

# War plans mount despite pleas for peace

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WASHINGTON — France, Russia, Germany and Pope John Paul II all pleaded for peace Wednesday, but President Bush studied invasion plans at the White House with his top battlefield commander as war with Iraq marched relentlessly closer.

• The three nations — now a coalition of the unwilling — vowed jointly to defeat a U.N. resolution that would authorize war, but the Bush administration downplayed their stand.

• U.S. military officials confirmed that they have designed an initial war strategy called “shock and awe” that would unleash 10 times the firepower of the opening phase of the first Persian Gulf War.

• The Israeli Army told residents of that nation to prepare gas masks and a safe room in case Iraq launches retaliatory chemical or biological attacks against them.

Senior administration officials said military action against Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein could erupt late next week.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, they also said the Pentagon and CIA have launched an operation, code-named “Imminent Horizon,” to hunt down an estimated 300 Iraqi agents in the United States and more than 50 other countries before they can launch terrorist attacks in retaliation for a U.S.-led invasion.

The operation is aimed at known and suspected intelligence officers in Iraqi diplomatic missions and at other Iraqis believed to be operating undercover as businessmen, tourists or academ-

ics, said a senior U.S. official who requested anonymity. So far, two Iraqis are being expelled from the Iraqi United Nations mission in New York, and a third has been ordered to leave the Philippines.

Seeking to influence an increasingly polarized diplomatic community, Secretary of State Colin Powell charged that Hussein was hiding machinery that could build missiles to replace those now being destroyed by U.N. weapons inspectors.

“No nation has been taken in by his transparent tactics,” said Powell. “He’s still a threat. The clock is continuing to tick, and the consequences of his continuing refusal to disarm will be very, very real.”

At the White House, the president’s schedule reflected the stark choice between war and peace.

After receiving a report in the White House situation room on the Pentagon’s war plans from Gen. Tommy Franks, America’s top battlefield commander for Iraq, Bush welcomed a peace envoy from Pope John Paul II to the Oval Office.

Cardinal Pio Laghi’s visit was the latest in a series of moves by the Vatican aimed at averting a U.S. invasion of Iraq. The 82-year-old pontiff has been an outspoken and active opponent of Bush’s plans, declaring that there is no moral or legal basis for war.

“It is illegal. It is unjust,” Laghi, a former golf partner of the first President Bush, told reporters after his White House visit.

In a letter to Bush delivered by the papal envoy, John Paul II told the president that he would “ask the Lord to inspire you to search for the ways of a stable peace.”

White House officials said Bush

made his case that war may be the best way to assure long-term international security.

Later Wednesday, Laghi held a news conference at the National Press Club after White House officials blocked his plans to meet with reporters at the White House.

Powell is scheduled to begin a new round of talks Thursday at the United Nations and to attend a Security Council briefing Friday by chief weapons inspector Hans Blix.

Blix offered a preview of that report Wednesday, saying Iraq recently has demonstrated improved compliance with international demands that it disarm but still has a distance to go. Iraq’s “track record is not so good,” he said.

His comments and Powell’s came as throngs of students around the globe protested the drive toward war and after Russia, France and Germany vowed jointly to defeat a second U.S.-sponsored U.N. resolution that would effectively open the gates to disarm and topple Hussein by war.

“We will not allow a resolution to pass that authorizes resorting to force,” French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin said in Paris after a hastily called mini-summit of the three nations’ foreign ministers. “Russia and France, as permanent members of the Security Council, will assume their full responsibilities on this point.” Both nations hold veto power.

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said his nation would not hesitate to veto the measure when it reaches the Security Council for a vote, expected next week.

To pass, a resolution must receive nine affirmative votes and no

veto from any of the five permanent members of the 15-member council — the United States, Britain, Russia, France and China.

At the White House, spokesman Ari Fleischer said the president “remains confident in the outcome of this.” He contended that the foreign ministers’ statement left the window open for more negotiations and a positive outcome for the United States.

“You have not heard the final word from any nation,” Fleischer said.

Through it all, preparations for war accelerated and intensified.

“Our troops in the field are trained, they’re ready, they are capable,” said Gen. Tommy Franks, America’s top battlefield commander for Iraq.

During a briefing at the Pentagon, Franks and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld repeatedly emphasized that Bush has not yet approved military action, but they also signaled that such a decision was a foregone conclusion.

“U.N. resolutions will be enforced,” Rumsfeld said. “The president has said that time is running out.”

In an attempt to minimize civilian casualties and maximize damage to key targets, at least 60 percent of the bombs will be guided by lasers, satellites or video cameras, compared with 20 percent in 1991, according to a senior military official who requested anonymity.

In another development that suggested imminent hostilities, Israel’s chief of military intelligence told Knesset members that a U.S.-led invasion of Iraq could begin as early as next week.

“As of now, I want to emphasize — get ready,” said Brig. Gen. Ruth

Yaron, an Army spokeswoman.

The Bush administration is expected to give diplomats, U.N. arms inspectors and other foreigners in Iraq 72 hours of warning before an attack. Blix, the U.N. inspection chief, said his inspectors could leave Iraq within 48 hours.

“We don’t know what’s going to happen,” he said.

Blix said Iraq has recently shown signs of greater cooperation with weapons inspectors, now that an invasion force is gathered at its borders.

“They (Iraqi officials) have been very active, I would say, and even proactive in the last month or so,” Blix said.

He pointed to the ongoing destruction of more than 100 prohibited al Samoud 2 missiles and seven recent interviews with Iraqi scientists under the conditions required by inspectors — without Iraqi monitors or any tape recorders.

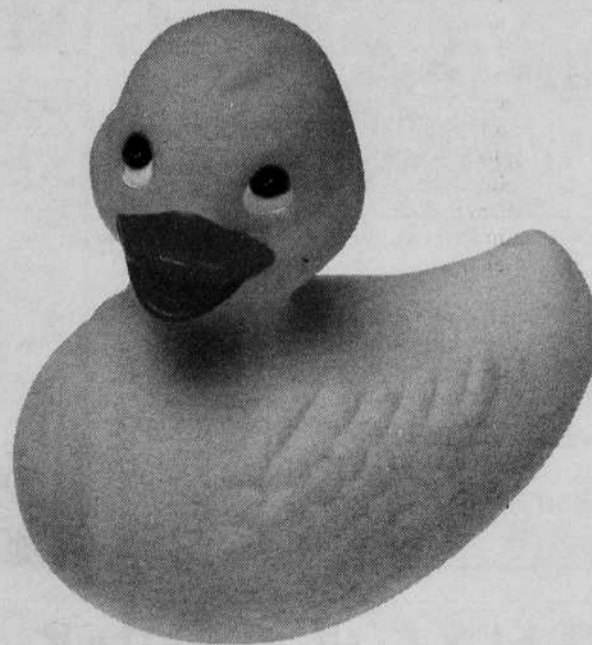
Though he said he remained skeptical of Iraqi claims of disarmament, the outbreak of war would mark “a serious failure for the approach through inspection to disarmament.”

He said additional inspections would be welcome and could conceivably complete their mission relatively soon.

“It seems to me it would be a rather short time to close the door and say, ‘This is it,’” Blix said.

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