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Drive by Some in U.S. to Hit Iraq Frustrates Jordan's King

By WARREN HOGE

King Abdullah II of Jordan, stopping here on his way to a meeting with President Bush in Washington, said today that elements of the American government were "fixated" on attacking Iraq and that only Secretary of State Colin L. Powell understood the true dimensions of the challenge.

The king expressed frustration with what he called "the splits in the way they look at the Middle East" in Washington and said he despaired at talking administration hawks out of their determination to attack Iraq without moving forward on Mideast peace.

"You can talk until you're blue in the face and they're not going to get it," he said of members of the administration who are pressing for action against President Saddam Hussein.

Abdullah met at 10 Downing Street with Prime Minister Tony Blair and, according to a spokesman, warned him that no move should be made against Iraq until prospects for peace in the Middle East improved. Mr. Blair has expressed support for removing President Hussein, but he has assured the many skeptics in Parliament that military decision is still far off.

Neither King Abdullah nor Mr. Blair spoke publicly after this morning's meeting, but the king made his views known in an interview today in The Times of London, in which he singled out Secretary Powell as the key to any possibility of moving forward in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"He is the man that gets it and understands what needs to be done in the Middle East," Abdullah said. "He is one of our strongest weapons in bringing peace and security to the area."

Recent reports in The New York Times quoted Defense Department officials as saying American military planners were considering using Jordan as a base for attacks against Iraq. The government replied quickly, saying, "Jordan will not be used as a launching pad."

The king must walk a fine line between his desire to remain Washington's friend and his stewardship of a population that is largely of Palestinian descent and supports Mr. Hussein.

Faulting the United States for inaction in the Mideast, he was quoted as saying, "In the light of the failure to move the Israeli-Palestinian process forward, military action against Iraq would really open Pandora's box."

He said that if those in Washington who are adamant about attacking Iraq got their way, it would "destabilize American strategic interest even more in the Middle East."

He was also scornful of President Bush's call for the removal of Yasir Arafat as chairman of the Palestinian Authority, saying, "Arafat's popularity goes up the minute you point an Israeli tank barrel at him or there is a ludicrous statement that comes out of Washington."