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Global Response

Key Allies Not Won Over by Powell

By Keith B. Richburg

Washington Post Foreign Service
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PARIS, Feb. 6 -- France and other key U.S. allies declared today that Secretary of State Colin L. Powell had not made a compelling case for an early armed strike against Iraq in his presentation to the U.N. Security Council Wednesday. France immediately began a diplomatic campaign to shore up opposition to going to war soon.

"There is no change in the French position, no change at all," said Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, whose country has been one of the most forceful voices for giving U.N. weapons inspectors in Iraq more time to work.

French President Jacques Chirac spoke by telephone today with counterparts among other Security Council members -- Vladimir Putin of Russia, Vicente Fox of Mexico, Ricardo Lagos of Chile, Paul Biya of Cameroon and Bashar Assad of Syria.

He told them that France refuses to accept that war is inevitable and that this view is widely shared in the world, according to a spokeswoman, Catherine Colonna, news services reported. He and Putin agreed that their governments would continue to work for a diplomatic solution to the crisis. France has not ruled out supporting a war but argues that peaceful means have not been exhausted.

Dominique de Villepin, the French foreign minister, said it was premature to discuss a new Security Council resolution authorizing a strike. "A second resolution? We are not at the time for that right now," de Villepin told Europe 1 radio in an interview. France holds a veto in the Security Council.

In other countries that are generally friendly to the United States, people expressed skepticism that Powell had provided proof justifying war. "If Americans know so much, why do they produce so little?" said Vladimir Lukin, a top Russian legislator and former ambassador to the United States. "Let them tip the inspectors off regarding smoking gun evidence."

France and Germany lead European opposition to a speedy attack. But Britain, Italy, Spain, Denmark and Portugal, as well as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, have firmly backed the U.S. position. On Wednesday, 10 more European governments, in the former communist east, jointly declared support for Washington. They were Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

In the Americas, the United States' immediate neighbors, Canada and Mexico, signaled that their positions remained unchanged.

Canadian Foreign Minister Bill Graham called Powell's presentation "disturbing and persuasive" but said Canada favored more time for the inspectors.

Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez, who watched Powell from Mexico's seat on the Security Council, said his country's preference for a nonmilitary solution had not changed. "Secretary Powell's presentation strengthens Mexico's conviction about the necessity to advance toward an effective and verifiable disarmament," he said in a statement. But he said Mexico still believes the "ideal way" to disarm Iraq is more inspections.

About 86 percent of 32,000 people who took part in a telephone poll Wednesday night on Mexico's most-watched television news show, El Noticiero, answer "no" to the question, "Should Mexico support a U.S. military attack against Iraq?"

Meanwhile, the disagreements over Iraq delayed a decision on whether the NATO alliance will begin military assistance to member Turkey, which is seeking AWACS radar surveillance planes and Patriot missiles to defend itself against a possible attack by Iraq. France, Germany and Belgium have blocked efforts to make a decision on NATO helping Turkey, arguing that it is premature because no decision has been made to go to war.

Today, NATO Secretary General George Robertson, a close ally of Washington, tried to break the stalemate and force a decision on the issue next week. He invoked what is known as the "silence procedure," meaning that certain steps will begin next week in the planning for Turkey's defense unless one or more countries openly object by midday Monday.

Robertson today acknowledged continuing disagreement in the alliance on this issue, but said, "I am confident we will reach a decision early next week." France, Germany and Belgium may still object. "It is premature to decide today on the issue of an eventual NATO involvement in the Iraq crisis," said Belgium's foreign minister, Louis Michel.

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In Germany, spokesman Bela Ande said the government is "concerned" that Iraq may still have weapons of mass destruction, but maintains that "the inspectors must be given the necessary time and means for their task."

The German government's strident opposition to even a U.N.-sanctioned war is beginning to raise concerns that it is becoming isolated from its immediate neighbors as well as the United States. This sense was heightened today by a jab from Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, who in remarks to the House Armed Services Committee grouped Germany with Libya and Cuba as countries refusing to help in a war.

German officials have noted that their country has agreed to open its airspace to U.S. warplanes, is protecting U.S. bases in Germany with German troops, and has units in Kuwait that specialize in dealing with nuclear, biological or chemical attacks.

In Italy, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, one of Washington's most staunch allies in the crisis, pledged to provide humanitarian help for Iraq in case of war. But he suggested he would await a new Security Council resolution before committing Italy to the coalition against Iraq.

During a visit to Moscow, Pakistan's president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, joined Russia's Putin in a joint statement opposing the unilateral use of force. Musharraf said he has no information to back up Powell's claim that al Qaeda operatives used the Iraqi Embassy in Pakistan as a "liaison office."

In Indonesia, the world's most populous predominantly Muslim nation, government officials said the evidence produced by Powell demonstrated the need for more work by U.N. weapons inspectors. In Bangkok, hundreds of Thai Muslims protested outside the U.S. Embassy, accusing Washington of unfairly condemning Iraq and calling for a boycott of American products.

*Correspondents Peter Finn in Berlin, Sharon LaFraniere in Moscow, Ellen Nakashima in Jakarta, Indonesia, and Kevin Sullivan in Mexico City contributed to this article.*

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