

Options limited by allies in Iraq crisis

By Nicholas Goldberg=(c) 1997, Newsday

AMMAN, Jordan - As the United States considers its options in the deepening crisis with Iraq, a serious obstacle is emerging: Allies around the world - including members of the original coalition that fought Iraq in 1991 - are proving reluctant to go along.

In Paris and Moscow, for example, fierce battles are under way to keep the United States from bombing Iraq. In Cairo, officials are meeting Monday with Iraqi envoy Tariq Aziz, who is seeking to shore up the opposition in the Arab world to any American bombing.

As far away as China - and as crucially close as Saudi Arabia, where U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright appeared Sunday on a lobbying swing through the Persian Gulf - America's tough stance against Saddam Hussein has been met with answers ranging from ambivalence to outright rejection.

"We're in an interim period, and the ball is in the court of a bunch of other countries," said Phebe Marr, a professor at the National Defense University in Washington. "While there's a standoff between the United States and Iraq, these other countries are making their own decisions."

The problem facing the United States right now is straightforward: On one hand, the Clinton administration believes it must take strong action, both to maintain its credibility and to pressure Iraq to reverse its decision barring American

weapons inspectors from the country. But the most obvious response - bombing Iraq - is extremely unpopular with many of America's allies in Europe and the Arab world, and might bring with it the collapse of the worldwide coalition that has opposed Saddam Hussein for seven years.

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In the Arab world, America's policies toward Iraq are coming under increasing fire. The way most

wielding weapons of mass destruction, but they don't want Iraq destroyed, either - the region is unstable enough as it is.

Even Kuwait, on whose behalf the gulf war was fought, announced Sunday that it opposes the use of force in the current conflict.

"1997 is not 1991," said Radwan Abdullah, a political analyst in Amman. "Iraq is extremely weak now. Saddam Hussein is not in a position to rebuild militarily. The sanctions are hitting people very hard - but they have become more or less permanent."

The reluctance of Arab countries to

powerful countries that sit on the Security Council, including, most notably, France and Russia.

These countries complain of "sanctions fatigue" and worry, as do the Arabs, that Iraq is being starved to no avail. Both have made it clear that while they believe Saddam Hussein to be a dangerous dictator who must not be allowed to build weapons of mass destruction, they are eager to see the sanctions lifted as soon as Iraq can reasonably be considered in compliance with United Nations demands.

But however sincere they may be in their concern for the people of Iraq, these countries also have an ulterior motive: Iraq has the second largest proven oil reserves in the Persian Gulf, with at least 100 billion barrels waiting to be unearthed - and Russia and France, in particular, want a piece of that business.

Of course, there is nothing to stop the United States from acting unilaterally, commencing a bombing campaign without the support of the neighboring Arab states or the Security Council. But politically and militarily, such a move is far more difficult. The United States might not be allowed, for instance, to stage its attacks from its air bases in Saudi Arabia. Arab countries might grow even more resentful and angry at the United States and might be less inclined to make concessions in the Arab-Israeli peace process. France and Russia might begin vetoing American-supported resolutions in the Security Council.

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Arabs see it, six years after the end of the gulf war, the economic sanctions that bar Iraq from exporting its goods - except for a small amount of oil to be converted to funds for food - are driving the country to starvation and poverty. Even those countries like Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia that joined the coalition to drive Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait in 1991 feel it is no longer right to punish his people - particularly since Iraq is no longer threatening its neighbors and since the sanctions do not seem to be weakening the regime in any way. They don't want a strong, power-hungry Saddam Hussein

join the anti-Hussein bandwagon is exacerbated by a longstanding sense that Iraq is being held to a higher standard by the West than Israel - which they believe is allowed to flout U.N. resolutions without so much as a word of criticism from the United States.

"Syria is opposed to a military strike because Iraq's violations are not a drop in the ocean compared to Israel's violations," Syrian Defense Minister Mustafa Tlass said Sunday.

The second problem facing the United States as it seeks support around the world comes not from the Arab world, but from several

China frees dissident, sends him into exile in U.S.

By Dele Olojede=(c) 1997, Newsday

BEIJING - After spending the better part of two decades in solitary confinement in prison camps, with most of his teeth lost and his health failing, the former electrician who became a symbol of defiance against China's Communist regime was driven straight to a waiting airliner here Sunday, and into exile in the United States.

Wei Jingsheng, 47, was released by the authorities less than three weeks after a White House summit between President Clinton and Chinese President Jiang Zemin, during which Clinton bluntly

lectured his guest about human rights and the issue of political repression colored the Chinese leader's reception by U.S. audiences.

Having apparently agreed to exile

U.S. diplomat accompanied him on the flight. On arrival in Detroit, Wei was admitted to the Henry Ford Hospital for evaluation and treatment.

The government said the man it

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as a condition of his release, Wei was freed and allowed to meet briefly with family members before being taken aboard a Northwest Airlines flight bound for Detroit. A

frequently denounces as a common criminal had been released for humanitarian reasons.

"Wei Jingsheng has been released on parole for medical treatment

because of his illness by Chinese judicial departments," the official Xinhua News Agency said in a brief bulletin. "Wei has gone abroad for medical treatment."

The announcement was a contradiction of the government's insistence in recent weeks that Wei was in good health, despite repeated assertions by family members and human-rights organizations that he was suffering from multiple ailments, including a heart condition, severe arthritis and back pain. He also reportedly had been tortured and subjected to frequent beatings by other prisoners, allegedly instigated by prison officials.

Along with fellow dissident Wang Dan, Wei was nominated this year for the Nobel Peace Prize, which eventually went to anti-land mine campaigners, though not before the mere prospect of the award sent the authorities here into a renewed paroxysm of condemnation.

A zealous believer in Chairman Mao as a youth, Wei became disillusioned with the rampant "dictatorship of the proletariat" after China's decade-long national convulsion known as the Cultural Revolution, a period of destruction ordered by Mao. In 1978 Wei published a now-famous tract demanding democracy.

He was arrested the following year and, except for seven months starting in September 1993, he had been in jail for 18 years.

The sudden freeing of Wei appeared to be a thank you gesture to Clinton, coming as it did on the heels of the leaders' Oct. 29 summit, which the Chinese side sees as international acceptance of China's emergence as a world power. Clinton rolled out the red carpet for Jiang in spite of severe criticism from Congress and human-rights groups of his "engagement" policy toward China.

White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles said Clinton was pleased Wei had come to the United States for medical treatment. After Wei gets that treatment, "the president looks forward to meeting with him," Bowles said on CBS' "Face the Nation."

Alliance of companies works against Microsoft

By Elizabeth Corcoran=(c) 1997, The Washington Post

Microsoft Corp. is facing an unusual alliance of five powerful companies that are working together on new technology that could topple the software giant from its perch atop the high-tech world.

The five competitors - International Business Machines Corp., Netscape Communications Corp., Novell Corp., Oracle Corp., and Sun Microsystems Corp. - have been driven together by two forces: a cold fear of Microsoft's continued hegemony and a shared vision of a new Internet-based "platform" that would be open to all. To plan strategy, executives of the five companies said they and their colleagues have been meeting, sometimes as often as weekly, to share ideas and technology.

The collaboration has gone on quietly for months but is surfacing now, at a time when Microsoft's business practices are coming under attack from both the Department of Justice and longtime consumer advocate Ralph Nader. The government last month charged that Microsoft is using the dominance of its Windows software to boost its share of the market for Internet-browsing software. And this past week, Nader led a two-day conference in which competitors and critics railed about Microsoft's business practices.

The unusual alliance of five companies, working together to combat what they view as a dominant rival, might once have raised antitrust issues of its own, according to lawyers familiar with the industry.

"Every time you get competitors together in a room, it makes antitrust lawyers very, very nervous," said Mark A. Lemley, a professor at the University of Texas School of Law in Austin. But, he said, "there's an increasing recognition in antitrust scholarship and law that sometimes cooperative arrangements among competitors is a good thing," particularly if the companies let others use the standards they jointly develop.

The vision shared by Microsoft's challengers is simple: The new cornerstone of the information age should be the Internet, which is essentially a collection of standards owned by no single company. The old stand-alone PC, with its Microsoft software and Intel chips, should gradually give way to newer, cheaper alternatives connected to the Net.

To make this happen, the executives are throwing their efforts into three new areas of technology - a computer language known as Java, which was developed by Sun for writing software that can be transmitted easily on networks and run on any computing device; a low-cost kind of computer known as an "NC," or network computer, being pushed by Oracle and other companies; and a programming technique known as "Corba" for building Lego-like blocks of software.

This cooperation in building a common platform "is a lot more like a single company's efforts," said Jon Kannegaard, a vice president at JavaSoft, a division of Sun. "We put someone in charge and define pretty carefully what we're going to do." In some cases, engineers from different companies are meeting on a weekly basis to hash out technical issues.

"There's a very strong incentive for us to push as hard and as fast as possible toward a world where operating systems are commoditized, chips are commoditized, and the Net becomes the platform," said Marc Andreessen, chief technology officer at Netscape Communications in Mountain View, Calif. "We all see an opportunity to make a tremendous amount of money as that world unfolds - as opposed to world where everything is Microsoft and Intel Corp. That's the big issue for all of these companies."

Microsoft's chairman Bill Gates said that by working together, his competitors "end up creating a fairly powerful message that we have to be

aware of." "That's an intense competition at a level beyond what we've seen in the past," he said at his company's annual shareholder meeting on Friday.

The alternative technologies are a few years old. What's unusual is that the five headstrong corporations are cooperating so intensely. "It's rare that there's an opportunity where there's an alignment of interests that lasts for more than a minute and a half," said Andreessen.

But this time, they are working so closely together that "I could give a speech at any of the companies (involved) and pass myself off as a member of their executive committee," said Eric Schmidt, chief executive of Novell.

"We see IBM playing with folks we've competed with down to the mat," said Patricia Suetz, vice president of Internet software at IBM. "We've all realized that part of our lifeblood is making sure that we ... have standards."

The battle between Microsoft and its five adversaries essentially focuses on who should set those standards, and how open they should be.

In the current, Microsoft-dominated world of desktop computers, the underlying operating system translates commands into a language that the machine can understand. Companies that want to build applications - say, spreadsheets or games - have to make their programs fit tightly with the operating system, like pieces of a puzzle.

The alternative vision is of a world where the Internet, with its open standards, can function easily with any type of operating system or hardware. In this open environment, new programs will work everywhere. Much as different brands of telephones work when plugged into the telephone network, "we've got to be able to connect everywhere," Suetz said.

IBM, she said, profited handsomely in the past by pushing its own, proprietary systems. "But like a reformed smoker ... we've become evangelical" about setting common standards, she said.

Executives at the five companies say that their engineers are working together on specific projects in ways that has never occurred before. The issues are "extremely specific and are supported by an emotional and technical agreement at the executive level," Schmidt said.

Even so, there's no guarantee that such an unusual partnership will succeed. For starters, past efforts to build an open platform have failed to capture the market. An open operating system called "UNIX," while common in large, powerful workstations, splintered into many different versions and thus lacked Microsoft's market power.

The five companies in the partnership must also contend with Microsoft's own plans for the future. Microsoft has pumped tremendous energy - \$2 billion and hundreds of thousands of programmers' hours - into making its Windows family of operating systems the very best platforms for building applications. They are selling an orderly, predictable world. Programs work. People know whom to call when something breaks.

Microsoft wants to extend that dominance into the 21st century, with new Windows products that embrace new technologies: a planned Windows98 version for the PC will offer a seamless electronic desktop that combines the operating system with an Internet browser; Windows CE, which will drive smaller computers such as WebTV and handheld devices; and Windows NT for servers and other large computers.

The rival companies say they're eager for all comers to use their new, Internet-based platform - even Microsoft.

"We've invited Microsoft to participate in everything we've done but by and large they've declined," Kannegaard said. "They don't share the vision. What can I tell you? We're not ganging up on Microsoft - they've chosen not to come to the party."

Judge rules proposition 187 unconstitutional

By Patrick J. McDonnell=(c) 1997, Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES - A federal judge ruled Friday that California's Proposition 187 violates both the Constitution and last year's sweeping Congressional overhaul of welfare law, setting the stage for appeals up to the Supreme Court on the divisive 1994 ballot initiative targeting illegal immigrants.

"Proposition 187, as drafted, is not constitutional on its face," Judge Mariana R. Pfaelzer declared in a 32-page opinion on a measure that focused national attention on the issue of illegal immigration.

While observers had anticipated this finding, much of the judge's decision turned on a relatively new law: last year's sweeping congressional reform of the federal welfare system, known as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. Proposition 187 served as a catalyst for much of that law's far-reaching restrictions on benefits for immigrants, those here both legally and illegally.

The 1996 welfare statute, the judge ruled, "serves to reinforce" her prior finding that Proposition

187 is a "scheme" designed to regulate immigration, an exclusively federal domain. State officials seeking to restrict immigrant access to benefits must live by the guidelines outlined in the new federal law, she ruled.

"California is powerless to enact its own legislative scheme to regulate immigration," Pfaelzer declared. "It is likewise powerless to enact its own legislative scheme to regulate alien access to public

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benefits." The judge cited as unlawful the initiative's major sections those barring illegal immigrants from receiving publicly funded education, social services and health care along with complementary provisions mandating that local law

enforcement authorities, school administrators, social workers and health-care aides turn in "suspected" illegal immigrants.

However, the judge did let stand two less-controversial sections that establish state criminal penalties for the manufacture and use of false documents to "conceal" immigration status.

Lawyers on both sides of the issue said the decision clearly signals that she soon will issue a permanent injunction to replace the existing temporary ban. The final order could come by the end of the year, attorneys said.

At that point, the battle surrounding the disputed measure will move to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, where Gov. Pete Wilson and other Proposition 187 supporters are expected to seek a rebuke of Judge Pfaelzer's ruling. Most expect the matter to end up in the Supreme Court, possibly as soon as next fall.

"This is the tombstone for Proposition 187," said Mark Rosenbaum of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, co-counsel in the case against the initiative.