

EXHIBIT 11

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THE STRUGGLE FOR IRAQ: DIPLOMACY; Powell Admits No Hard Proof In Linking Iraq to Al Qaeda

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Secretary of State Colin L. Powell conceded Thursday that despite his assertions to the United Nations last year, he had no "smoking gun" proof of a link between the government of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and terrorists of Al Qaeda.

"I have not seen smoking-gun, concrete evidence about the connection," Mr. Powell said, in response to a question at a news conference. "But I think the possibility of such connections did exist, and it was prudent to consider them at the time that we did."

Mr. Powell's remarks on Thursday were a stark admission that there is no definitive evidence to back up administration statements and insinuations that Saddam Hussein had ties to Al Qaeda, the acknowledged authors of the Sept. 11 attacks. Although President Bush finally acknowledged in September that there was no known connection between Mr. Hussein and the attacks, the impression of a link in the public mind has become widely accepted — and something administration officials have done little to discourage.

Mr. Powell offered a vigorous defense of his Feb. 5 presentation before the Security Council, in which he voiced the administration's most detailed case to date for war with Iraq. After studying intelligence data, he said that a "sinister nexus" existed "between Iraq and the Al Qaeda terrorist network, a nexus that combines classic terrorist organizations and modern methods of murder."

Without any additional qualifiers, Mr. Powell continued, "Iraq today harbors a deadly terrorist network, headed by Abu Musaab al-Zarqawi, an associate and collaborator of Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda lieutenants."

He added, "Iraqi officials deny accusations of ties with Al Qaeda. These denials are simply not credible."

On Thursday, Mr. Powell dismissed second-guessing and said that Mr. Bush had acted after giving Mr. Hussein 12 years to come into compliance with the international community.

"The president decided he had to act because he believed that whatever the size of the stockpile, whatever one might think about it, he believed that the region was in danger, America was in danger and he would act," he said. "And he did act."

In a rare, wide-ranging meeting with reporters, Mr. Powell voiced some optimism on several other issues that have bedeviled the administration, including North Korea and Sudan, while expressing dismay about the Middle East and Haiti.

But mostly, the secretary, appearing vigorous and in good spirits three weeks after undergoing surgery for prostate cancer, defended his justification for the war in Iraq. He said he had been fully aware that "the whole world would be watching," as he painstakingly made the case that the government of Saddam Hussein presented an imminent threat to the United States and its interests.

The immediacy of the danger was at the core of debates in the United Nations over how to proceed against Mr. Hussein. A report released Thursday by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a nonpartisan Washington research center, concluded that Iraq's weapons programs constituted a long-term threat that should not have been ignored. But it also said the programs did not "pose an immediate threat to the United States, to the region or to global security."

Mr. Powell's United Nations presentation — complete with audiotapes and satellite photographs — asserted that "leaving Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction for a few more months or years is not an option." The secretary said he had spent time with experts at the Central Intelligence Agency studying reports. "Anything that we did not feel was solid and multisourced, we did not use in that speech," he said Thursday.

He said that Mr. Hussein had used prohibited weapons in the past — including nerve gas attacks against Iran and Iraqi Kurds — and said that even if there were no actual weapons at hand, there was every indication he would reconstitute them once the international community lost interest.

"In terms of intention, he always had it," Mr. Powell said. "What he was waiting to do is see if he could break the will of the international community, get rid of any potential future inspections, and get back to his intentions, which were to have weapons of mass destruction."

The administration has quietly withdrawn a 400-member team of American weapons inspectors who were charged with finding chemical or biological weapons stockpiles or laboratories, officials said this week. The team was part of the 1,400-member Iraq Survey Group, which

has not turned up such weapons or active programs, the officials said.

The Carnegie report challenged the possibility that Mr. Hussein could have destroyed the weapons, hidden them or shipped them out of the country. Officials had alleged that Iraq held amounts so huge — hundreds of tons of chemical and biological weapons, dozens of Scud missiles — that such moves would have been detected by the United States, the report said.

The Washington Post this week reported that Iraq had apparently preserved its ability to produce missiles, biological agents and other illicit weapons through the decade-long period of international sanctions after the Persian Gulf war, but that their development had apparently been limited to the planning stage.

On North Korea, he said he had received "encouraging signals" from his Asian counterparts that the North might be close to agreeing to another round of six-party talks. But he said the administration would not yield on its insistence that the North first state its willingness to bring its nuclear program to a verifiable end.

Mr. Powell was equally hopeful about a peace agreement to end a grueling civil war in Sudan. "The key here is that after 20 years of most terrible war, Sudanese leaders have come together and are just one or two steps short of having a comprehensive peace agreement," he said.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said the United States and the three other nations promoting peace talks had expected more movement ending hostilities and establishing a Palestinian state. "They are as disturbed as I am that we haven't seen the kind of progress that we had hoped for," he said.

Turning to Haiti, where a decade ago Mr. Powell took part in a delegation that sought to persuade plotters in a military coup to step down, he voiced frustration at the failure of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to reach agreement with his political foes. Violence has flared in recent days as anti-Aristide protesters demanded an end to a political deadlock that has paralyzed the government. The country's Catholic Bishops Conference has tried to broker a new agreement.