

the Iraqi Foreign Minister rejected my letter to Saddam Hussein—refused to carry this letter and give it to the President of Iraq. The Iraqi Ambassador here in Washington did the same thing. This is but one more example that the Iraqi Government is not interested in direct communications designed to settle the Persian Gulf situation.

The record shows that whether the diplomacy is initiated by the United States, the United Nations, the Arab League, or the European Community, the results are the same, unfortunately. The conclusion is clear: Saddam Hussein continues to reject a diplomatic solution.

I sent Secretary Jim Baker to Geneva not to negotiate but to communicate. And I wanted Iraqi leaders to know just how determined we are that the Iraqi forces leave Kuwait without condition or further delay. Secretary Baker made clear that by its full compliance with the 12 relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, Iraq would gain the opportunity to rejoin the international community. And he also made clear how much Iraq stands to lose if it does not comply.

Let me emphasize that I have not given up on a peaceful outcome—it's not too late. I've just been on the phone, subsequent to the Baker press conference, with King Fahd, with President Mitterrand—to whom I've talked twice today—Prime Minister Mulroney. And others are contacting other coalition partners to keep the matter under lively discussion. It isn't too late. But now, as it's been before, the choice of peace or war is really Saddam Hussein's to make.

And now I'd be glad to take a few questions.

*Q.* Mr. President, you said in an interview last month that you believed in your gut that Saddam Hussein would withdraw from Kuwait by January 15th. After the failure of this meeting today, what does your gut tell you about that? And in your gut, do you believe that there's going to be war or peace?

*The President.* I can't misrepresent this to the American people. I am discouraged. I watched much of the 'Aziz press conference, and there was no discussion of withdrawal from Kuwait. The United Nations resolutions are about the aggression

against Kuwait. They're about the invasion of Kuwait, about the liquidation of a lot of the people in Kuwait, about the restoration of the legitimate government to Kuwait. And here we were listening to a 45-minute press conference after the Secretary of State of the United States had 6 hours worth of meetings over there, and there was not one single sentence that has to relate to their willingness to get out of Kuwait.

And so, Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press], I'd have to say I certainly am not encouraged by that, but I'm not going to give up. And I told this to our coalition partners—and I'll be talking to more of them when I finish here—we've got to keep trying. But this was a total stiff-arm. This was a total rebuff.

*Q.* Let me follow up on that. Let me follow up. Have you decided in your mind to go to war if he's not out of there by the 15th?

*The President.* I have not made up my decision on what and when to do. I am more determined than ever that the United Nations resolutions including 678 is implemented fully.

Yes, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International]?

*Q.* Mr. President, 'Aziz made a pledge that he would not make the first attack. Would you match that? And also, what's wrong with a Middle East conference if it could avoid a bloody war?

*The President.* No, I wouldn't make it. And we oppose linkage. The coalition opposes linkage. And the argument with Saddam Hussein is about Kuwait. It is about the invasion of Kuwait, the liquidation of a member of the United Nations, a member of the Arab League. And it has long been determined by not just the Security Council but by the entire United Nations that this is about Kuwait. And that is the point that was missing from his explanations here today. And so, there will be no linkage on these items. And that's been the firm position of all of the allies, those with forces there, and, indeed, of the United Nations—the General Assembly—

*Q.* So, you feel free to attack?

*The President.* —so when he talked about his allies there, I don't know who