



10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

*From the Private Secretary*

Prime Minister

The Gulf Crisis.

I attach the overnight telegrams  
and two important editorials. The Times  
one is particularly helpful, & you  
should read it if possible.

We still do not have confirmation  
of the departure of our convoy in  
Kuwait because of the difficulty of  
raising the Embassy by radio. We  
have no known homelings shortly after  
0800. The supposition is that all is



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well.

The Americans carried out an interception of an Iraqi ship in the Gulf at 0500 on the morning. The ship in question was the Zenobia bringing tea from Sri Lanka. The USS Goldsborough is trying to divert it into a UAE port. I do not yet know the final outcome.

CD?

2/9.





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## NO SOFT OPTIONS

Even before parliament convenes on Thursday, Labour and Liberal Democrat leaders are reaching for the cloak of the United Nations to justify jettisoning their promises of a nonpartisan approach to the government's handling of policy on the Gulf. A letter to the prime minister from Paddy Ashdown, the Liberal Democrats' leader, demands commitments which would severely constrain Britain's future military options. These Mrs Thatcher has consistently, and rightly, refused to make.

Mr Ashdown expects the government to state unequivocally that Britain will "follow sanctions, and sanctions alone", in pursuit of its aim. He asks for an undertaking that Britain accepts that it is for the UN Security Council, not individual states, to decide if further action is required, and a pledge that Britain will not initiate offensive action without the council's explicit authorisation. He challenges the government's contention that the individual and collective self-defence clause of the UN Charter, article 51, provides adequate legal grounds for assisting Kuwait to recover its territory. Significantly, his letter never mentions the victim, Kuwait.

Labour's Gerald Kaufman, not content with launching his own peace plan for the entire Middle East last week, has taken this attachment to the United Nations a stage further. Not only has he made Labour's support for the government conditional on the latter acting only with specific UN authorisation, but he purports to believe that "the whole object of this exercise is to uphold the authority of the UN". The UN is only a means to an end. A more upside down sense of priorities in the face of Iraq's aggression is difficult to imagine.

Any approach now which encourages President Saddam Hussein to believe that he can hold on to Kuwait decreases the hope of his withdrawing and thus increases the risk of war. The rapid deployment of American forces in Saudi Arabia pre-empted an Iraqi move on the Saudi oilfields. The decision to use American and British forces to impose the naval blockade on Iraq forced Saddam (and the international community) to take sanctions

seriously. But Iraq remains in possession of Kuwait, and has refused even to discuss withdrawal with the UN secretary-general, whose peace efforts seem increasingly futile.

Should Iraq now conclude that no further action will be taken without UN approval, Baghdad will multiply its efforts to bypass sanctions and hope for the world to tire of confrontation. What then? Article 51 says that states are justified in using force against aggression only "until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security". This famous catch-all phrase allows room for judgment on the definition of "necessary". More to the point are the successive resolutions on Kuwait itself, which imposed enforceable sanctions in order to remove Iraq from Kuwait. These resolutions explicitly left open the question of article 51, under which the British, American and Arab land and air forces are operating.

In the escalation of any conflict, states directly involved in resisting an acknowledged threat to peace are likely to form their own views on the appropriate use of force. Important as it is to use the United Nations as the basis for any multinational action, failure to compel Iraq to retreat would be a far greater, and more consequential, defeat for international law than acting without the express sanction of the security council. A week of tense negotiations was required to obtain security council endorsement of an already existing naval blockade. That provides a foretaste of the difficulty of getting 15 states to approve offensive military action to drive Iraq from Kuwait. There will always be peace moves in the offing, excuses to defer a decision.

Mrs Thatcher should not bow to Mr Ashdown's further demand that Britain limit itself in advance to removing Iraq from Kuwait. The tactical equation of any conflict over Kuwait could well require military action against Iraq, both to ensure a successful withdrawal, and to prevent any early repetition. The prime minister understands this and deserves ungrudging support on Thursday from all sides of the house.



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## Time for reflection and diplomacy

**I**T IS not surprising that some strong differences of opinion are emerging about the way ahead in the Gulf. From the Left, there are demands that the West should rule out direct military action against Saddam Hussein. From the less thoughtful elements of the Right, there are strident cries for early military action, argued in terms which suggest that delay signifies weakness. To this clamour is added a third element, the impatience of the world's media for a *démarche*, compounded by the mindless neutrality of some television reporters, who seek to advance a media cause contemptuous of any national or public interest.

Yet, hard on the world's nerves though a period of limbo may be, it serves important purposes. President Bush and his allies must be right to explore every peaceful possibility of forcing Saddam's withdrawal, before resorting to direct action. The absolute failure of the UN Secretary-General's weekend talks with the Iraqi foreign minister in Amman greatly strengthens the American hand. Time for reflection and diplomacy has reinforced the international front against Saddam. The importance of ensuring that Iraq loses not only Kuwait, but also the means to renew aggression with nuclear or chemical weapons, is being driven home to many people.

If war comes, it will be remarkable if America and its allies can command the whole-hearted support of the world community. Formal backing from the UN cannot become the *sine qua non* of Washington's policy. Stresses within the Soviet Union, between reformists and those who find it intolerable to abandon a former Moscow client, are unlikely to be resolved wholly to the West's satisfaction. But these difficulties do not invalidate Washington and London's policy of doing everything possible to ensure that if military action becomes necessary it would have the widest possible international support.

Some Conservatives, fearful that the resolution of the Western democracies will crumble, summon memories of Munich and 1938, but draw wrong conclusions from them. Chamberlain was undoubtedly gulled and humiliated by Hitler. But most historians believe that the interval before war broke out was decisive in convincing the Western world, and above all the British dominions, that Hitler must be fought; and in buying time to provide Britain with the bare minimum of military resources to carry on the struggle. In the Gulf crisis, it cannot be repeated too often that the United States and its allies should not embark upon direct military action until they have deployed the strongest possible forces, to ensure a decisive conclusion. It is improbable that this optimum moment will come before October. If it is decided to allow the economic blockade to tighten its grip, the internal stresses upon Saddam's regime are unlikely to become critical before next year. This may prove too long to wait, given the fragility of the international coalition.

But it will be a sorry reflection upon the Western public, and the media which influence it, if its will and patience cannot now endure a pause. This period of international diplomacy and discussion should strengthen popular understanding that the challenge of such a dangerous aggressor as Iraq's President — and it is the fact that he is an aggressor, not that he is a tyrant, which poses an intolerable threat — must be met. It is not easy for Western leaders to strike the right public balance, displaying determination without appearing committed to war. The Prime Minister, whose performance has been impressively low-key since the crisis began, at times came close to stridency in a weekend television interview, though she was entirely right to reiterate that the tragic predicament of the hostages in Iraq cannot be allowed to determine policy. The Commons debate later this week will provide an important opportunity for her to emphasise her commitment to the frustration of Saddam, without exposing herself to the charge of bellicosity.

A week before Iraq invaded Kuwait, we argued in this column that, whether or not Saddam's threats led to war, the West must sooner or later expect to fight somewhere in the world in defence of its vital interests, of which oil is the foremost. This moment may indeed come in the Middle East in the next few months. But it can seldom or never be wrong to be seen to explore the limits of diplomacy and indirect pressure before taking action which will cost many lives, and the justice of which will be debated before the bar of history.