

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Arab nations oppose U.S. military strike

Kuwait does not support military action, but the United States will go it alone if necessary

By Jim Abrams
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Despite the outward opposition of Arab countries to a military strike against Iraq, the White House is confident the Arabs won't stand in the way of any U.S. action, President Clinton's top security adviser said Sunday.

Sandy Berger said that in any case, the United States is ready to go it alone if necessary.

The Arab nations, National Security Adviser Berger said on NBC's "Meet the Press," understand the threat posed by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. "In the end of the day, they are not going to impede our ability to do what's necessary," Berger said.

The administration campaigned hard among allies over the weekend for support of strong sanctions, and possibly military retaliation, against Iraq for expelling American members of the U.N. weapons inspection team.

President Clinton on Saturday spoke to Russia's Boris Yeltsin, France's Jacques Chirac and Britain's Tony Blair, urging a united voice in confronting Iraq. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has been making the same pitch in a tour of Persian Gulf states and with the Russian foreign minister,

Yevgeny Primakov.

While support has been solid for stronger U.N. sanctions against the Baghdad government, France, Russia and the Arabs have resisted the idea of militarily punishing Saddam for his latest challenge to U.N. resolutions approved after the 1991 Gulf War.

Foreign Minister Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah of Kuwait, which Saddam occupied to spark the war, said Sunday his country does not support military action. The Kuwaiti cabinet issued a statement urging a diplomatic solution "so that the area could be spared the dangers of tension and instability, and the Iraqi people would not be subjected to more misery and suffering."

But on CBS' "Face the Nation," Bill Richardson, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, stressed that he was getting a different message from Kuwait's defense minister and that Albright was successfully building support in the region for U.S. policy.

"We have no doubt that at the end of the day they will be supporting whatever action we take," Albright's spokesman, James P. Rubin, added on ABC's "This Week."

Defense Secretary William Cohen, also on ABC, said Kuwait and Saudi Arabia might not face an immediate Iraqi invasion, but they fully understand the danger to their populations by Iraq's chemical and biological weapons programs.

"We intend to intensify that apprehension on their part" by making

clear that Saddam has the capability to unleash devastating weapons of mass destruction if the U.N. inspectors are kept out of the country, he said.

The administration officials stressed that in the near term the emphasis will be on working out a diplomatic solution. "Failing that, we obviously would prefer if we had to work multilaterally," Berger said. But he added that if the allies don't join a military action, "the president has made very clear that he has ruled out no option."

In the event of a military attack on Iraq, Saddam's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz told Time magazine in an interview, various groups sympathetic to the Iraqis "would be in that mood" to carry out terrorist attacks against Americans.

Asked about that, Defense Secretary Cohen said terrorist acts against Americans launched at the behest of Iraq "will be met with a rather overwhelming response."

As to when a decision on military force will be made, Cohen said, "There's no artificial deadline, but I think we're all aware of the ticking of the clock."

Iraq's ambassador to the U.N., Nizar Hamdoun, said on CBS and on CNN's "Late Edition" that Iraq realizes that in the eyes of the United Nations its expulsion of American inspectors is unacceptable.

But he said Iraq has "been cornered and forced into this situation" by the U.N. Security Council's refusal to lift crippling economic sanctions.



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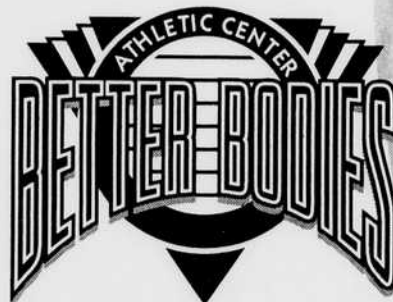
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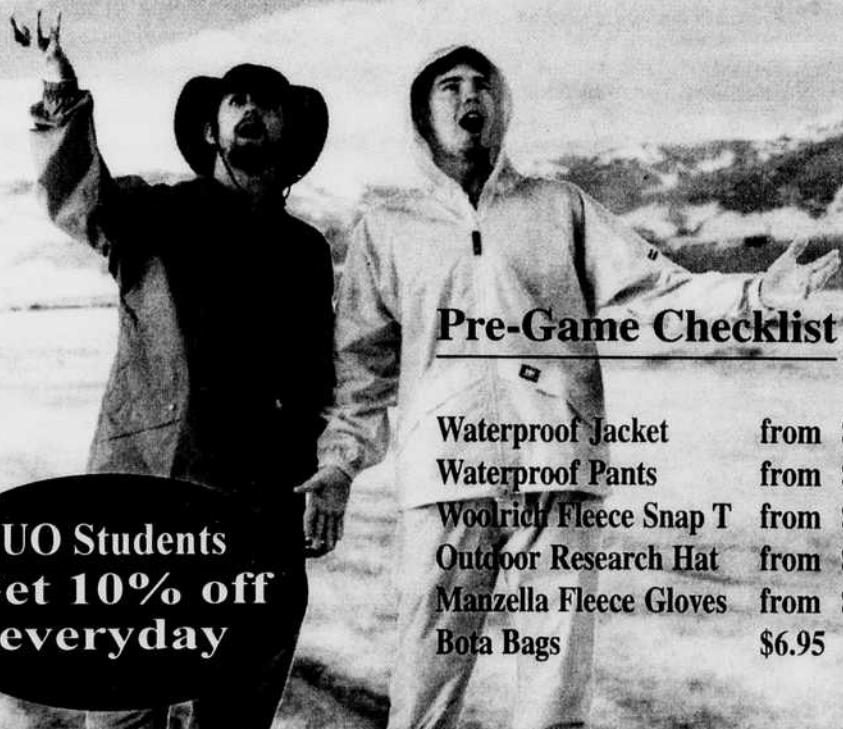
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