



Press Conference on Iraq Declaration

Secretary Colin L. Powell

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(2:30 p.m. EST)



SECRETARY POWELL: Well, good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. On November 8th, the United Nations Security Council responded to the challenge issued by President Bush in his 12 September speech to the United Nations General Assembly. On that day, the Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1441, requiring Iraq to disarm itself of its weapons of mass destruction and to disclose all of its nuclear, chemical, biological and missile programs.

Resolution 1441 was the latest in a long string of Security Council resolutions since Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Previous resolutions, which included requirements to disarm and to end the cruel repression of the Iraqi people, have all been defied or ignored by Iraq.

Resolution 1441 recognized that Iraq "has been and remains in material breach of its obligations," but gave the Iraqi regime, again, a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations.

Iraq's answer came on December 7th in a 12,200-page document submitted to the Security Council.

Resolution 1441 required Iraq to submit a declaration on all its mass weapons program of destruction, a declaration that was "currently accurate, full and complete," in the words of the resolution.

The inspectors told the Security Council this morning that the declaration fails to answer many open questions. They said that in some cases they even have information that directly contradicts Iraq's account.

Our experts have also examined the Iraqi document. The declaration's title echoes the language of Resolution 1441. It is called, "Currently Accurate, Full and Complete Declaration." But our experts have found it to be anything but currently accurate, full or complete. The Iraqi declaration may use the language of Resolution 1441, but it totally fails to meet the resolution's requirements.

The inspectors said that Iraq has failed to provide new information. We agree. Indeed, thousands of the document's pages are merely a resubmission of material it gave the United Nations years ago, material that the UN has already determined was incomplete.

Other sections of the Iraqi declaration consists of long passages copied from reports written by the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency. The only changes the Iraqi regime made were to remove references critical to its own conduct. The declaration totally fails to address what we had learned about Iraq's prohibited weapons programs before the inspectors were effectively forced out in 1998.

And let me just touch on a few examples, and we'll be giving out a fact sheet later with additional examples.

Before the inspectors were forced to leave Iraq, they concluded that Iraq could have produced 26,000 liters of anthrax. That is three times the amount Iraq had declared. Yet, the Iraqi declaration is silent on this stockpile, which, alone, would be enough to kill several million people.

The regime also admitted that it had manufactured 19,180 liters of a biological agent called botchulinum toxin. UN inspectors later determined that the Iraqis could have produced 38,360 additional liters. However, once again, the Iraqi declaration is silent on these missing supplies.

The Iraqi declaration also says nothing about the uncounted, unaccounted precursors from which Iraq could

have produced up to 500 tons of mustard gas, sarin gas and VX nerve gas.

Nor does the declaration address questions that have arisen since the inspectors left in 1998. For example, we know that in the late 1990s, Iraq built mobile biological weapons production units. Yet, the declaration tries to waive this away, mentioning only mobile refrigeration vehicles and food-testing laboratories.

We also know that Iraq has tried to obtain high-strength aluminum tubes which can be used to enrich uranium in centrifuges for a nuclear weapons program. The Iraqi regime is required by Resolution 1441 to report those attempts. Iraq, however, has failed to provide adequate information about the procurement and use of these tubes.

Most brazenly of all, the Iraqi declaration denies the existence of any prohibited weapons programs at all. The United States, the United Nations and the world waited for this declaration from Iraq. But Iraq's response is a catalogue of recycled information and flagrant omissions. It should be obvious that the pattern of systematic holes and gaps in Iraq's declaration is not the result of accidents or editing oversights or technical mistakes. These are material omissions that, in our view, constitute another material breach.

We are disappointed, but we are not deceived. This declaration is consistent with the Iraqi regime's past practices. We have seen this game again and again -- an attempt to sow confusion and buy time, hoping the world will lose interest. This time, the game is not working. This time, the international community is concentrating its attention and increasing its resolve as the true nature of the Iraqi regime is revealed again.

On the basis of this declaration, on the basis of the evidence before us, our path for the coming weeks is clear.

First, we must continue to audit and examine the Iraqi declaration to understand the full extent of Iraq's failure to meet its disclosure obligations.

Second, the inspections should give high priority to conducting interviews with scientists and other witnesses outside of Iraq, where they can speak freely. Under the terms of Resolution 1441, Iraq is obligated -- it is their obligation -- to make such witnesses available to the inspectors.

Third, the inspectors should intensify their efforts inside Iraq. The United States, and I hope other Council members, will provide the inspectors with every possible assistance, all the support they need to succeed in their crucial mission. Given the gravity of the situation, we look forward to frequent reports from Dr. Blix and Dr. El Baradei.

Finally, we will continue to consult with our friends, with our allies, and with all members of the Security Council on how to compel compliance by Iraq with the will of the international community.

But let there be no misunderstanding. As Ambassador John Negroponte said earlier today, Saddam Hussein has so far responded to this final opportunity with a new lie. The burden remains on Iraq. Not on the United Nations. Not on the United States. The burden remains on Iraq to cooperate fully and for Iraq to prove to the international community whether it does or does not have weapons of mass destruction. We are convinced they do until they prove to us otherwise.

Resolution 1441 calls for serious consequences for Iraq if it does not comply with the terms of the resolution. Iraq's noncompliance and defiance of the international community has brought it closer to the day when it will have to face these consequences. The world is still waiting for Iraq to comply with its obligations. The world will not wait forever. Security Council Resolution 1441 will be carried out in full. Iraq can no longer be allowed to threaten its people and its region with weapons of mass destruction. It is still up to Iraq to determine how its disarmament will happen. Unfortunately, this declaration fails totally to move us in the direction of a peaceful solution.

And now I'd be prepared to take some questions.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes.

QUESTION: I'm a little confused because this was to have been Iraq's last chance and you've just laid out four additional things, including interviewing scientists, and you're still saying that Iraq has the opportunity to so-and-so and so-and-so. I don't know if you're saying an airtight case hasn't been made or somehow you have some slim hope it can be turned around by Iraq.

SECRETARY POWELL: It remains to be seen. The resolution was its last chance and there were obligations for Iraq in that resolution: one, to accept the resolution; two, to provide a declaration. We have begun our analysis of that declaration and we find so far that it has failed to do what it was supposed to do.

But we will continue to work with UNMOVIC and IAEA and we'll consult with other members of the Council to see what conclusions the Council members arrive at, and to see whether or not more evidence can be brought forward to make the case to the Council that Iraq has totally missed its opportunity.

But so far, with respect to complying with the conditions and the terms of 1441, Iraq is well on its way to losing this last chance.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you've used the expression "material breach." Can you tell us why you've chosen to use this? And how would you answer those who have been saying this morning that by using this without taking action you are, in fact, devaluing the expression?

SECRETARY POWELL: "Material breach." I think, perhaps, too much has been made of the term. Material breach is a term that comes from the law that says a party to a commitment has failed in meeting the terms of that commitment. Iraq has done that repeatedly in the past. That's why 1441 begins with that statement of past material breach on many occasions by Iraq, still in material breach, and this is a new material breach.

I don't think we are devaluing the term. I think we are using the term to make it clear to the world that, once again, we have a breach on the part of Iraq with respect to its obligations and therefore the spots have not changed.

Now, I'll let the other members of the Council make their own judgment as to whether they wish to characterize it as such right now. The important point, I think, is that from what we heard from Dr. Blix and Dr. El Baradei this morning, and what I heard from other members of the Council who have spoken, is that there is no question that Iraq continues its pattern of noncooperation, its pattern of deception, its pattern of dissembling, its pattern of lying. And if that is going to be the way they continue through the weeks ahead, then we're not going to find a peaceful solution to this problem.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, is there a deadline by which Iraq has to show this compliance, and will the United States return to the Security Council and seek another resolution authorizing military action toward the end of next month if Iraq does not comply?

SECRETARY POWELL: There is no calendar deadline, but obviously there is a practical limit to how much longer you can just go down the road of noncooperation and how much time the inspectors can be given to do their work.

In the weeks ahead, we expect both the IAEA and UNMOVIC to give regular reports as they get deeper into their inspection work, and as they analyze the declaration further. There are still long sections of the annexes that came with the declaration that have to be carefully examined. So I would not put a timeline on it, but obviously it is not indefinite. This situation cannot continue.

A body of evidence is slowly building since the passage of Resolution 1441, and that body of evidence shows that Iraq is still not cooperating. It is Iraq's obligation to cooperate and they are the ones who are supposed to be coming forward under this resolution to demonstrate to the international community what they have done in the past, what they might still be holding, and to come clean. And what we have seen in this declaration is they still have not made a decision to come clean. And the inspectors will not be able to do their work until Iraq demonstrates that they are cooperating and they are coming clean and bringing forward the information. And until that happens, we should be very skeptical, and I'm afraid we should be very discouraged, with respect to the prospects of finding a peaceful solution.

Terri.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, when is the US planning to share its intelligence with the inspectors, if at all? I think we were told they were waiting until after the initial assessment. Is now the right time to do that?

SECRETARY POWELL: We have, of course, been sharing our evaluation of the declaration with the inspection teams of both IAEA and UNMOVIC with respect to providing them additional forms of support that would make the inspection effort perhaps more targeted and effective. We are prepared to start doing that and we'll be in contact with them.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, as you know, the Vice President, in particular, has been very skeptical about

inspections. So far, the inspectors have not turned up anything. Are you not concerned that if another month elapses and the inspectors are not able to find any of these weapons that you say are hidden, that that's going to undermine your case to the world that there is, in fact, violations?

SECRETARY POWELL: We have all been skeptical of inspections because we are basically distrustful of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime, and for good reason, and so, the President took the case to the international community.

The declaration, I think, is further evidence of Iraq's unwillingness to comply with the requirements of the international community. And I don't want to prejudge what the inspectors might or might not find and it is not clear, exactly, what they have found or not found yet. They are getting up to speed. The number of inspectors has increased. Bits and pieces of information will come together. I hope that when members of the Council provide more support to the inspectors, it may make their work even that much more effective. But I wouldn't prejudge. The President has said repeatedly, he is interested in the disarmament of Iraq peacefully, if possible, but if that is not possible, it will be done by force.

QUESTION: Thank you. Mr. Secretary, if the US goes to war with Iraq, what kind of war would it be? Will it be swift, or will it be bloody? How will it differ from Desert Storm?

SECRETARY POWELL: We are doing everything we can to avoid war. The President has made that clear. But if war comes, the only thing I would say about the nature of that conflict is that it will be done in a way that would minimize the loss of life, and it would be done in as swift a manner as possible, and for the purpose of getting rid of weapons of mass destruction and liberating the Iraqi people. But I wouldn't go any further right now.

Way in the back, please.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, are you satisfied with the Turkish cooperation on this Iraq subject?

SECRETARY POWELL: We have been in very close touch with the Turkish Government at all levels, and the new Turkish Government as well, and we are satisfied with the level of dialogue. And in the days ahead, now that some political issues are behind us with respect to EU accession, I think the new Turkish Government will be able to focus more on consultation with us with respect to Turkish actions and Turkish interests in what we are doing.

QUESTION: The Iraqi declaration helped to clarify or more additions, would the United States be ready and willing to accept more qualifications of what they already said? Would you take into consideration that they said, "Oh, yes, we forgot this year what we actually have done with this"? Will that be possible to prevent a war?

SECRETARY POWELL: Let's see what happens in the days ahead. I can't hypothesize on that because I have little confidence that the Iraqis will do anything but try to -- see, we answered your question here, but we're not answering all these other questions that perhaps you haven't even asked us yet.

The resolution was clear: currently accurate, full and complete. It means the burden is on them to come forward and say, "You know we've been doing this. You know we've done it in the past. We have now changed, turned over a new leaf, and we're giving you all the information you need to see that we are giving this up, or anything we still are doing we will not do and we are demonstrating to you where this is so it can be destroyed, and we are in compliance."

But that has not been the attitude of the Iraqi Government for the past 12 years, it is not the attitude of the Iraqi Government today, and the world should view this with great skepticism, keep the pressure on, make sure Iraq knows that it will be disarmed one way or the other, and hope that the Iraqi people and Iraqi leaders, besides Saddam Hussein, realize that they are going to disarm one way or the other.

Charlie.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you are also facing another crisis in Venezuela. Can you bring us up to date on where that crisis stands? Are things getting better, getting worse, as supply of food and fuel is shortened?

SECRETARY POWELL: We are very concerned and we are following the situation in Venezuela very closely. We are concerned about the continuation of the strikes and the demonstrations in the streets that create the possibility of violence and deep political unrest and social unrest. We also are worried about the fact that the oil sector is slowly shutting down, with economic consequences for all Venezuelans, but as well as others outside of Venezuela.

We are in close touch with the Secretary General of the OAS, who is in the lead for the community of American nations on this subject. We have presented some ideas to the Secretary General for his consideration. I had a conversation last week with the Foreign Minister of Venezuela to see if we could play a helpful role.

There have been some efforts in the last day or two to put forward ideas from both sides that might be a basis of discussion. I can't say that much progress has been made on that. Both sides have been acting in a rather intransigent way. But we are watching it closely and working closely with the OAS and we are also in touch with others who are interested, such as the Carter Center.

Last one. Betsy, you got it.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, Mr. Blix said today that he had asked for lists of Iraqi scientists who had worked on these programs. He said that there were no efforts yet to try and work on modalities for access to these people. Are you going to push them harder to -- I mean, getting access, after all, is what you're after.

SECRETARY POWELL: We are working on modalities now and we are putting in place, working with Dr. Blix and Dr. El Baradei, putting in place means by which one could accomplish this interview task. It has some complex aspects to it.

And there will be names that will be made available. And let us remember this. Under the resolution, when those names are presented to the Iraqi Government, they are required to provide these individuals for interview, and for interview in a safe place, and for their families to be in a safe place where they will not be in danger of losing their lives for telling the truth.

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