



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Briefing on Situation With Iraq

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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SECRETARY POWELL: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. As you know, last fall, in an act of unanimity the Security Council came together following President Bush's historic speech to the United Nations on the 12th of September and on the 8th of November, after long negotiations, passed UN Resolution 1441 by unanimous vote, 15 to zero, not one member failing to raise a hand in support of that resolution.

In the months after the passage of UN Resolution 1441, we watched as the inspectors began their work, and we were immediately concerned that Iraq was not going to understand the intention of 1441 when Iraq submitted 30 days later, a declaration that can only be said to be false, not complete, rather, incomplete, not truthful, untruthful and nowhere near meeting the spirit intended in 1441. We called that out to the international community at that time.

We said we believed that that false declaration was a material breach. We continued to support the inspectors, we continued to watch, and although we have seen some process improvements and some grudging movement on the part of Saddam Hussein's regime to provide some information and provide some equipment to the inspectors, it certainly wasn't the kind of compliance and total cooperation that 1441 required and that we were hoping but had no illusions about Iraq being able to accept and respond to.

As a result of this and as a result of a number of briefings that we received from UNMOVIC and IAEA, a week and a half ago, the United Kingdom, the United States and Spain put forward a resolution that would once again give Saddam Hussein one last chance to act or face the serious consequences that were authorized and clearly intended in UN Resolution 1441.

Unfortunately, over the last roughly two weeks or thereabouts, a little less than two weeks that we have been debating this particular draft resolution, and despite best efforts to see whether or not language could be adjusted to make it more acceptable to Council members, it is clear that there are some permanent members of the Council that would veto any such resolution or any resolution resembling the one that the British tabled Friday before last at the United Nations.

As a result of this, the United Kingdom, the United States and Spain decided to not call for a vote on this resolution. We spent a great deal of time overnight and early this morning talking to friends and colleagues around the world about the resolution and it was our judgment, reached by the United States, the United Kingdom and Spain that no further purpose would be served by pushing this resolution. So we are not going to ask for a vote on the resolution. The resolution will die anyway, because it had a built-in date of 17 March within the resolution, which has not been modified.

As you heard the President and the other leaders who assembled in the Azores yesterday for the Atlantic Summit say, the window on diplomacy is closing. The moment of truth is arriving. And you will hear a speech from the President of the United States this evening. President Bush will address the nation and the world on the situation as we now see it. In his speech, he clearly will issue an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein that the only way to avoid the serious consequences that were built into 1441 is for Saddam Hussein and his immediate cohorts to leave the country and to allow this matter to be resolved through the peaceful entry of force and not a conflict. Nevertheless, the President's determination will be made clear tonight that this matter cannot continue indefinitely, that Saddam Hussein is guilty of the charges that have been brought against him previously through these many resolutions which acknowledged that he had weapons of mass destruction and he has failed to disarm himself as required by the various resolutions.

We believe and I think you've also heard an opinion from British legal authorities within the last 24 hours that there is sufficient authority in 1441, 678 and 687, earlier resolutions, for whatever military action might be required.

I'm very, very pleased that the Council did come together last November 8th for 1441, of course disappointed that we were unable to get a subsequent resolution, but we believe that our actions now are supported by international law, whatever actions we might take in the future, and the President will talk to this issue tonight.

I won't say anymore about the President's speech because the President, of course, will have the opportunity to speak for himself and make the points perfectly clear to the American people and to the international community.

You will also notice that in their statements yesterday at the Atlantic Summit, all of the leaders spoke to a future for Iraq that will be brighter if it comes to the use of military force, where this dictator will no longer be able to oppress his own people, no longer able to threaten his neighbors, and no longer able to develop these horrible weapons which could be used against his neighbors as they have been used in the past, or, of greater concern to us, and spread and be acquired by terrorist organizations which might use them against us, our friends or our interests.

I think it was also important to note in the President's statement yesterday his commitment to the UN and the role that we believe the UN will play in the aftermath of any conflict should it come and our continued support for the UN. And with that, I will take a couple of questions and then I have to go.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, on the allies --

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes.

QUESTION: Back in November, when several of them tried to dilute the resolution, and they did accomplish some word changes, would it be fair to say that they understood at the end that force was possible? Because they seem to give the impression they had succeeded in sidetracking force. And could you say if you think there will be permanent damage to the alliance with what the French have done with support from Germany and Russia?

SECRETARY POWELL: On your first question, Barry, there can be no confusion on this point. If you remember the debate that we were having before 1441 was passed, there were some nations who insisted that a second resolution would be required. And we insisted that a second resolution would not be required. And as we negotiated our way through that, we made it absolutely clear that we did not believe that the resolution as it finally passed would require a second resolution. And, in fact, the resolution that we are not taking to a vote today is not a resolution that we believe was necessary. It was a resolution we're supporting along with the United Kingdom, who tabled it, and Spain. It was a resolution that would help some of our friends to show to their publics and to the world that we had taken one last step, we had made one last effort to see if Saddam Hussein would come into compliance.

The burden of this problem rests squarely on Saddam Hussein and his continuing efforts to deceive, to deny, to do everything to divide the Council, to take advantage of every meeting we have had over the last several months, to do something just before that meeting to suggest that he is complying when he really isn't. And the world should know that this crisis is before us because of this regime and its flagrant violation of obligations that it entered into over the last 12 years. That's where the burden lies.

QUESTION: And is there permanent damage -- excuse me.

SECRETARY POWELL: Is there permanent damage?

QUESTION: To the alliance?

SECRETARY POWELL: The UN is an important institution and it will survive, and the United States will continue to be an important member of the United Nations and its various organizations. But, clearly, this is a test, in my judgment, that the Security Council did not meet.

We all knew what we were doing last fall. The very reason that we went into a prolonged negotiation on 1441 was so that it did not become the same kind of resolution that we had seen so many times in the past, that had a lot of words, a lot of rhetoric, and Saddam Hussein can simply ignore and thumb his nose at. This was a resolution that every person who voted for it, every permanent representative who was there on the 8th of November and voted for this resolution knew

that it was different, that serious consequences would flow, and those serious consequences meant the use of force to disarm Saddam Hussein if he did not comply with that resolution and cooperate fully with the inspectors to disarm that regime.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, how long a period of time do you think is appropriate for Saddam Hussein to be allowed to get out? And who -- who else besides him would have to leave if they want to avert war?

SECRETARY POWELL: I won't speak to a time limit. The President may do that in his speech this evening, and I'll leave that to him.

But clearly, we would want to see Saddam Hussein depart, as well as immediate members of his family who are in positions of control and authority over the armed forces of Iraq. And there are a number of other individuals we would also like to see depart, some of them were mentioned in the weekend press. But it's not just one individual to solve the problem.

QUESTION: Do you have a number, though?

SECRETARY POWELL: I don't have a number at hand. There are a variety of numbers and ideas floating around. And if somebody in Baghdad wishes to know the names, I'm sure we'd be able to provide them.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, can you give us some things like what has happened over the last 24 hours since the meeting in the Azores? Who were the problems, what kind of conversations did you have, who did you reach out to, and what were the responses?

SECRETARY POWELL: The United Kingdom, obviously, reached out to a number of their colleagues and I can't speak for them; I'll let them cover their own calls and consultations. Similarly, Spain and others. Richard will give you the list of my calls for this morning, but it's about, oh, 12 or 15. I've spoken to the French. I just spoke to Foreign Minister de Villepin. I spoke to Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer of Germany. I've spoken to Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov of the Russian Federation. I've spoken to the new Chinese Foreign Minister, Foreign Minister Li. I've spoken to President Musharraf. I have spoken to Kofi Annan. I have spoken to Foreign Minister George Papandreou of Greece, who is also in the Greek Presidency for this period. I have spoken to Foreign Secretary Straw. I've spoken to Foreign Minister Palacios of Spain. And there is a very long list waiting when I get back upstairs.

The response was, you know, this is where we are. Does anybody see any prospects for movement on this particular resolution? And, frankly, everybody pretty much accepted that this resolution was not going to be a successful one, because there was one nation, France, that had indicated that it would veto it under any set of circumstances, or any similar resolution as modified that would leave a path open to conflict. But we always knew, from the very beginning, that such a path had to be kept open. And this is what "serious consequences" meant. And without that path, Saddam Hussein would never comply.

And what he was trying to do was just stretch it out, more inspections, more time, let's delay, let's give a little here, give a little there, let's see if we can break this consensus. And with the certainty of a French veto and possibly other vetoes, this was not the time to have further division within the Council by taking this to a vote.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you seemed to imply yesterday in one of the shows that you believe French commercial interests helped drive the position. I am wondering if you can elaborate on that. And how firm a guarantee do you have that Turkey won't send its troops well into northern Iraq and cause problems with the Kurds there?

SECRETARY POWELL: I made the point that there -- in response to a question, that of course there are commercial interests that everybody has to consider. And the French have for years had difficulties with the inspection regime. And I pointed out in one of the shows yesterday that when you go back to 1998 and early 1999, when the current inspection regime was being developed, when UNMOVIC was being created after the collapse of the previous inspection regime, France worked actively for a number of months, in our judgment, to try to weaken that inspection regime. And, at the end of the day, when compromises had been made and everybody thought we had a good outcome before our time, the previous administration, even then France abstained from voting for it. And so that is a concern to us.

But, in 1441, France was solidly on board. And when you look at the statements that were made by French officials right after the passage of 1441, it was absolutely clear that they understood that Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime had weapons of mass destruction. It was not something just known to American intelligence; it's known to all the major

intelligence agencies in the world. And France acknowledged that, everybody acknowledged that when they signed on to 1441, because that's what it says. It said, Iraq is in material breach, has been in material breach, and now has the opportunity to get out of the problem or get into further material breach. And what they did was get into further material breach. And that's our judgment and we believe that the test of the resolution has been met with respect to the appropriateness of the application of serious consequences.

QUESTION: And the Turks and the Kurds?

SECRETARY POWELL: Barbara -- I'm sorry. On the Turks and the situation in northern Iraq, we are in the closest consultation with the Turks and let me say that we are very sensitive to Turkish concerns. We appreciate the fact that the Turkish Government did take our request for deployments into their Parliament at a difficult time for them, with a Prime Minister who was still coming in, so to speak. Mr. Erdogan was not the Prime Minister at that time. And we are in the closest touch with them now on a number of issues. One, the possibility of resubmission and he has committed to do that at a time that he believes is appropriate; and secondly, we don't think it would be useful right now to create any additional tension on the border between Turkey and northern Iraq and we are in discussions with them as to how to make sure that tensions can be kept at the lowest point and not to have difficulty in northern Iraq of a kind that concerns them.

And we have also assured the Turks that in anything that the future might hold, we are committed to the territorial integrity of Iraq.

Barbara.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask, yeah, I wanted to ask just some personal reflections. After 1441 was passed, you were a very, very happy man and certainly it was quite a triumph. How have you been feeling the last few weeks? When did you realize that this was not going to happen? Do you wish you'd done anything differently? Do you wish you'd traveled more? Changed your tactics in any way?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, you know, this legend that is out there now that Colin Powell one, he -- the first variation of it was, he doesn't travel; and the next variation was, he hates to travel; and the third variation was, he will never travel and doesn't want to travel.

You do your job by personal contacts, by contact, by travel and by the use of modern technology so that you can get more bang for the time. And so in the last six weeks, I have had four, personal, one-on-one meetings, direct meetings, with the French Foreign Minister, with the British Foreign Minister, with the Russian Foreign Minister, five such meetings with the Chinese Foreign Minister. I have gone to Davos in Switzerland, where I addressed an international setting and at that meeting I met with the Turkish Prime Minister for almost two hours and the incoming Turkish Prime Minister, Mr. Erdogan.

I have had the Turkish, a Turkish delegation here in the Department, a full delegation, the Foreign Minister, the Finance Minister; and they came to my home until midnight as we worked on the economic package. And so I believe that I have used my time properly.

At the same time, I went to Asia a few weeks ago, so I travel when I believe travel is appropriate. I'd like to travel more, but you know, the Secretary of State has many responsibilities that he or she has to deal with and one has to balance it all.

But I assure you that I do not shrink back from traveling and I will be traveling again soon.

QUESTION: But any regrets? Anything you'd have done differently?

SECRETARY POWELL: No. I mean you can always look and say you should have done this, should have done that, but the fact of the matter is, we came up with a good resolution and we got a solid vote for it, 15-0, and then for a period of four months after that we worked hard with the inspectors, we provided them intelligence. The focus, really, was at the UN in New York, not, you know, a lot of other places. That's where we had to concentrate our effort. And we did everything we could to try to persuade the Council that what they were seeing was not compliance. What they were seeing was passive cooperation that didn't get to the heart of the matter, which was a strategic decision by Saddam Hussein to comply. And that's what we weren't able to get and that's what we weren't able to convince some members of the Council is what was needed in order for us to believe that Saddam Hussein was a changed regime, was leading a changed regime that was willing now to cooperate with the international community and comply with its obligations.

One last one. Sir.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you said that the ultimatum would be for Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq. Is there any form of disarmament or cooperation at this stage which could save his skin?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think the time for diplomacy has passed. I think that's pretty clear. That's what the leaders were saying in the Azores yesterday. And we used last evening and this morning to consult broadly around the world. We did, the British did, the Spanish did. A lot of people have been talking to each other this morning and overnight, and it became clear that it would be best at this time to withdraw the resolution, and I can think of nothing that Saddam Hussein could do diplomatically. I think that time is now over. He had his chance. He's had many chances over the last 12 years, and he has blown every one of those chances.

Thank you.
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