

else that he must comply—that he will comply. But I can't tell you that this Baker meeting moved the process forward an inch unless—the only bright spot I can put on it is that he sees now, the Foreign Minister sees now, and hopefully he will report this directly back to the President, that the United States is more determined than ever to do its part in fulfilling the United States—in complying with all the resolutions of the U.N.

So, that's about where we are now.

Q. Would you welcome a French mission to Baghdad?

Q. Mr. President, would it help or hinder efforts at this point for the French and other partners in the alliance to—

The President. We have had mission after mission for peace. I'd have to think it out. I talked to the Secretary-General up there in Camp David this weekend about possibly another mission, but he knows and I know that he would operate within the confines of the Security Council. So if that could be helpful, we would be supportive.

The EC wanted 'Aziz to come and talk to them. I don't know, Larry [Lawrence O'Rourke, St. Louis Post-Dispatch], where that stands, but I gather that Iraq, once again, rather arrogantly turned that down. But we are going to keep probing for peace because that's what I want. But we are going to stay firm in our resolve to see the United Nations resolutions complied with.

Q. Did he offer you anything in the way—did he offer anything as an alternative to—a phased withdrawal—

The President. No.

Q. —or some future point, or post-

poning the deadline?

The President. No.

Q. Why did they take 6 hours?

Q. Did they negotiate, sir, or did—

The President. You rush out now and listen to the Baker press conference, and you'll get the answer to those questions better than I could give them, because I think he's in a press conference right now. And that will be followed by the Tariq 'Aziz press conference in Geneva.

But I would like to turn this part of this meeting off by saying that I am very grateful to the Members of Congress here from both sides of the aisle, Democrats and Republicans, who have come together to try to help resolve this crisis in a peaceful manner. And in my view, a resolution supporting the United Nations resolutions or encouraging—of giving the President—telling the President to go out and do this is the best way now, given the intransigence of Iraq, to have a shot for peace.

But there was no concession by the Iraqis, no give, and they rejected the letter, to even take that directly to Saddam Hussein. So—

Q. Rejected your letter, sir?

The President. Exactly. And that will be covered now in the press conference.

Note: The exchange began at 2:05 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. President Bush referred to Secretary of State James A. Baker III; Foreign Minister Tariq 'Aziz and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Javier Perez de Cuellar de la Guerra, Secretary-General of the United Nations. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

The President's News Conference on the Persian Gulf Crisis January 9, 1991

The President. I have a brief opening statement, and then I will take a few questions.

I have spoken with Secretary of State Jim Baker, who reported to me on his nearly 7 hours of conversation with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq 'Aziz. Secretary Baker made

it clear that he discerned no evidence whatsoever that Iraq was willing to comply with the international community's demand to withdraw from Kuwait and comply with the United Nations resolutions.

Secretary Baker also reported to me that

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

stood up at the General Assembly of the United Nations and stood against the resolution that so overwhelmingly passed condemning Iraq. So, there will be no linkage, put it that way.

Q. Mr. President?

The President. Yes, Brit [Brit Hume, ABC News].

Q. Tariq 'Aziz, on the subject of the letter, suggested that it was rude in its use of language and somehow inappropriate to a diplomatic communication. I wonder, sir, if you are willing to release the letter, now that it has run its course, apparently? And if, whether you are or not, would you characterize it for us and tell us what it said?

The President. Well, let me first describe why I wanted to send a letter. It has been alleged, fairly or unfairly, that those around Saddam Hussein refuse to bring him bad news or refuse to tell it to him straight. And so, I made the determination that I would write a letter that would explain as clearly and forcefully as I could exactly what the situation is that he faces. The letter was not rude. The letter was direct. And the letter did exactly what I think is necessary at this stage.

But to refuse to even pass a letter along seems to me to be just one more manifestation of the stonewalling that has taken place. We gave him 15 dates for the Secretary of State to meet with him. And he's off meeting with Mr. A and Mr. B and Mr. C and has no time for that.

So, the letter was proper—I've been around the diplomatic track for a long time—the letter was proper, it was direct, and it was what I think would have been helpful to him to show him the resolve of the rest of the world—certainly of the coalition.

In terms of releasing it, Brit, I haven't given much thought to that. It was written as a letter to him. But let me think about it. I might be willing to do it; I might not. I just don't know. If I thought it would help get the message out to him in an indirect way maybe it makes some sense, although we've been saying essentially the same thing over and over again that was in the letter.

Q. Well, Mr. President, was the refusal by the Ambassador here to even accept the

letter—was that prior to or simultaneous with the refusal of Tariq 'Aziz? I mean, is it your impression—

The President. I think it was after he had made that—I think it was after the letter had been rejected at the table there in Geneva. Just one more effort to try to get this direct communication to him. I'm not sure on that, but I believe that's correct.

Q. Mr. President, there are reports that you are considering a callup of up to a million reservists to reinforce the forces that are serving in the Persian Gulf. What can you tell us about that?

The President. I can tell you nobody has ever suggested that to me.

Q. Is there any reserve callup being contemplated at this point?

The President. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll ask the Secretary of Defense to respond to that question when I get finished here.

Q. Can you tell us what your attitude now is about the use-of-force resolution that you asked for yesterday with the Congress?

The President. Well, I had a good meeting with certain Members of Congress. I've talked to all four leaders this afternoon—Senator Mitchell, Senator Dole, Speaker Foley, Congressman Michel—I talked to him in person here. And I'm not sure where it stands. I am anxious to see and would certainly welcome a resolution that says we are going to implement the United Nations resolutions to a tee.

I don't think it's too late to send a consolidated signal to Saddam Hussein. And I think that would be a consolidated signal. I think it would be helpful still. I've told the Congressmen back in December, as I think I told everyone in this room, that I would have welcomed a resolution back then, provided it would send this solid signal. But if it can do it today, I would welcome it.

So, I don't know exactly where it stands, but I know that there is a good feeling up there. I think people see that the American people are supportive of the policy of this country. I think they see that we have tried the diplomatic track. I hope they know that I am as committed to peace as anyone. But I hope they also know that I am firmly determined to see that this aggression not stand. And I think they're backing me in

that.

So, maybe that ingredient, which hasn't always been quite as clear as it is now, will help as this debate, proper debate, goes forward in the Congress.

Q. Do you think you need such a resolution? And if you lose it, would you be bound by that?

The President. I don't think I need it. I think Secretary Cheney expressed it very well the other day. There are different opinions on either side of this question, but Saddam Hussein should be under no question on this: I feel that I have the authority to fully implement the United Nations resolutions.

Q. And the question of being bound—the second part of that?

The President. I still feel that I have the constitutional authority—many attorneys having so advised me.

Q. Sir, I want to ask you about Francois Mitterrand. But Wyatt's [Wyatt Andrews, CBS News] question opens up a whole area. Let me just ask you: You talk about you don't want this to be another Vietnam.

The President. It won't be another Vietnam.

Q. If the Congress of the United States refuses to give you a resolution that—refuses to even give you a Gulf of Tonkin-type resolution, how can you go to war?

The President. I don't think they're going to refuse.

Q. Okay. Let me ask you about Francois Mitterrand. You say the—

The President. There have been 200—I'll just repeat for the record that there have been a lot of uses of force in our history and very few declarations of war. But I have tried. I have done more consultation with the Congress than any other President. Some of these Democratic Members have told me that. And I have tried to reach out to them in various ways, and I will continue to do it, because I want to see a solid front here as we stand up against this aggressor.

Q. Let me ask you about that solid front—

The President. And I think it enhances the peace. I really believe, John [John Cochran, NBC News], that he is living under a delusion. I think he doesn't think that

force will be used against him. I think he's misinterpreted the debate. I also think he's under a delusion about what would happen if a conflagration breaks out. I believe that firmly, and I've had many, many people whom I respect tell me that. So, I would hope that what we're talking about here would dissuade him from that.

This is a followup.

Q. You've said that the coalition is united against any linkage on the Palestinian question. You've talked to Francois Mitterrand twice today. But in public, he says he is for this international peace conference, and he seems to have no objection at all if Saddam Hussein wants to use that as a figleaf to pull out of Kuwait. You do have an objection. Mitterrand also says that apparently the European Community foreign ministers are going to meet with 'Aziz apparently in Algiers. What if they go in there and say, well, we have no objection to an international peace conference on the Mideast?

The President. The foreign ministers of the EC have been very solid, and so has President Francois Mitterrand, that there will be no linkage. So you're asking me a hypothetical question that I won't have to answer because he's not going to do that.

Q. He said today he disagrees with you on the international peace—

The President. The French Government and the United States Government over the years have had some differences on how the best way to bring peace to the Middle East is. We had a very active initiative underway by Jim Baker. But that doesn't have anything to do with the invasion of Kuwait. And Francois Mitterrand knows that it doesn't have to do with the invasion of Kuwait and the aggression against Kuwait. And I know he knows this. And he's been very forthright about it.

But, yes, he's very frank in saying countries have a different approach to how you solve another very important problem. I would simply refer you back to what I've said on that subject. I think you were with us over in the joint press conference with President Gorbachev when I addressed myself to this. But I am going to avoid linkage.

I listened to that 'Aziz meeting, and all he tried to do is obfuscate, to confuse, to

make everybody think this had to do with the West Bank, for example. And it doesn't. It has to do with the aggression against Kuwait—the invasion of Kuwait, the brutalizing of the people in Kuwait. And it has to do with a new world order. And that world order is only going to be enhanced if this newly-activated peacekeeping function of the United Nations proves to be effective. That is the only way the new world order will be enhanced.

Q. You say that Saddam Hussein doesn't understand yet. Why not a meeting face to face? Why refuse any meeting face to face?

The President. Because he's had every opportunity. We finally said this is the last step. We tried 15 dates in Baghdad. We tried to set up these meetings. And now we tried this one, and there wasn't one single reason to make me think that another meeting between the United States and Saddam Hussein—and the Iraqis would do any good at all. If I felt it would, fine. But it will not.

I talked to the Secretary-General of the United Nations today, and there is a chance that he might undertake such a mission. Certainly we'd have no objection. There's one other reason—and I cite that because this is not Iraq against the United States. It is Iraq against the rest of the world. It is the United Nations that passed 12 resolutions, not the United States. It is the General Assembly of the United Nations—100-plus countries standing solidly against the dictator. And therefore, it doesn't need to be a bilateral negotiation here. We tried that. And we were stiff-armed by an intransigent Foreign Secretary.

And so the answer is, if diplomacy can be effective now, let's keep it in the context in which these resolutions were passed. And I would hope that maybe it would have an effect, but I'd have to level with the American people: Nothing I saw today—nothing—leads me to believe that this man is going to be reasonable. So, back to Terry's question, I have less of a feeling that he'll come around. But we ought to keep trying. We ought to keep trying right down to the wire.

Q. You've repeated the "keep trying." You've cited the Secretary-General of the

United Nations. Secretary of State Baker cited him three times. What exactly could his mission be if there is no alternative to what Secretary Baker—

The President. I'm not sure. What would a mission of Jim Baker have been? It might have been to convince the man that he is up against an immovable force. He's up against something that is not going to yield. He is up against a situation under which there will be no compromise; and there will be none. But because, you see, Ann [Ann Compton, ABC News], I go back to my point, I don't think he has felt this up until now—on both points. I don't think he's felt that force will be used against him, and I think he has felt that if it were, he'd prevail. He's wrong on both counts.

Q. Mr. President, there have been reports that Saddam believes that if it comes to war, even if he's driven out of Kuwait militarily, he can survive in power. Is he wrong?

The President. I think he's wrong on all of his assumptions about what would happen if it came to war—God forbid.

In the middle, and back here. And then we've got three more, and then I've got to go. These—Ellen [Ellen Warren, Knight-Ridder]?

Q. Would he be killed, Mr. President? Would he be killed if it came to war?

The President. I'm not going to answer that. I don't know the answer to that question.

Q. Mr. President, you seem to have ruled out further diplomacy as a—

The President. No, you missed what I said, ma'am—Ellen, about the Secretary-General, possibly. The EC has tried—I'll get back to you. Let me finish this one train of thought and then I'll come to your question—the EC has tried, and, indeed, we see 'Aziz saying no, he wouldn't meet with the foreign ministers. You've seen President Chadli Bendjedid of Algeria to try.

I told the Congressmen, I want to see us go the last step for peace. I want to use everything at my power to encourage people to try. And, indeed, there have been. Arab League has tried. Over and over again, people have tried. And they run up against the same answer. I remember the speculation that came out here in our

papers in this country about a visit by a French delegate that was going over there. The hopes were raised. Nothing happened. So, I just had to argue with the premise because there has been a lot of diplomacy and there may be more.

Now, excuse me for interrupting you.

Q. Sir, you seem to be very skeptical that further diplomacy would work. And yet you've said here today that you haven't given up on a peaceful solution. I wonder where it is you find this hope for a peaceful solution?

The President. I'm not sure I have great hope for it. But I think when human life is at stake, you go the extra mile for peace. And that's what we have tried to do. And I will continue to think of reasons—I told President Mitterrand, I said, look, if you think of a new approach, or I do, please, let's one or the other get on the phone and try. But we remain determined that these resolutions are going to be complied with. I am very concerned that sanctions—I know sanctions alone aren't going to get this job done. And so we're pushing here, and that's what the Baker meeting with 'Aziz was about. I'm not going to give up, though.

Karen [Karen Hosler, Baltimore Sun]?

Q. A lot of people, in looking at the situation, on the outside will say, there must be more than this. There must be some back-channel diplomacy. There must be something going on. We can't be rushing headlong into war this way. Can you tell us that there is nothing, that it is what we appear to be getting—that Saddam isn't going to move and we're going to war?

The President. I'm not going to use that phrase. I am going to say, if Saddam doesn't move, we are going to fully implement Resolution 678. And it will be fully complied with.

But I wish I could tell you I'm more hopeful. There is no back channel. We've tried it directly. I've had to level, and properly so, with our coalition partners as to what I'm doing, and they've leveled with us, leveled with the United Nations Security Council members who are not involved in the coalition with force—for example, the Soviets. A lot of avenues have been tried. But I can't tell you that there's any hidden agenda out there, secret negotiations—

there is not. And it wouldn't be right for us to be off telling you one thing openly here and then going around behind the corner with some secret channel. So, I would like to say if there's any feeling that that's happening, it isn't happening.

Q. So, the entire hope for peace then rests on Saddam backing off from his—

The President. And it has since August 2d—exactly. Because this aggression is not going to stand. And there's an awful lot at stake in terms of the new world order that it doesn't stand. And there's a lot at stake in terms of a lot of human life in Kuwait that it doesn't stand. And there's a lot at stake in terms of how the coalition looks at this that it doesn't stand. So, it won't.

Q. Mr. President, you said that when you first proposed high-level talks between Iraq and the United States that it was because you were convinced the message had not gotten through, had not gotten across. Are you now convinced that the message had gotten across?

The President. Well, I did listen carefully to Mr. 'Aziz, who I thought spoke quite well. I didn't agree with what he was trying to do, obviously, to confuse the issue by refusing to discuss the point at hand, which is the invasion of Kuwait, but I thought he did it well. [Laughter] I thought he kind of sent a signal that they do understand what's up against them, but I still don't believe that they think the world coalition will use force against them. I may be wrong, but that's what I think in here. And I also still believe, as I said earlier, that he somehow has this feeling that he will prevail or that he will prolong. This will not be that. I've heard some wild predictions on this horrible human equation that might be involved if force were used, and I would say I don't agree with some who are arguing the loudest because it's putting the worst case out in terms of loss of human life; I must say that. I don't know. I think 'Aziz understands it, but I'm not sure that Saddam Hussein does.

Q. If I could follow, Mr. President—

The President. A followup question. I'm sorry, I'm going to have one more, and then Charles [Charles Bierbauer, Cable News Network]—I told him, and then I'm leaving. Thank you very much, though.

Q. When you were listening to Foreign Secretary 'Aziz, did you get any kind of particular feelings of anger or—

The President. No, I didn't. I thought it was a very rational presentation, but wrong. I must say, I thought his style was good. From talking to Jim Baker, I thought he—I mean, when I talked to Jim, he said, look, the man presented his case. Clearly, we didn't agree with it. I thought he was quite complimentary of the way the Secretary of State did it. So, the atmospherics, I think, were all right, but he doesn't have it. He doesn't understand it. At least from what he said, he doesn't. Because this is not about some other question of linkage. This is about the invasion and the aggression about Kuwait—the dismantling of Kuwait, the brutality about Kuwait. So, I didn't get a sense of security from listening to that. But I will say that I thought that he presented his views in a reasonable way. He had a tough agenda. He had some tough talking points there. He works for a tough man.

Q. What exactly are you trying to convey here to Saddam Hussein on what he does have to lose? Is it the decimation of his society? Is it the liquidation of his military? Is it losing his own power? Can you be specific on that?

The President. I can't be more specific, but I can be that he will get out of Kuwait, and he will get out of Kuwait entirely, and he will get out of Kuwait without concession. That, I think, is the underlying part of the message.

Q. Mr. President, a question on Israel. Tariq 'Aziz was emphatic that if Iraq is attacked, Israel will be attacked. What are your obligations to Israel? Are you prepared to fight a war throughout the Middle East?

The President. That is too hypothetical a question for me to answer. We are prepared to do what we need to do to fully

implement 678. And I would think that he'd think long and hard before he started yet another war. There is one war on—that's his war against Kuwait. That's his aggression against Kuwait. And I don't think he wants to start another one. So, I'm not going to buy into that hypothesis that the United States would obviously feel that that was a most provocative act, most provocative.

Q. If I may, I don't believe it was a hypothetical question. The question was, what are your obligations to Israel?

The President. We have friends all over the world. We have friends in this coalition. And I'm determined that the United States will fill our obligations there. Clearly, if a friend in that area was attacked, wantonly attacked for no cause whatsoever, not only the United States but I think many people around the world would view that as a flagrant provocation. And I'll leave it stand right there.

Thank you all very much. Thank you.

Note: President Bush's 68th news conference began at 3:55 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of State James A. Baker III; Foreign Minister Tariq 'Aziz and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Mohamed Sadiq al-Mashat, Iraqi Ambassador to the United States; King Fahd bin Abd al-'Aziz Al Sa'ud of Saudi Arabia; President Francois Mitterrand of France; Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of Canada; Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney; George J. Mitchell, Senate majority leader; Robert Dole, Senate Republican leader; Thomas S. Foley, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Robert H. Michel, House Republican leader; President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union; Javier Perez de Cuellar de la Guerra, Secretary-General of the United Nations; and President Chadli Bendjedid of Algeria.