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Again, Baghdad defiant on arms Inspection talks fail to last 2 days

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NEW YORK - Talks between the United Nations' chief weapons inspector and Baghdad on dismantling Iraq's weapons of mass destruction collapsed yesterday, only five months after Saddam Hussein promised Secretary-General Kofi Annan that he would cooperate.

Talks between the United Nations chief weapons inspector and the Iraqi government collapsed yesterday after fewer than two days of negotiations.

U.N. weapons inspector Richard Butler will be returning to New York by tomorrow to brief the Security Council, said Danilo Turk, the Slovenian ambassador to the council and its current president.

Mr. Butler was unlikely to get clearance to fly out of Baghdad before dawn today.

"This is a difficult moment," Mr. Turk said. "It is not easy to have the discussions cut short, it is disturbing. We will have to see what Mr. Butler brings."

Mr. Turk said he had consulted with fellow council members, but it was not clear what caused the breakdown in talks.

Earlier, Mr. Butler told reporters in Baghdad that the talks had reached an impasse because Iraq had turned down his proposed "road map" for ridding the country of its weapons of mass destruction.

His comments followed harsh criticism of Mr. Butler's U.N. Special Commission inspection team by Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, who accused the Unscm director of "serving the American policy" and "acting dishonestly."

"The manner in which the inspection teams have acted recently is neither honest nor fast," Mr. Aziz told a Baghdad press conference. "Unscm is back to its old games, to its old tricks."

A State Department official said in Washington that the dispute sounded "potentially serious." But "it's what they do, not what they say," that matters, the official said.

Only days before Mr. Butler arrived in Baghdad, Iraq accused an inspector of spying for the United States by taking photos of a train carrying military equipment. Unscm denied the charge against Jason Gilbert, an American, who was leading a diving expedition to the Tigres River to look for missile parts.

In a letter to the secretary-general dated July 30 and released yesterday, Iraq demanded that surveillance of its nuclear program be downgraded from inspection to long-term monitoring.

The four-page letter, from Saddam's Revolutionary Command Council, also insisted that the inspections be speeded up and the embargo lifted.

The Security Council has said that the sanctions - including a ban on air travel and limits on the sale of oil - will not be lifted until Unscm ensures the weapons have been destroyed.

Iraq, which wants the sanctions lifted by the end of the year, has feuded with U.N. inspectors numerous times.

In February, the U.N. secretary-general defused tension by brokering an agreement with Saddam Hussein to open eight presidential complexes to inspectors. The situation further improved in June, when Mr. Butler gave Iraq a "blueprint" of what it must do to comply with U.N. resolutions that must be met for sanctions to be lifted.

Neither Mr. Butler nor Mr. Aziz gave specifics on what was discussed yesterday, but the "blueprint" calls for further disclosures about the country's missile program and biological and chemical weaponry.

In Washington yesterday, the House voted **407-6** to condemn Iraq for its "**material breach**" of U.N. resolutions and international agreements. A similar sense-of-the-Congress resolution had been passed by the Senate on Friday.

Iraq "has misrepresented to the U.N. and to the world the history of its weapons of mass destruction programs," said Rep. Benjamin A. Gilman, New York Republican and chairman of the International Relations Committee.

The House resolution listed dozens of violations, dating from 1991 and culminating with the discovery of evidence in June that the Iraqis had produced chemical warheads for missiles, a practice they had consistently denied.

Rep. Lee H. Hamilton of Indiana, the committee's ranking Democrat, noted that the words "**material breach**" are usually diplomatic code for violations so serious as to warrant immediate military action, and might be misinterpreted by American allies. But he agreed to vote for the resolution regardless.

Mr. Butler got an even chillier reception than usual when he arrived in Baghdad with 19 officials and inspectors on Sunday, the eighth anniversary of the Kuwait invasion that ultimately led to the catastrophic sanctions.

The Iraqis are irate over Unscm demands to inspect documents that are said to account for special missile warheads Iraq fired during the 1991 Persian Gulf war. The information, found locked in a safe by inspectors last month, was to be unsealed by Iraqi officials and weapons inspectors during this visit.

The Iraqis steadfastly claim they already have surrendered their chemical, biological and nuclear weapons of mass destruction and say attention to such trifling details will not contribute to the early lifting of sanctions.

In its letter to Mr. Annan, the Revolution Command Council called for "a comprehensive national debate on . . . steps that should be taken to protect the supreme interests of the [Iraqi] people and the security and sovereignty of the nation."

An Iraqi official based at the United Nations insisted yesterday that Baghdad was still cooperating with Unscm but lamented that after eight years there was still no hope of having the sanctions lifted.

"We should stick to the material balance of disarmament," said the diplomat. "We don't need the big picture, the history, the full picture. We have fulfilled our obligations under [council resolutions], and we want promises to lift the sanctions."

The reports said a funeral procession for 35 dead children passed outside the building where the talks were being held.

The families said the children, carried in small coffins on the roofs of cars, were victims of the sanctions.

* Sean Scully in Washington contributed to this report, which is based in part on wire services.

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