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Iraq agrees 'in principle' to dismantle missiles

Diego Ibarguen, Jessica Guynn and Martin Merzer
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

UNITED NATIONS — The Bush administration's drive toward war with Iraq grew more complicated Thursday evening when Iraqi officials agreed "in principle" to comply with a U.N. order to begin dismantling scores of prohibited missiles.

Chief U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix had ordered the destruction of Iraq's Al Samoud 2 missiles to begin by Saturday. Many diplomats were awaiting Saddam Hussein's response as a test of his willingness to comply with U.N. mandates to disarm.

Though it was not clear that Iraq's acceptance was unconditional, the development seemed likely to strengthen the stand of those, led by France, calling for more U.N. weapons inspections and opposing President George W. Bush's push toward war.

Earlier Thursday, Bush portrayed the missile issue as little more than a distraction.

"The rockets are just the tip of the iceberg," he said. "The only question at hand is total, complete disarmament, which he is refusing to do."

Independent experts said Hussein would gain politically by complying.

"If Iraq destroys the missiles, public opinion will be affected here and abroad," said David Albright, a former U.N. nuclear weapons inspector who now heads the Institute for Science and International Security in Washington.

"Clearly, if they destroy the missiles the way Dr. Blix envisioned it, that will be used by opponents of war to justify their claims that inspections are working," agreed Richard Speier, a former senior Pentagon expert on missile proliferation. "However, they really are delivering this a drop at a time. They're not serious about disarming."

Weapons inspectors said Thursday night that they would "clarify this acceptance" by Iraq.

Blix ordered the missiles dismantled because their range can exceed the 93-mile limit set by the United

Nations after the 1991 Gulf War.

"They know how to destroy a missile," Albright said. "You take out the propellant and burn it. If they do systematically destroy the missiles, there will be a call from publics around the world to wait."

Little progress was evident in the Bush administration's efforts to win support on the 15-member Security Council for a new U.S.-British-Spanish resolution that would implicitly authorize war.

Diplomats from France, Russia and China confirmed that their nations remained committed to expanding the inspections. Syria shares that position.

Bulgaria is the only country that stands firmly behind the U.S.-British-Spanish resolution.

That leaves six countries — Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Guinea, Mexico and Pakistan — in the middle. Nine affirmative votes, and no veto, are required for passage.

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Rogers

continued from page 1

Rogers met his wife, Joanne, when they were both music majors at Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla. In 1991, the college laid a stone in his honor in its Walk of Fame, right outside the house where he lived as a student.

He is survived "by his wife, Joanne; two sons, two grandsons and millions of grateful neighbors," Katie Couric said on NBC's "Today."

During a 1997 awards ceremony in Los Angeles, Rogers received a career achievement award from the nation's television critics, and he accepted it with a lesson.

"I realize more and more that even if we do all the right things in television scripting and production and editing and promotion, even if we should deliver the perfect program that everybody in the world would see, if we don't have love for

the people we're working with and the audiences we're working for, our whole industry will someday dwindle," Rogers told the audience.

"Love and success, always in that order. It's that simple and that difficult."

He followed that approach on his program, which was produced from 1968 to 2000 at WQED, the Pittsburgh public television station.

The last first-run episode of "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" was made in December 2000, but didn't air until August 2001.

John Sinclair, chair of the music department at Rollins College, called his longtime friend "the epitome of a gentle spirit" and a great ambassador for the school. Rogers had known about the stomach cancer at the end of last year, Sinclair added, but went ahead with his duties as grand marshal of the Tournament of Roses Parade.

"Through his kindness, he educat-

ed all of us on what it was like to be accepting," Sinclair said. "He liked everyone just the way they were."

In later years, in appearances at the White House and the Daytime Emmy Awards, Rogers asked audiences to remember "the extra special people" who had helped them. He asked for a half-minute of silence.

"I'll watch the time," he would say. People would laugh, then grow silent. Many would be in tears later.

"Wherever they are, how pleased the people you've been thinking about must be," he said afterward. "My hunch is, that besides me, there are many others in this life who often think about you and all that you've done for them."

Millions are pausing now for another reason: Thank you, Mister Rogers.

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Airmen

continued from page 1

Canadian and Belgian Air Forces, and said he got the idea to bring Tuskegee Airmen to the University in 1998 after he saw a film about them. Lamon has brought Tuskegee Airmen to the University several times since 1998.

"Every American should be aware of the plight of Afro-Americans — even today, but especially during World War II," Lamon said. "Some people should be ashamed of how they treat their fellow countrymen."

Lamon said for a white person to become a pilot is like climbing Spencer Butte, but for a black person to achieve that same feat is like climbing Mt. Everest.

"I'm not interested in what they did as pilots — their victories, their success — I'm interested in

what they did to become a pilot," Lamon said.

Lamon and Holloman said many young people don't know the hardships black pilots went through to earn their wings.

"We're gonna try to make the students aware that unlike white students in the Air Corp., we had different problems," Holloman said.

Lamon said many white government officials believed blacks were incapable of being pilots.

After the U.S. government approved the "Tuskegee Project" to let blacks train as pilots in 1941, the first class graduated nine months later, and 450 airmen served overseas, 66 of whom died in battle.

All of the flight training was conducted at Moton Field and Tuskegee Army Air Field in Tuskegee, Ala. Recruits faced

racism even during their training.

"(It) was right in the heart of segregation in the south," Drummond said, adding that he was lucky because he didn't have to go into town often, where racism was even worse.

While Drummond did not get any combat experience until the Korean War, Holloman saw plenty of action in Italy, where he escorted bombers and disrupted German lines of communication.

"I was happy to be ... putting my life on the line in defense of my country," Holloman said.

At the same time, the flier said he had to ignore the obstacles placed in his way.

"I realized only the strong would survive," he said.

Contact the reporter at romangokhman@dailymerald.com.

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