

U.N.-Iraqi meeting inconclusive

(AP) — The U.N. chief met Sunday with Saddam Hussein in a bid to make peace in the Persian Gulf, but he said later "only God knows" if there will be war. Saddam said any last-minute peace overture is up to the Americans.

In an earlier radio address, the Iraqi leader reiterated that his country is ready to fight to keep conquered Kuwait.

"That doesn't surprise me, but they're making a tremendous mistake," Bush shot back, speaking to reporters in Washington.

Javier Perez de Cuellar, the U.N. chief, left Baghdad immediately after his meeting with Saddam.

The meeting took place two days before the Jan. 15 U.N. deadline for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait or face possible attack.

"I have always said that I am neither optimistic or pessimistic but always hopeful. I could not have been a secretary-general if I was not hopeful," Perez de Cuellar told reporters in Baghdad.

Asked if there would be war, he responded:

"It is a question, if you believe in God, only God knows. If you don't believe in God, who knows."

Perez de Cuellar said he could not give details of the talks but would inform the U.N. Security Council of the Iraqi position when he meets with the council in New York on Monday.

The U.N. chief, who arrived in Paris early Monday on a flight from Baghdad, was to meet with President Francois Mitterrand later in the morning and then leave for New York.

Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jacques Poos, who holds the rotating presidency of the Euro-

pean Community, was reportedly to fly to Paris to meet with Perez de Cuellar before a Monday meeting of EC foreign ministers in Luxembourg.

The Iraqi leader, speaking after the talks, said any last-minute peace initiative would be up to the Americans "because they are the ones now raising the slogan of war."

In the remarks to Iraqi media officials, carried by the official Iraqi news agency, Saddam also said that Perez de Cuellar was encouraged to return to Baghdad "if there is a desire to search for the means to peace."

However, in the remarks reported by the BBC, he insisted there must be a link to the Palestinian issue. U.S. officials have rejected any tie between the two issues.

French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas said in a television interview in Paris that the world was "a hairsbreadth" from war. He said he might travel to Baghdad depending on what Perez de Cuellar said.

Secretary of State James A. Baker III met with officials in Ankara, Turkey on Sunday and reportedly discussed use of an air base near the Iraqi border in case of war.

He later flew to a British air base north of London, where he met British Prime Minister John Major. Baker said he was "troubled" by Soviet military action in Lithuania but that it would not affect military action in the gulf.

"It is desirable to move sooner rather than later," he added.

Iraq has said that if attacked by the U.S.-dominated multinational force, it would strike first at Israel. Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens said Sunday that Israel would respond to any Iraqi attack, despite reported U.S. appeals for it to exer-

cise restraint.

Washington has reportedly urged Israeli restraint because it wants to keep together the alliance against Iraq, which invaded Kuwait on Aug. 2. Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt are part of that alliance.

There were appeals Sunday for Saddam to leave the occupied emirate from the pope, Saudi King Fahd and Libyan leader Col. Moammar Gadhafi. On Saturday, Syrian leader Hafez Assad urged Saddam to withdraw and thereby spare Arabs a destructive war.

Earlier Sunday, Perez de Cuellar met with PLO leader Yasser Arafat and explained the proposals he would make to Saddam, according to Arab diplomats.

After the meeting, Arafat told a news conference he did not believe war would break out on Jan. 15.

"I don't believe the war will break out," Arafat said. "Jan. 15 is only a date like all other dates."

He said, however, the U.S. Congress' endorsement Saturday of military action could be damaging to Perez de Cuellar's peace efforts.

In the earlier radio broadcast, Saddam said, "Our 19th province has become a battlefield for the showdown in which the (Arab) nation will be triumphant." He urged Syria, which has committed nearly 20,000 troops to the 600,000-strong allied force, to switch sides and join with Iraq.

Saddam has summoned the National Assembly to an emergency session Monday. The reason for the session was not disclosed, but Saddam has used the parliament in the past to validate concessions during the crisis.

Chemicals and missiles are Iraq's military power

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — The wild card in Iraq's formidable arsenal in the confrontation over Kuwait is its stockpile of chemical weapons and its missiles.

Saddam Hussein's clandestine drive to develop the first Arab nuclear weapon adds further menace to his fighting talk.

Most experts believe he is years away from actually being able to make a nuclear bomb or missile warhead.

Iraq is understood to have a little more than 26 and one-half pounds of pure uranium 235, the material needed to make nuclear weapons.

Experts say at least double that amount is needed to make even a crude atomic bomb.

U.S. officials have warned that Iraq could have a nuclear weapon in less than two years. But the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency insists Iraq does not have the technology to build nuclear weapons.

"In terms of declared facilities, the threat of an Iraqi nuclear weapon capability is no more nor less than it was 10 years ago," said Norman Dombey, a physicist at England's University of Sussex.

If the nuclear factor remains in the realm of theory, Saddam's armory of chemical weapons is not.

Western intelligence agencies believe he has thousands of tons of poison and nerve gas stockpiled and is capable of producing, by the most conservative estimates, hundreds of tons a year at heavily guarded plants around Iraq.

During the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, "chemicals were extensively used by the Iraqis in artillery shells, in canisters dropped from helicopters and in aircraft-delivered bombs," Martin Navias of the Department of War Studies at King's College, London, wrote in a recent paper.

Saddam's chemical arsenal is believed to consist primarily of mustard gas, a blistering agent first used in World War I, and nerve agents such as tabun and soman.

These agents, which are absorbed through the skin and attack the human nervous system, were developed by the Nazis in the 1930s.

But they were never used in World War II for fear the Allies would retaliate in kind.

Their effectiveness depends on many variables, such as weather conditions and terrain, which makes results uncertain, particularly against military targets.

Iraq is known to have been working on even more lethal weapons, biological agents such as anthrax and typhoid at its research center at Salman Pak, southeast of Baghdad.

Secretary of State James Baker has claimed several times that Baghdad has biological capability, but some Western experts remain skeptical.

During the war with Iran, the Iraqis were unable to link chemical warheads to their surface-to-surface missiles.

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