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THREATS AND RESPONSES: BAGHDAD; Iraq Insists U.S. Experts Are Rushing To Judgment

By Neil MacFarquhar

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Iraq, evidently seeking to play down any criticism that emerged from the first report by the chief United Nations weapons inspector, said today that scientists had not had sufficient time to digest the technical information contained in the country's lengthy declaration of its weapons programs.

Gen. Amir al-Saadi, President Saddam Hussein's top adviser on weapons, said that politicians in Washington and London were creating a lot of static about the 12,000-page declaration, though he doubted that much of the declaration, full of in technical detail, could have been translated from the Arabic and fully analyzed since it was delivered 12 days ago.

''Both the Americans and the British have made sweeping statements that it is all false, it has so many gaps, you can drive a tank through it, etc.,'' General Saadi, a British-trained chemical engineer told a news conference in English. ''Obviously they haven't read it. They didn't even bother.''

General Saadi said Iraq was awaiting an assessment by specialists, not politicians.

''We have only heard politicians talk like that,'' he said. ''We haven't heard any reputable weapons expert come out and pick out the holes in our declaration.''

But a few hours later Hans Blix, the chief United Nations weapons inspector, did just that, saying that the Iraqis had failed to make a full disclosure of its weapons programs.

While noting that the evaluation of the Iraqi declaration was continuing, Mr. Blix said that it contained ''very little'' evidence of previously known arms programs or past efforts to develop weapons.

''The absence of that evidence means of course that we cannot have confidence that there do not remain weapons of mass destruction,'' he said. He avoided, however, characterizing the outstanding questions as a violation of the Nov. 8 Security Council resolution demanding Iraq to provide a full accounting of its weapons programs.

Although Mr. Blix's statement came late in the evening in Baghdad, senior Iraqi officials had said earlier that if clarifications to the declaration were necessary they would be forthcoming.

Taha Yassin Ramadan, an Iraqi vice president, said in an interview with Radio France Internationale, ''I would like to assure you that the declaration is complete.'' He added, however, ''Iraq is ready to supply all the necessary specifics.''

After Mr. Blix's remarks the Bush administration was quick to say that Iraq was in ''material breach'' of the Security Council resolution, but American officials said that did not mean an attack was imminent.

While the dueling statements over whether the report was complete seemed certain to intensify, another possible source of friction could be the questioning of Iraqi weapons experts by United Nations inspectors.

The Security Council resolution provides for the weapons inspectors to fly out of the country Iraqi scientific experts with possible knowledge of the weapons programs, along with their relatives. The suggestion was that the experts would speak more frankly once they were removed from the shadow of Iraq's secret police. One criticism by American officials has been that the United Nations inspectors have been too reluctant to use this authority.

General Saadi said today that by the end of the month Iraq would have completed a list of scientific experts, but that thus far the subject of flying them out of the country had not been broached.

''We will cross that bridge when we come to it,'' he said.

''It doesn't mean automatically they will want to take people out; maybe they will want to meet them inside the country,'' he added, noting that there were questions over human rights and the details involved.

Gen. Hussam Muhammad Amin, who runs Iraq's National Monitoring Directorate, which serves as the liaison with the inspectors, said at the news conference today that in the three weeks since the weapons inspectors had been back they had visited 130 sites, 116 of which were under United Nations monitoring from the previous round of inspections that ended in 1998.