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Facing lack of support, U.S. delays U.N. war vote

Ron Hutcheson, Diego Ibarguen and Martin Merzer
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration retreated on the diplomatic front Thursday night, delaying until next week a vote on a U.N. war resolution despite repeated vows to demand a decision on the unpopular measure this week.

Diplomats who attended a closed-door evening session of the U.N. Security Council reported that U.S. and British ambassadors told the council there would be no vote Friday and that talks concerning a resolution could continue through the weekend.

It appeared no progress had been made in the session, which adjourned shortly after 7 p.m. EST. The council plans to resume closed-door talks on Iraq on Friday.

The intensifying diplomatic turmoil came as more U.S. ships and planes assembled in the Persian Gulf region for war with Iraq and after Secretary of State Colin Powell raised the possibility that the U.S. could abandon all plans for a vote.

Last week, President Bush said he would insist on a vote this week, a position the White House had maintained firmly through Wednesday.

Earlier Thursday, Iraq denounced a six-part disarmament test proposed Wednesday by Britain, France, Germany and Russia — all members of

the U.N. Security Council — flatly rejected the proposal. And none of the six uncommitted nations on the council endorsed it.

In short, confusion enveloped the Bush administration's diplomatic drive as negotiations started over again at the United Nations and in many world capitals. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan floated the idea of a summit of world leaders.

"The options remain, go for a vote and see what members say, or not go for a vote," Powell said.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon strategically repositioned warships and deployed B-2 stealth bombers from their U.S. bases to locations within striking distance of Iraq.

About a dozen cruisers and destroyers were ordered from the eastern Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf region, where they will join about 60 warships. The B-2s departed Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, apparently bound for Diego Garcia, a British island with a large U.S. airbase in the Indian Ocean.

In Baghdad, volunteers dug foxholes and stacked sandbags in city streets

Last Thursday night, President Bush — seeking a U.N. resolution that would pave the way to war if Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein fails to fully disarm — said that he would demand a vote by the Security Council this week "no matter what the whip

count is. It's time for people to show their cards."

This Thursday, a day of frenetic activity at the White House left the unmistakable impression that Bush was losing ground in his high-stakes bid.

The president worked the phones again, seeking support from foreign leaders in a series of consultations so urgent that he canceled a lunchtime trip to the Capitol after his motorcade had completely assembled.

At one point, his aides considered, then rejected, plans for a trip to meet British Prime Minister Tony Blair in England. Under growing anti-war pressure at home, Blair also worked to salvage a new U.N. resolution.

Bush has said he is ready to use force to disarm and depose Saddam even without a new U.N. resolution, but Blair faces a severe split in his Labor Party — even the potential collapse of his government — if he sends troops into battle without U.N. backing.

Nine votes on the 15-member council — and no vetoes — are needed to pass a measure. France and Russia have pledged to veto any resolution that carries an ultimatum to Iraq and an explicit or implied threat of immediate military action.

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U.S. Senate votes to outlaw certain late-term abortions

Jodi Enda
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

WASHINGTON — Opponents of abortion rights won the first of what they hope will be a string of congressional victories, as the U.S. Senate voted overwhelmingly Thursday to outlaw a controversial form of late-term abortion.

The bill, banning what abortion foes

call "partial-birth" abortions, is expected to sail through the House of Representatives, as it has in the past. President Bush has vowed to sign it into law.

"Partial-birth abortion is an abhorrent procedure that offends human dignity, and I commend the Senate for passing legislation to ban it," Bush said in a statement. "Today's action is an important step toward building a culture of life in America."

Abortion-rights advocates predicted that the law would be declared unconstitutional because it does not permit exceptions to protect the health of a pregnant woman. The U.S. Supreme Court struck down a similar Nebraska law three years ago.

"Given that they didn't put a comprehensive health exception in this, it's dead on arrival," said David J. Garrow, a professor at Emory University's law school and author of "Liberty and Sexuality: The Right to Privacy and the Making of Roe v. Wade." "This will be enjoined by some federal judge literally the very same day the president signs it."

Even the bill's sponsor, Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., said he didn't expect the measure to reduce the number of abortions performed in the United States because doctors could use other procedures.

"By the actual banning of the procedure itself, I don't think we're stopping any more abortions," Santorum said.

But the Senate vote prohibiting the rarely used procedure is at least as important for its symbolism and politics as for its medical impact.

The 64-33 vote marks the first abortion-related tally since Republi-

cans took control of the Senate this year and shows the strength of a movement left out in the cold during the eight years that President Bill Clinton was in office. Clinton twice vetoed similar legislation.

The Senate bill would prohibit doctors from partially delivering a fetus and then committing an "overt act" to kill it. A recent survey conducted by the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a think tank quoted by both sides in the debate, found that 2,200 such abortions were performed in the United States in 2000.

However, abortion-rights advocates contend that the Santorum bill was vague enough to outlaw other forms of abortions as well, particularly those performed in the second trimester.

"One of the most deceptive aspects of this bill is that the sponsors pretend it is about late-term abortions and a specific late-term abortion procedure," said Nancy Northup, president of the Center for Reproductive Rights, which argued the case against Nebraska's law.

Abortion opponents in Congress served up the measure as their best shot this year. Waiting in the wings are bills that would make it a crime to take minors across state lines for abortions in order to avoid parental-notification laws; prevent federal, state and local governments from withholding money from hospitals that don't provide abortions; and make it a crime to injure a fetus during the commission of another crime.

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