

Diplomats descend on Baghdad in push to end standoff peacefully

BAGHDAD, Iraq (AP) — Would-be peacemakers from around the world pressed Iraq on Wednesday to end a standoff over weapons inspections with diplomacy before Washington does it with air strikes.

Word emerged of possible progress, including an Iraqi offer at compromise.

Russia insisted there were signs of optimism, but President Boris Yeltsin, using language reminiscent of the Cold War, said a U.S. attack could lead to "world war."

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, meeting with an envoy from France, said he was striving for "a balanced political solution," the official Iraqi News Agency said.

Iraq has refused to allow U.N. inspectors into Saddam's palaces and other key sites, calling it a matter of national sovereignty.

CNN reported the Iraqis were offering to open some — but not all — of the suspected weapons sites to inspectors.

The United States increasingly is threatening to resort to military force to end the Iraqi defiance.

Congress worked Wednesday on a resolution authorizing President Clinton to launch air attacks, and U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson traveled the world seeking support from fellow U.N. Security Council member-nations.

Hoping to avert attack, the Arab League's secretary-general and Turkey's foreign minister arrived in Baghdad, joining envoys from Russia and France in pressing Iraqi leaders for a peaceful solution.

Quoting unidentified sources, CNN said that Iraq was offering to allow U.N. inspectors access to eight disputed sites for about a month.

CNN said the Iraqi proposal called for each of the 15 members of the Security Council to appoint five inspectors.

The 21 countries represented on the U.N. Special Commission, which oversees inspections, would then each appoint two more.

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**Bill Clinton
United States President**

It said that these 117 experts would make "visits" to the palaces and would report their findings directly to the Security Council.

Asked about the reported Iraqi offer, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa in Cairo said: "We have been informed by the Iraqis of this."

He refused to elaborate.

The Americans rejected the earlier plan, saying it appeared to be an attempt by Baghdad to bypass the Special Commission and ignore the commission's mandate to set up long-term monitoring of suspected chemical, biological and nuclear programs.

At the United Nations, British Ambassador John Weston suggested the latest reported proposal would also prove unacceptable.

"The Security Council will want to be satisfied the Special Commission can go about its job in the manner required by Security Council resolutions," he said.

In Washington, Clinton said the United States' "bottom line" is to deny Saddam the capacity to develop and deliver weapons of mass destruction.

"The best way to stop Saddam from building nuclear, biological or chemical weapons is simply to get the international inspectors back to work with no restraints," he said.

Jet violated air regulations in gondola accident

CAVALESE, Italy (AP) — The U.S. Marine jet that severed a ski lift cable, plunging 20 people to their deaths, violated Italian air safety regulations with its "earth-shaving flight" across a snowy hillside, the prime minister of this angry nation said Wednesday.

The defense minister said the American pilot should be prosecuted, several influential lawmakers said U.S. bases in Italy should be closed, and Italian and American investigators started looking into the accident near Trento, about 90 miles east of Milan.

"This is not about a low-level flight, but a terrible act, a nearly earth-shaving flight, beyond any limit allowed by the rules and laws," Premier Romano Prodi told reporters.

Witnesses said the Marine EA-6B Prowler swooped through the valley just above the tree-tops on Tuesday. Its tail severed two, fist-sized, steel cables, sending a gondola full of European skiers and the operator to their deaths.

Startled by an unusually loud boom, 66-year-old Carla Naia looked up and saw the jet "coming at me at an incredible speed."

"I've seen lots of planes and I've often cursed them," the Cavalese resident said. "But this one seemed completely out of control, far lower and

faster than the others."

Residents of this valley have long complained about low-flying jets out of Aviano Air Base at the foot of the Italian Alps.

"We are fed up," Mauro Gilmozi, the mayor of this picturesque town of 3,600, said. "This 'Top Gun' stuff has got to stop."

An EA-6B pilot who flew missions in the area last year said it is standard procedure for pilots based at Aviano to fly low-level training routes in the Dolomite Mountains, but for safety reasons they are not supposed to be at altitudes below 1,000 feet.

The pilot, who spoke Wednesday on condition he not be identified, said potential hazards such as ski resort cables are plotted on a flight map.

The EA-6B pilots do low-level training because in times of war they must sometimes fly as low as 100 feet to avoid detection by enemy radar. The plane's central mission is to identify the type and location of enemy radars — generally surface-to-air missile radars — and to either jam their signal or attack them with high-speed anti-radiation missiles.

The Defense Ministry said military flights must maintain a minimum altitude of 500 feet. The cable was severed about 300 feet above the ground.

Undersecretary Massimo Brutti told state television that the plane's flight plan called for it to be flying at 3,600 feet. Aviano spokeswoman Capt. Tracy O'Grady said the pilot "was on an approved low-level training mission," but did not say what altitude was authorized.

O'Grady also said U.S. military investigators were looking into why the plane was flying so low. A Marine accident investigation team from the United States was scheduled to fly to Aviano, 60 miles east of Cavalese.

The EA-6B prowler, a surveillance plane, was on temporary assignment to Aviano; its home base is at Cherry Point, N.C. The identity of the pilot has not been released.

Anger continued to build in Italy, an important U.S. ally and home to seven major U.S. military installations. U.S. flights over Italy have increased dramatically since the international intervention in Bosnia, one of Aviano's most important jobs. The U.S. planes provide support for the international peacekeeping mission in Bosnia.

Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini deplored the accident but said that it would not "distort our alliances and our collective security structures." Defense Minister Beniamino Andreatta took a harsher line, demanding that the pilot be prosecuted.

1998 crucial for Bos

SARAJEVO, Bosnia (AP) — Last week's new national election Wednesday, the first since the war, will bear the weight of ending the conflict.

Unable to end the war, the international community is imposing a new election. The election will be a realization of the Dayton peace accord, which ended the war in Bosnia last year.

Behind the new election is a realization of the Dayton peace accord, which ended the war in Bosnia last year.

If ethnic nationalism is not weakened, the election will be a failure. The election will be a realization of the Dayton peace accord, which ended the war in Bosnia last year.

1998 should be a year of change. NATO Secretary General Javier Solana has visited Bosnia last week.

Two years after the Dayton peace accord, Bosnia is still largely under the control of Croats and Muslims. It seems to be on the verge of agreement.

So in December, the name of the new common currency will be tied to the German mark.

On Wednesday, the Bosnians missed their deadline to agree on a flag. They agreed on a dark blue field with a yellow triangle in the center, divided into three ethnic groups.

One side of the flag will be lined with white. "This is the flag of Bosnia," said the Bosnian President, Milorad Dodik.

Duncan Bulwinkle, a U.S. diplomat in Sarajevo, says the flag sends a message of unity, not division. While the flag seems to be a step forward, without asking for their hunch is that the leaders gain from it.

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