

World News

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What's on?

Bush steps up pressure on UN
17.57PM GMT, 8 Mar 2003

President George W Bush has stepped up pressure on reluctant UN Security Council members to set a March 17 deadline for Iraq to disarm or face military action.

"As a last resort, we must be willing to use military force," Mr Bush said in his weekly radio address.

"Unfortunately, it is clear that Saddam Hussein is still violating the demands of the United Nations by refusing to disarm," he said.

"As a last resort, we must be willing to use military force" - President George W Bush

"These are not the actions of a regime that is disarming. These are the actions of a regime engaged in a wilful charade," he added, "If the Iraqi regime were disarming, we would know it - because we would see it; Iraq's weapons would be presented to inspectors and destroyed."

Mr Bush said UN inspection teams do not need more time, or more personnel: "All they need is what they have never received - the full cooperation of the Iraqi regime."

The United States, Britain and Spain have proposed a new UN resolution that sets a March 17 ultimatum for Iraq to comply fully with disarmament demands.

But the proposal faces opposition from France and other veto-wielding Security Council members, prompting a final, intense round of public and private diplomacy before next week's showdown vote.

So far Washington appears to be making little headway. Despite a telephone appeal by Mr Bush, Chilean President Ricardo Lagos, whose country has a seat on the Security Council, said the March 17 deadline for Iraqi disarmament was too short and that UN weapons inspectors should be given more time.

Iraq denies it has illegal arms and says it is cooperating with UN inspectors. In a statement on Saturday, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein called on the Security Council to lift 12 years of sanctions.

While US officials were upbeat in public about the resolution's prospects, they were less confident in private.

"We will see whether we can pass the resolution," said a senior Bush administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity. "It's going to be an intensive effort to persuade people to do that over the next several days."

Undeterred by the opposition, Mr Bush and his advisers over the weekend continued to lobby world leaders for support. Aides said the President could dispatch his national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, to Russia to lobby President Vladimir Putin in person. Secretary of State Colin Powell could also be called upon to visit leaders with swing votes.

France is doing the same, sending its foreign minister on quick trips to Guinea, Cameroon and Angola.

Mr Bush has made clear he may lead "a coalition of the willing" to disarm Iraq regardless of the UN outcome.

But going to war without the world body's approval would be certain to stoke an already powerful antiwar movement around the world, intensify anti-American sentiment and could shake the political support of important allies, including British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The United States so far only has four sure Security Council votes in its corner - its

World News

50 feared dead in Saudi attack

Up to 50 people are feared dead after terrorists launched a wave of suicide bomb attacks on Western targets in the Saudi capital Riyadh.

French strike causes misery

Thousands of Britons are facing travel misery because of a major strike in France affecting planes, trains, buses and ferries.

Iraq: US shake-up begins

America's new civilian administrator for Iraq has arrived in Baghdad.

Ali to leave intensive care

Iraqi orphan Ali Ismael Abbas, who lost both his arms after his house was destroyed by a missile, is expected to leave intensive care.

Bali bomber goes on trial

The first trial of the men accused of causing the Bali bombing in which more than 200 people were killed has begun in Indonesia.

Sharon set for Palestinian meeting

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his Palestinian counterpart Mahmoud Abbas will meet for the first time on May 16.

own with those of Britain, Spain and Bulgaria. To succeed, Bush needs to get nine members of the 15-member Security Council to approve the resolution. But vetoes by France, Russia or China threaten to block it.

In his radio address and in private calls, Mr Bush appealed to Security Council members still on the fence.

"Allowing a dangerous dictator to defy the world and build an arsenal for conquest and mass murder is not peace at all; it is pretence," Bush said. "The cause of peace will be advanced only when the terrorists lose a wealthy patron and protector, and when the dictator is fully and finally disarmed."

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