

Bush, House OK Iraq deal;

President: If Hussein resists, 'force may become unavoidable'

October 3rd, 2002

By Jill Zuckman

Chicago Tribune

President Bush and congressional leaders reached agreement Wednesday on a draft resolution that would allow Bush to confront Iraqi President Saddam Hussein with military force, a prospect that Bush said "may become unavoidable."

The agreement, which came after the White House agreed to drop some controversial language and make other concessions, supports Bush's use of force "as he determines to be necessary and appropriate." The House is likely to quickly pass the resolution. Democratic opponents in the Senate, who had sought to narrow the conditions under which Bush could wage war on Iraq, acknowledged that momentum had shifted toward the White House-backed language.

On the diplomatic front, The Associated Press said the United States will propose to the United Nations Security Council that inspectors be given broad new powers to hunt for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and that they be provided military backing to carry out the search. The U.S. draft proposal, which the AP obtained Wednesday, has not been submitted formally to the Security Council. Key elements face deep opposition from Russia, China and France.

"We will not leave the future of peace and the security of America in the hands of this cruel and dangerous man," Bush said of Hussein during an event in the White House Rose Garden. "If he persists in his defiance, the use of force may become unavoidable."

Bush was joined by House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.), House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) and Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.).

"Many of us believe that we need to deal with this threat diplomatically if we can, militarily if we must," Gephardt said.

Conspicuously absent was Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), who is among leading Senate Democrats calling for Bush to do more on the diplomatic front before resorting to military force.

"The Democrats are obviously in disagreement," said Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and co-author with Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) of an alternative resolution that appeared to be losing steam.

Daschle canceled a previously scheduled meeting with reporters Wednesday and huddled with aides and advisers as he sorted out the Senate's options. Meanwhile, the House International

Relations Committee began to debate the new resolution, and a vote on the House floor was scheduled for next week.

In a statement, Daschle said the Senate also would begin debating a resolution soon, though it was unclear which version he meant. Daschle called the agreement between Bush and House leaders an improvement over the original draft resolution Bush sent to Capitol Hill two weeks ago.

The draft resolution agreed to Wednesday contains several White House concessions: Bush promised to submit a finding to Congress, before using force, that diplomacy has failed and that military action is necessary. He also pledged to report to Congress every 60 days on matters relevant to the confrontation.

Bush also agreed to drop controversial language authorizing him "to restore international peace and security in the region," which had prompted concerns that Bush was asking for a free hand to attack anywhere in the Middle East. Instead, the agreement would make Iraq the focus of any military action.

Hastert said this still gave Bush the flexibility he needed and added that the president would not be required to seek approval from the UN before proceeding.

"If the president determines that he has to act unilaterally to protect the American people, he can, and he has the ability to do that," Hastert said.

Majority leader hesitant

Daschle outlined his reservations.

"I continue to believe that the final resolution should include greater emphasis on eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, a stronger statement that operations against Iraq will not undermine the ongoing international effort against Al Qaeda, and a clearer assessment of the administration's plans for the political and economic reconstruction of a post-Saddam Iraq," Daschle said.

Still, he said he is certain that the Senate will adopt some version of a resolution with broad bipartisan support.

Some Senate Democrats and some Republicans have warned that the United States should not confront Hussein on its own, preferring to see an alliance with the UN and other countries.

That is the focus of the Biden-Lugar version, which would require Bush to inform Congress before taking action that he has sought a UN resolution or has determined that the Iraqi threat warrants unilateral action. Biden insisted that this wording would only strengthen Bush's position, but the president rejected the proposal earlier this week, saying it would tie his hands.

Biden said he expects to offer his proposal on the Senate floor, but he canceled plans to consider it in the Foreign Relations Committee as support seemed to shift to the Bush-backed language throughout the day.

Meanwhile, two prominent Democrats and two leading Republicans introduced the president's latest language in the Senate.

"Mr. President, we delivered for your father. We will deliver for you," promised Sen. John Warner (R-Va.), one of the leaders in crafting the 1991 Persian Gulf war resolution to turn back the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Warner, along with Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.), Evan Bayh (D-Ind.) and Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), said they would shepherd the agreement for Bush through the Senate.

But the key to the deal, sealed over breakfast Wednesday at the White House, was Gephardt.

'Unique' threat

"In our view, Iraq's use and continuing development of weapons of mass destruction, combined with efforts of terrorists to acquire such weapons, pose a unique and dangerous threat to our national security," Gephardt said at the Rose Garden ceremony.

Gephardt's decision to side with Hastert and Bush at the expense of Daschle was a rare break from what has become an increasingly partisan divide this year. But Gephardt has staked out a more hawkish stance than many of his fellow Democrats on the Iraq issue, and he was responsible for suggesting many of the modifications adopted in the final agreement with the president.

A core of Democrats in both houses remains adamantly opposed to the new language.

"It is not a resolution I can support, because . . . it still authorizes the president at this point to take unilateral action," said Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.). "I don't feel that its commitment to building the coalition and going to the United Nations is nearly strong enough."

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) said politics seems to be dictating the Iraq resolution's timetable.

"The object is to put members on record before the election," he said. "It has less to do with the imminent threat of Iraq and more to do with the imminent arrival of the election."

But even Democrats adamantly opposed to Bush's plans said they are resigned.

"I think many people are on the path to give the president pretty much what he wants," said Rep. David Bonior (D-Mich.), who recently returned from Baghdad and has criticized "this rush to war."

