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THREATS AND RESPONSES: ARMS INSPECTIONS; IRAQ SAYS REPORT TO THE U.N. SHOWS NO BANNED ARMS

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Iraq today delivered a 12,000-page declaration on banned weapons to the United Nations, meeting a Security Council deadline with more than 24 hours to spare. Officials said the documents confirmed, in rebuttal of American and British claims, that Saddam Hussein's government had no weapons of mass destruction and no current programs to develop them.

Mr. Hussein also chose today to deliver a statement on Kuwait, offering an apology to God if Iraq unknowingly harmed the desert kingdom with its invasion in 1990. But he coupled that muted climbdown with an appeal to Islamic militants in Kuwait -- a diverse group with at least some past links to Al Qaeda -- to join him in fighting the "occupying infidel armies," meaning the United States, which he said was preparing to invade Iraq from Kuwait.

"You have seen the intentions of the officials of Kuwait, and of the occupying foreigner" with their "hand-in-hand schemes," he said, adding, "Why don't the believers, loyalists and holy warriors get together with their counterparts in Iraq under the tent of their Creator -- instead of the tent of London, Washington or the Zionist entity -- to discuss first and foremost jihad against the infidel armies."

In Washington this afternoon, the Bush administration prepared the C.I.A. and the national laboratories to analyze the report as soon as they obtain a copy. Underscoring the urgency of the task, they were preparing to compare it with intelligence information about Mr. Hussein's known weapons projects before inspectors were withdrawn in 1998, and some information -- portions of it apparently gleaned from defectors -- about the programs since.

The White House press secretary, Ari Fleischer, issued a terse statement noting that Mr. Hussein had met the deadline with "what it claims is a declaration of its programs to develop chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and other delivery systems." National security officials said, however, that the declaration must be more than accurate; it must lead United Nations inspectors to arms caches, or to irrefutable evidence that they have been destroyed.

At a news conference in Baghdad, the Iraqi official in charge of preparing the weapons declaration, Maj. Gen. Hussam Muhammad Amin, said the documents "verified" the position Iraq had taken ever since the United States and Britain, threatening war, accused Baghdad this year of continuing with secret nuclear, biological and chemical weapons programs. Iraq contends that it has abandoned all such projects and met longstanding demands that it disarm.

In the new report, General Amin said, "we declare that Iraq is empty of any weapons of mass destruction." To hammer the point home, he told reporters summoned for an early sighting of the documents at Baghdad University that Mr. Hussein had ordered Iraqi officials to be "fair and frank" in the declaration. "That means that when we say we have no weapons of mass destruction, we are speaking the truth," he said.

The Iraqi report appears to set the stage for a still sharper confrontation between the United States and Iraq, with the ball effectively now back in the American court. Senior Bush administration officials have repeatedly said Iraq has revived some of the banned weapons programs it has now formally denied, and warned that Mr. Hussein would be running the gantlet of war if he returned to the patterns of the past, trying to save his secret projects by deceit.

A senior administration official said in an interview in Washington on Friday that President Bush had elected to take time to have the Iraqi declaration analyzed by the C.I.A. and at weapons laboratories.

Mr. Bush warned in his weekly radio address today that the declaration must stand up to American scrutiny if Iraq is to avoid military attack. "We will judge the declaration's honesty and completeness only after we have thoroughly examined it, and that will take some time," he said.

Late Friday, a senior official speaking at the White House said the administration had "significant concerns based on different sources" that Iraq was assembling the cascade of centrifuges needed to produce a nuclear weapon from highly enriched uranium, the same technology that North Korea is using. Clearly American officials will be looking for any hint of such a program in the voluminous document, even if Iraq claims that it is for a peaceful purpose.

The official also made it clear that Mr. Bush would feel free to take military action if the administration determines, after its full assessment, that Iraq is probably lying. "This is not a court of law," he said. "This is a matter for national security, and we have to go with the preponderance of the evidence."

A senior administration official, asked about the evidence, said: "Since 1998, there have been a number of pieces of information, intelligence evidence, that suggest that a number of these programs not only continue but have accelerated." When pressed, he added, "There are things of course that we're not going to make public."

American officials have reiterated in recent days that they believe the best way to contradict whatever is in the Iraqi document is to encourage the defection of scientists or engineers.

In Baghdad at 8:05 p.m. (12:05 p.m. Eastern time), Iraqi officials delivered the documents and additional information on computer disks to United Nations officials at the Canal Hotel on the capital's eastern outskirts, converted for use as the United Nations headquarters in Iraq.

Several men in a beige-colored four-by-four carried two bags and four cardboard boxes into the building, where they met for a ceremony with United Nations weapons-inspection officials.

The ceremony centered on a gray fiberglass suitcase of the kind used as airline carry-on bag, containing a complete set of the documents intended for the Security Council. Seated at a table set on a marbled floor, General Amin lifted the bag onto the table, opened it and checked off each sheaf of documents with a United Nations official.

The general urged his United Nations counterpart to leaf through each document. Finally, after both sides signed letters of acknowledgment, the Iraqis tied the suitcase with string. They then plugged a cone-shaped sealing machine into a power outlet, melted a tumbler-full of red wax and sealed the suitcase for its journey to New York.

The handover put Iraq a full day ahead of a deadline of midnight Sunday that the United Nations Security Council set last month in demanding a "currently accurate, full and complete" declaration by Iraq of any banned weapons programs or related work in nonmilitary fields. Leaders of the inspection team in Baghdad, which began work 11 days ago, have said Iraq has delivered at least eight previous "full and complete" declarations of its secret weapons programs in the last 10 years, only for each to be shown later to have omitted entire programs banned under Security Council resolutions.

United Nations officials said the Iraqi report would be flown out of Baghdad early Sunday morning to a United Nations staging post in Larnaca, Cyprus, and transferred there to a flight to New York. They said the cargo of spiral-bound documents, CD-ROM's and large, snap-shut filing folders would arrive in New York around lunchtime on Sunday and be delivered straight to the offices of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Observation Commission, set up to ensure the disarmament of Iraq.

A second copy of the documents will go to the International Atomic Agency in Vienna, which has responsibility for monitoring Iraqi nuclear programs. The New York-based inspection agency has the task of searching out and destroying any prohibited biological or chemical warfare projects, as well as plans to develop ballistic missiles with a range longer than 90 miles. The restrictions were imposed after the Kuwait invasion, which led to the Persian Gulf war and Iraq's ouster from Kuwait in early 1991.

Mr. Hussein's statement on Kuwait today contrasted oddly with his speech on Thursday, in which he struck a mollifying note on the crisis with the United States, saying Iraq should allow the new weapons inspectors to do their work so as to prove to the world that Iraq has no banned weapons and to "keep our people out of harm's way."

Today, he returned to his old belligerence. The statement began with a nod to Iraq's unpopularity in Kuwait since the 1990 occupation, kept alive in part by Iraq's failure to account for 600 Kuwaitis and foreign residents who were seized by the Iraqis then and never seen again. Iraq continues to pay hundreds of millions of dollars a year in reparations for the damage and injuries it caused in 1990.

Saying nobody should think he was doing so "out of weakness," Mr. Hussein went on, "We apologize to Allah for any action that may anger the Almighty."

He then began a tirade against Kuwait's leaders for siding with the United States in the crisis with Iraq and for allowing Kuwaiti troops to train with Americans along the border with Iraq. "They have betrayed their God after having betrayed their Arab nation," he said.

In the weapons crisis, the next crucial stage will come when the Iraqi documents are handed over to the United States and other member nations of the Security Council, a step that Hans Blix, one of the chiefs of the United Nations agencies monitoring Iraqi disarmament, said on Friday could take several days. He said the delay would be necessary to give United Nations experts time to purge documents of any technical information that, in the wrong hands, would lead to "proliferation," meaning the spread of deadly weapons to rogue states or terrorists.

Theoretically, the United States could short-circuit the cumbersome United Nations procedures by taking the declaration General Amin made today, that Iraq has no banned weapons or weapons programs, and immediately producing the detailed intelligence that Mr. Bush has repeatedly said Washington has of the existence of such programs. But the American official interviewed on Friday said that after the Iraqi documents are reviewed by the C.I.A. and the laboratories, it would be compared with "past lists of what was there, to previous inspection reports, and to our own intelligence."

"Eventually we will make our assessment available," said the official, whose tone indicated that Mr. Bush was not in any hurry to use the report as a reason to go to war.

United Nations inspectors in Baghdad have said the Iraqi declaration will set a "base line" of truth, and that any deceit by Iraq in the declaration could open the path to an immediate swoop by the inspectors on sites where banned programs are under way.

Even without the new intelligence the United States says it has on secret Iraqi weapons sites, the Security Council, once it has the documents, will have an immediate benchmark for establishing whether Iraq has made a clean breast of its secret weapons work. This benchmark, those officials say, will rest in whether Iraq has now accounted for the weapons and weapons materials that United Nations inspectors came to know about in the 1990's, but were never able to find.

The list includes 4,000 tons of chemical warfare "precursors," meaning materials needed to make anthrax, mustard gas and other weapons, as well as hundreds of tons of chemical warfare agents; 31,000 chemical warfare munitions, including 550 mustard gas shells; as many as 20 Soviet-made Scud missiles adapted by the Iraqis to deliver chemical and biological warheads; and 600 tons of precursors for the deadly VX gas, enough to make 200 tons of the gas itself. Western experts have said this would be enough to wipe out the entire world population.

Asked at the news conference whether the declaration included those allegedly missing items, General Amin answered obliquely. "Generally speaking, the declaration will answer all the questions that have been raised in the past months and years," he said. He appealed several times to the United States and Britain to accept that Iraq had now met its obligations under Resolution 1441, the weapons-control measure the Security Council approved unanimously on Oct. 8 under intense American pressure. "If the intention of the United States and Britain is to disarm Iraq, this should prevent any threat of war," he said.

Few documents in recent history have been so tensely awaited as the Iraqi declaration, and the countdown to the handover suggested that Iraqi officials might have had last-minute dramas in putting the huge dossier together. General Amin referred glancingly to the strains, saying "tens" of Iraqi scientists and officials had

worked around the clock for weeks to pull the information together. "We feel proud that we fulfilled everything in the specified time," he said.

Photos: Iraqi officials yesterday with the declaration on banned weapons. Iraq says it is not developing such weapons. (Tyler Hicks/The New York Times)(pg. 1); Maj. Gen. Hussam Muhammad Amin, at table, left, watched as a United Nations arms inspection official, Miroslav Gregovic, center, and another Iraqi examined documents the Iraqis delivered yesterday in Baghdad. (Pool photo by Jerome Delay); (Associated Press); (Getty Images); (APTN)(pg. 28) Chart: "From the U.N. Resolution to the Iraqi Report" NOV. 8 -- The United Nations Security Council unanimously adopts Resolution 1441. President Bush calls it a "final test" of Saddam Hussein's willingness to disarm. Military action could be authorized in a second stage, after the weapons inspectors do their work and if they detect violations of the inspection rules. NOV. 12 -- Iraq's Parliament rejects the U.N. resolution, but the next day, Iraq says that it will reluctantly allow inspectors to begin work. But the Iraqis seethe with hostility toward the United States and repeatedly deny President Bush's assertions that they have weapons of mass destruction. NOV. 18 -- United Nations inspectors arrive in Baghdad. NOV. 27 -- Nearly four years after withdrawing from Iraq, United Nations inspectors begin searching for banned weapons programs. Two teams of inspectors check three sites, and they face no Iraqi resistance. The first sites chosen are ones that were checked previously, during inspections that ran from 1991 to 1998. DEC. 2 -- Inspectors who visit a missile development plant say they are unable to find some equipment discovered and tagged by inspectors in 1998. The Iraqi government quickly counters, saying that some items were destroyed in a missile attack in 1998, and that others were transferred to other sites. DEC. 3 -- Two teams of inspectors show up at one of President Hussein's palaces and demand that its gates be opened for an immediate search. The spokesman for the teams says that the inspections occur without incident. "Our inspectors are authorized to inspect any site they choose," he said. Iraqi officials express anger at the visit. DEC. 5 -- President Hussein urges Iraqis to maintain their patience to "keep our people out of harms way amid an international situation in which some people might claim that we didn't give the inspectors the proper chance to disprove the American allegations." DEC. 7 -- Iraq presents documents detailing its nuclear, chemical and biological activities to U.N. officials. JAN. 27 -- By this date, the inspectors are to brief the Security Council on their progress. (pg. 28)