

conflict is thrust upon us we are ready and we are determined. We've worked long and hard, as have others including the Arab League, the United Nations, the European Community, to achieve a peaceful solution. Unfortunately, Iraq has thus far turned a deaf ear to the voices of peace and reason.

Let there be no mistake: Peace is everyone's goal. Peace is in everyone's prayers. But it is for Iraq to decide.

*Persian Gulf Crisis*

Q. Mr. President, does this mean now that war is inevitable—

*The President.* No—

Q. —and have you made the decision in your own mind?

*The President.* No, it does not mean that war is inevitable. And I have felt that a statement of this nature from both Houses of the United States Congress was, at this late date, the best shot for peace. And so, let us hope that that message will get through to Saddam Hussein.

Q. Have you made the decision in your mind?

*The President.* I have not, because I still hope that there will be a peaceful solution.

Q. Mr. President, there's only 3 days left until the deadline, which isn't enough time for Saddam Hussein to pull out his troops. In fact, you, yourself, wouldn't let Jim Baker go to Baghdad on this date because there wouldn't be enough time. Do you see the possibility of anything happening in these last few days that could avert war or any chance that he will pull his troops out?

*The President.* Well, in terms of the chance, I'd have to say I don't know. And in terms of what could avert war, you might say an instant commencement of a large-scale removal of troops with no condition, no concession, and just heading out could well be the best and only way to avert war, even though it would be, at this date, I would say almost impossible to comply fully with the United Nations resolutions.

Q. Sort of a followup: Have you heard from the U.N. Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar today, and is there any hope on that front?

*The President.* No—well, I don't know whether there is hope on it because I haven't heard from him today.

Q. Mr. President, are you satisfied that countries in the international coalition like France, Syria, and Egypt will take part in offensive operations in the event of hostilities in the Gulf?

*The President.* Yes.

Q. The second part of that question, sir, you've said that if hostilities come it will not be another Vietnam. What kind of assumptions are you making about the duration of a conflict, and can you assure the American people that hostilities would not expand beyond the current theater of operations?

*The President.* Well, I am not making any assumptions in terms of numbers of days, but I have said over and over again that the differences between what is happening in the Gulf and what happened in Vietnam are enormous in terms of the coalition aligned against the Iraqis, in terms of the demographics, in terms of the United Nations action and, I am convinced, in terms of the force that is arrayed against Iraq. So, I just don't think there is a parallel.

But I would like to say that I have gone over all of this with our Secretary of Defense and with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs; and all three of us, and everybody else involved in this, are determined to keep casualties to an absolute minimum. And that's one of the reasons that I authorized Secretary Cheney to move the additional force several weeks ago.

Q. What about firebreaks to keep the war from expanding?

*The President.* Well, I don't worry too much about the war expanding. I have said very clearly, and I'd like to repeat it here, that we will hold Saddam Hussein directly responsible for any terrorist action that is taken against U.S. citizens, against citizens of others in the coalition. So, I must confess to some concern about terrorism. It's not just that it relates to this crisis because I've always felt that way. But if it is related to the crisis, if the terrorist acts are related to it, Saddam Hussein will be held directly responsible for that, and the consequences will be on him.

Q. Mr. President, the pendulum of hope has swung back and forth, and you, yourself, have said you didn't hold out tremendous hope for the last-minute diplomatic ef-