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U.S. Defends Evidence of Iraq Plot

Reuter

The Clinton administration yesterday rejected a challenge to its evidence that Iraq hatched an attempt to blow up former president George Bush during his visit to Kuwait last spring. The alleged assassination attempt prompted a June 26 retaliatory U.S. missile attack on Baghdad.

White House spokesman Donald K. Steinberg said the U.S. government had established "with certainty" that Iraq planned to assassinate Bush, who led the alliance that crushed Iraqi forces in the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Iraq has denied involvement in the alleged plot.

Journalist Seymour Hersh wrote in the New Yorker magazine on sale yesterday that the administration's case against Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was based on circumstantial evidence.

The most glaring weakness, he said, was the assertion that a remote-control firing device found in a Kuwaiti car bomb had the same "signature" as previously recovered Iraqi bombs. Hersh said he had contacted seven experts in electrical engineering and bomb forensics who said the remote control devices shown in pictures released by the White House were mass-produced items that "had not been modified in any significant way."

But Steinberg said "a wide body of forensic evidence" led investigators to conclude Iraq was responsible for the plot. Other officials said the United States also had intelligence information establishing this.

The Navy fired 23 Tomahawk missiles June 26 at the headquarters of Iraqi intelligence in response to what Clinton termed "compelling evidence" that Iraqi agents had plotted to kill Bush at Saddam's command.