggested it might veto any U.S. bid for a council resolution authorizing an invasion.

Another U.S. ally, Turkey, announced it would host key Middle East foreign ministers in talks Thursday to try to find ways to ease the U.S.-Iraqi standoff. "All decision-makers should give an ear to calls for peace rising in the world," said Recep Tayyip

Erdogan, leader of Turkey's ruling party. "It's possible to achieve it, especially if the United States contributes."

Only British Prime Minister Tony Blair spoke in support of the Bush administration, telling British lawmakers "the intelligence has grown over the last couple of months" that Iraq is concealing chemical and biological weapons.

Saddam, meanwhile, struck a confident note, telling army commanders Tuesday that he has good reason to be happy these days. In the latest of a series of morale-boosting meetings with the military, the Iraqi president said: "I want you to know that even when I am not smiling, I am in fact smiling ... it reflects my joy at the path we chose ... and because I am happy to be the leader of men of your caliber."

U.N. arms inspectors dropped in unannounced Tuesday on a chemical plant south of Baghdad flagged by British intelligence as a "facility of concern." It was their eighth visit to the Qa Qa Company since early December, and they have reported no sign of chemical weapons-making there.

In fact, after some 400-site visits across Iraq since Nov. 27, the chief U.N. inspectors have reported finding no "smoking guns."

On Monday, those top arms monitors — Hans Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei, head of the U.N. nuclear agency — concluded a 10-point agreement in talks with Iraqi officials to clear obstacles to more effective inspections.

Washington wants to "create the idea that Iraq isn't cooperating," Ramadan told reporters Tuesday. "We hope to increase this cooperation (with inspectors) and overcome any obstacles, so we don't give the U.S. administration any pretext."

The U.S. military is likely to attack anyway, he said, but without international cover, "the aggression would be seen as only an

American-Zionist (Israeli) one."

Following its invasion of Kuwait and its defeat in the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq was forbidden by the Security Council to possess any chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. A council resolution adopted Nov. 8 sent inspectors back after a four-year absence.

The new U.N.-Iraqi accord stipulates, among other things, that the Baghdad government will encourage Iraqi scientists, engineers and other weapons specialists to submit to private interviews with U.N. inspectors, who believe interview subjects will be more candid without Iraqi government officials sitting in.

On Tuesday, U.N. inspectors also visited the Al-Mutasim missile plant, 55 miles west of the capital. A comprehensive CIA report last October said the size of new facilities at the plant indicated it was building larger missiles, violating a U.N. prohibition on Iraqi missiles with ranges greater than 90 miles.

After repeated visits to Qa Qa, Al-Mutasim and 11 other installations cited as "facilities of concern" in British and U.S. intelligence reports, the arms monitors have reported no violations of U.N. bans.

Thousands of women rallied in Baghdad on Tuesday in an anti-American and pro-Saddam demonstration sponsored by a national women's organization. As American flags burned, groups of angry women chanted, "Kill Bush and we'll dig his grave!"

Beyond Iraq's borders, thousands of U.S. troops continued to assemble in the Persian Gulf region. The U.S. Army announced Monday that 37,000 more, including the 4th Infantry Division, had been ordered to the Gulf. Blair's government announced it was sending 26,000 soldiers to the region — one-quarter of the British army.

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