

Rice: Powell made 'compelling' case on Iraq

Saddam threw away final opportunity to 'come completely clean'

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- Secretary of State Colin Powell should have left no doubt in the minds of the U.N. Security Council members that Iraq has not disarmed and continues to deceive the world, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice said Wednesday.

"I think the secretary made a very compelling case," Rice told CNN's Larry King Live.

"When you have evidence of deception on the scale that [Iraqi President] Saddam Hussein has been practicing," she said, "it's a little hard to make the argument that 1441, the very important U.N. resolution of the Security Council, is being observed."

Resolution 1441, adopted by the Security Council last November, calls on Iraq to disarm itself of chemical, nuclear and biological weapons.

Because the Bush administration finds Iraq in violation of the resolution, the United Nations was the right venue for Powell to make his case Wednesday, Rice said.

"It was only fitting to take this back to the Security Council at this point in time," she said.

Rice said Iraq can do very little now to avoid confrontation. Saddam had one final opportunity to "come completely clean" with weapons inspectors, but he threw it away by deceiving them, so the world should be "very skeptical."

White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer said the information Powell shared with the Council was carefully reviewed to ensure it did not compromise sources and methods used by U.S. intelligence.

CIA Director George Tenet managed the review process, Rice said, and had the final say on what details could be released.

"It was a collaborative effort in which the intelligence community really led in bringing the intelligence information to the policy-makers to put together the presentation," she said.

Some U.S. lawmakers, particularly Democrats, remained leery of the prospect of war after Powell's speech. Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Massachusetts, said Powell had made a "very strong case" about the dangers posed by Saddam but that Bush must still explain the costs of war "in blood and treasure."

Rice said President Bush knows very well the consequences of sending American troops into war, because he is responsible for any casualties. But the costs of inaction, Rice said, are much greater.

"We have to talk about the continued presence of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Saddam Hussein," she said. "We have to talk about the kind of connections ... that Colin Powell talked about today between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein. We have to talk about the costs of a possible attack like 9/11, but this time with weapons of mass destruction, so that we're not talking about the deaths of 3,000 Americans, but the deaths, perhaps, of tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands or more."

Inaction would also have consequences for the relevance of the Security Council, Rice said. If the United Nations failed to force Iraq to comply with resolutions already in place, the world body might lose credibility.

Asked whether the United States is disappointed in the reluctance of long-time allies France and Germany to back the United States on Iraq, Rice said the administration remains hopeful those countries will join the growing international consensus that Iraq is in violation of U.N. resolutions.

"We understand that countries have different views," she said. "But it's very hard, after Secretary Powell's presentation today, to come to any other conclusion that Iraq is not complying -- never intended to comply."

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