

In Congress, calls arise for inquiry on Iraq's weapons

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Washington- The chorus on Capitol Hill demanding an explanation for the failure of U.S. search teams to find lethal, banned weapons in Iraq got louder yesterday, as some lawmakers questioned the truthfulness of the Bush administration's rationale for war.

At a Pentagon news conference, a top official rejected claims that the Defense Department manipulated prewar evidence on weapons of mass destruction and Iraqi links to terrorists, the Associated Press reported.

"The suggestion that we said to them, 'This is what we're looking for, go find it,' is precisely the inaccuracy that we are here to rebut," said Douglas Feith, undersecretary of defense for policy.

In building a case for attacking Iraq, President Bush insisted Saddam Hussein had poison gas and germ warfare weapons that posed a threat to the United States.

Thus far, nothing of the sort has been uncovered in postwar Iraq, inflaming anti-war critics who maintained all along that Bush was exaggerating the threat.

Rep. Dennis Kucinich, a Cleveland Democrat who is running for president on an antiwar platform, said the Bush administration "led this nation into war based on lies."

Feith said at the news conference that he wanted to "lay to rest" reports that a small group of Defense Department analysts - working apart from the Central Intelligence Agency last year - had simply sought out convenient intelligence information as a justification for war.

The analysts, he said, were examining existing intelligence to develop new strategies for waging the international war against terrorism.

In Congress, the Senate Armed Services and Intelligence committees and the House Intelligence Committee are all considering inquiries into the soundness of intelligence produced by the CIA and the Defense Department.

A GOP aide said Congress already has a great deal of classified information sent up by the CIA.

Ohio Republican Mike DeWine, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he is not surprised that "people are raising issues."

But he said, "I believe the data was correct. If you look at the history of Iraq, we have good evidence that at certain periods of time they had weapons of mass destruction."

House Speaker Dennis Hastert, defending Bush, said "It is going to take a little while to find the weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq, and "we are going to do it."

That's not enough for some lawmakers.

Kucinich said he would introduce a Resolution of Inquiry today to compel Bush to give Congress evidence supporting statements he and others made asserting Iraq had chemical and biological weapons and "reconstituted nuclear weapons."

The resolution cannot be buried when it is sent to a House committee. A vote is required, up or down.

Among the statements Kucinich cited were those from Bush's Cincinnati speech last October when the president said Iraq "possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons. It is seeking nuclear weapons."

"Here we are, June of 2003. Show me the weapons," Kucinich demanded. "Where are they?"

An ally, Illinois Democrat Jan Schakowsky, was equally vociferous. Bush's credibility "is on the line," she said. "Show me the evidence."

DeWine asked for patience. "I think it is still early. Iraq is a very big country," he said.

"We have to look at the experience of the first Iraq war when it took some time to get a full assessment of exactly what they had and what they were doing."