

pliance, are those within the Secretary-General's mandate to advance further steps?

*The President.* What were the two?

*Q.* Well, two of several that are out there are a U.N. peacekeeping force, also a timetable for your withdrawal, and then a Middle East peace conference.

*The President.* Well, my view is that a withdrawal to the status quo ante is not satisfactory and thus there will have to be a peacekeeping force of some kind. In other words, Saddam Hussein will not simply be able to go back to square one if he started that today. There would have to be further compliance with other resolutions and there would have to be a peacekeeping force. Secondly, I have said I don't want U.S. ground forces to stay there a day longer than necessary. So, I am not troubled with that.

On the other question, I simply want to see us avoid what is known as linkage. And I think the American people more clearly see now what I mean by linkage because they watched the 'Aziz press conference where the whole question was shifting—trying to shift the onus away from the aggression and brutality against Kuwait and move it over and try to put the blame on Israel or try to shift the onus to the Palestinian question.

So we have, along with the United Nations—other participants in the U.N. Security Council process—have avoided linkage. And so, I guess I'd say it depends how it is put forward. I, myself, at the United Nations when I presented the U.S. position this fall, spoke up against—eventually wanting to see this question solved. And, indeed, everyone knows that Jim Baker tried very hard to have us be catalytic in bringing that age-old question to solution.

So, I just think whatever is done, it has to be done in a way to preserve the U.S. position that there be no linkage.

*Q.* Would it be fair to extrapolate then that you have discussed these additional steps with Mr. Perez de Cuellar and endorsed them?

*The President.* No, Charles [Charles Bierbauer, Cable News Network], I read before this meeting here with you all some five-point proposal, and I can tell you that was not discussed, and I'm not sure it is a proposal. In this complicated situation in

which all countries that want to see peace come about, we hear a lot of things that eventually prove not to have been correct. And I don't know of any five-point proposal. And just to clear the record, Perez de Cuellar did not discuss with me any five-point proposal.

This is the last one, Dan.

*Q.* Mr. President, you have said on a number of occasions there is no secret diplomacy, no backroom diplomacy, no side-door diplomacy. Are you prepared at this point, given the conversations you had yesterday with Mr. Gorbachev and the meetings you had with the Soviet Ambassador, that there is now still nothing else out there other than the Perez de Cuellar mission that might lead to a diplomatic solution to this?

*The President.* Well, I'd say that is the main initiative out there right now and the only one that I know of, although you hear rumors that others may go. President Gorbachev may want to send somebody. The EC may decide after the Perez de Cuellar mission to send somebody. But I don't know of that for a fact certain. And if Perez de Cuellar finds no flexibility and, indeed, is faced with the rhetoric that we heard coming out of Iraq as recently as a few hours ago, that I think will be a sign of—I'll put it this way, a discouraging sign. And I think it will frustrate the understandably noble intentions of countries all around the world that would like to think that at the last minute this man would come to his senses.

*Q.* If I could follow on that: If the Soviets or the EC or someone else decides they want to send someone to Baghdad after the Perez de Cuellar mission, does that in any way tie your hands in the use of military force after the 15th if these are bumping up against the 15th deadline or slightly thereafter?

*The President.* I would not leave the door open on slightly thereafter. I think we have sent out an advisory—certainly to American citizens, and I would enlarge that to everybody—that the 15th is a very real deadline. Your question, if I answer it, I want to be sure I don't answer it in leaving the door