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WORLD NEWS

Iraq, U.N. reach agreement

Officials say members of the Security Council will be the first to review details of the agreement

By Robert H. Reid

BAGHDAD, Iraq — U.N. chief Kofi Annan and Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein settled the last major obstacle Sunday to opening presidential palaces to U.N. arms inspectors, which is the main condition for avoiding a U.S. attack, Annan's spokesman said.

The agreement came during a three-hour meeting between Annan and Saddam at the Republican Palace, one of eight presidential sites that Iraq had declared off-limits to U.N. weapons inspectors, said U.N. spokesman Fred Eckhard.

"We've reached an agreement," Eckhard said. "We have a text."

One Iraqi official, who insisted his named not be used, was asked whether there was a deal. He replied, "Yes."

Eckhard said "we expect the text will be acceptable to all 15 members of the Security Council," including the United States, which has said it would refuse an agreement that it believes undermines the inspectors' authority.

White House spokesman Mike McCurry said preliminary accounts had been received from Baghdad, but he refused to assess them. "We've got a lot of serious questions. It's a very serious matter at a serious time, and we want to get some questions answered,"

Annan and Iraq's deputy prime minister, Tariq Aziz, met late Sunday to agree on the precise wording of an agreement the secretary-general will take back to the Security Council.

Annan was scheduled to return to New York on Monday and brief the Security Council on Tuesday afternoon.

The crisis over weapons inspections has brought the Persian Gulf to the brink of war.

The United States has sent a naval armada and 25,000 troops to the region to mount air strikes unless Iraq agrees to open all sites, including eight presidential palaces, to the U.N. weapons inspectors.

Pro-Iraq protests have erupted across the Arab world — Jordan had to send out tanks in one

desert city to contain them - and sent Israelis scurrying for gas masks and diplomats there preparing to leave. Israel also decided Sunday to distribute antibiotics to protect against a biological attack, despite Annan's news.

Britain, America's strongest backer for a military strike, reacted cautiously.

"The expectation is that Kofi Annan will make an announcement in the morning whether a deal has been brokered," a spokesman for Prime Minister Tony Blair said on customary anonymity. "Even then, he will report back to the Security Council the details of that.'

Annan briefed Blair by telephone on his discussions with Saddam, the spokesman said without elaborating.

Annan met with the Iraqi leader after talks with Aziz since Friday failed to resolve the last major obstacle - Iraq's demand for a time limit on inspections of presidential compounds.

Eckhard said that time limits were not part of the agreement, but that details of the deal would first be presented to the Security

FBI search home for biological weapons

Tests show the material is an animal vaccine, not ingredients of a biological weapon

By Dara Akiko Tom

LOGANDALE, Nev. - FBI agents in surgical gloves removed boxes full of materials from the home of a researcher Sunday, a day after he was released from jail when tests showed he possessed a harmless animal vaccine, not a biological weapon.

More than a dozen agents descended on William Leavitt Jr.'s property in this small farming community 50 miles northeast of Las Vegas. Neighbors said the agents had been searching the home and an adjacent shed since Wednesday, when Leavitt was arrested along with Larry Wayne Harris.

Leavitt's lawyer, Lamond Mills, called the search "a fishing expedition" and said he planned to visit the home to "see what kind of shape the house is in and what they've taken.'

"I think they're embarrassed, and I think they're looking for anything they can find to bring charges against Bill Leavitt," Mills

FBI agents at the scene declined to comment.

Agents, some wearing surgical gloves, were seen removing boxloads of materials from a

Monday's detention hearing for Harris, who remained jailed over the weekend on biological weapon charges.

A government lab on Sunday was still testing material seized from Harris' Ohio home to determine if it is a dangerous - and illegal — biological agent, federal sources have said. Harris is on probation for a 1995 conviction for illegally obtaining the bubonic plague bacteria.

The FBI says its investigation into both men is continuing, even though authorities announced Saturday that a substance once feared to be the ingredients of a biological weapon turned out to be a harmless anthrax vaccine.

The material was seized from Leavitt and Harris on Wednesday in Henderson, Nev.



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