

Inspectors differ in stance on Iraq

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NEW YORK — United Nations weapons inspectors delivered a mixed verdict Monday on whether Iraq was disarming, handing President Bush more evidence to make a swift case for war but also bolstering European calls to give the inspectors more time.

The two chief weapons inspectors, Hans Blix and Mohamed ElBaradei, offered the U.N. Security Council sharply differing assessments after 60 days on the ground in Iraq. Blix recited an ominous list of unanswered questions about Iraq's chemical and biological weapons capabilities, while ElBaradei expressed more confidence that Baghdad's nuclear program had been contained.

"Iraq appears not to have come to a genuine acceptance, not even today, of the disarmament that was demanded of it," Blix said.

But ElBaradei countered: "We have to date found no evidence that Iraq has revived its nuclear weapons program since the elimination of the program in the 1990s."

The chief inspectors' reports prompted instant calls from France, China and Russia — the three veto-bearing Security Council members outspokenly opposed to war — to extend the inspectors' mission and postpone any decision on the use of force. Diplomats particularly cited the failure of the nuclear inspectors to find any Iraqi nuclear bombs, because Washington had often called that the most dire threat.

"We share the view of many that this process has not been completed and more time is needed," said China's deputy U.N. ambassador, Zhang Yishan.

But Bush administration officials argued the opposite conclusion, in-

sisting that the inspectors' report meant the Security Council now would have to confront Iraq President Saddam Hussein about his prohibited weapons programs or prove itself irrelevant.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer called the inspectors' report a "frightening reminder" of the dangers posed by Hussein's weapons of mass destruction.

"To this day, the Iraq regime continues to defy the will of the United Nations," Secretary of State Colin Powell told reporters. "It has not given the inspectors and the international community any concrete information in answer to a host of key questions."

White House officials refused to specify what next steps Bush planned to take, and Fleischer said listeners to the president's State of the Union speech Tuesday "won't

hear a deadline, they won't hear a declaration of war."

Officials said no decision was likely until after Bush meets Friday with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, whose government is dispatching 26,000 troops to the Persian Gulf to join an American force that will soon number more than 150,000 soldiers.

The Security Council will begin a closed-door debate Wednesday on the inspectors' report, and the Bush administration will need to decide soon whether to press for a new resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq, thus risking an open split with key European allies such as France and Germany, or else allow the inspections to continue for some weeks or months.

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Looking for peace



A group of anti-war protesters sits on the steps of Johnson Hall Monday, with many spending their day beating drums and chanting. As the afternoon progressed, the group of protesters grew larger and livelier.

Danielle Hickey Emerald

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