

PRESS DIGESTMain News

Your refusal to do deals with Iraq shares the lead in the broadsheets with the US rejection of talks with Hussein and EC agreement on joint action. The crisis is seen as deepening, with the tabloids splashing the seizure of Britons from their Kuwait homes.

Widespread coverage of our planes and ships in Gulf as pool reports are used. One story (Telegraph) says more RAF Tornados may be sent to Gulf

Telegraph, Times, Guardian, Today, Sun, Star and Express use our military material from Gulf

Mitterrand warns his people that war in the Gulf is inevitable. Senior French officials believe the US could launch massive air raids within next 2 days Mirror.

You will not negotiate over Britons detained in Kuwait, and accuse Saddam of using women and children as bargaining counters Times

You make clear that presence of trapped Britons will not deflect us from naval action. You accuse Iraq of flouting fundamental human rights and hold Saddam personally responsible Telegraph

Sanctions must have teeth, you say at rare Downing St press conference. But are careful not to talk up the prospect of war Independent

To the bewilderment of many in Whitehall, you accuse the Red Cross of being dilatory about releasing trapped foreigners Guardian

"The Contempt of Maggie" is the Mail's headline. You call it repulsive for Saddam to use human beings to make bargains

Express, Today and Sun also stress the refusal of deals.

"Give us the Tools": you demand extra powers to blockade Star

In strongest joint statement ever, EC threatens a united response if harm comes to any EC citizen and defies demand to close embassies Telegraph

In response to deepening isolation, Iraq offers to start talks with the US. First sign that Saddam may be looking for a compromise, but Americans reject the plan Independent

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Mirror and Mail lead with the Britons being held at gunpoint in Kuwait . You are gravely concerned but will not bargain.

US refrain from using force to stop Iraqi tanker, accepting Security Council restraints on action Independent

More than £10 billion wiped off value of shares as fears of conflict increase Guardian

Senior Labour sources think party will seek recall of Parliament in next two weeks Independent

Much coverage of Tory criticism of petrol price rises.

Today calls them profiteers. Young men on Jupiter prepare to die for their country as petrol bosses bleed their country dry

Washington officials say the US is not planning a first strike, despite bellicose tone of Bush speech on Monday Independent.

EDITORIALS

Independent says you struck the right note of calm resolution at your press conference. You were as firm as President Bush on all the main issues, but wisely avoided sounding as bellicose. In the rest of Western Europe, unity and the willingness to deploy forces are now increasing, after a disappointingly muted initial response. If the Iraqi blackmailer does not release his hostages and hand back Kuwait the West cannot promise to refrain from the use of whatever force is needed to make him do so.

Telegraph criticises Western European leaders with the exception of you. They have shown a depressing reluctance to act in concert with US over Iraq. Saddam has now succeeded, by threatening the lives of innocent foreigners in further uniting Western opinion against him. The pieces are now in place to squeeze the aggressor.

Mail says that in your first public statement for a fortnight, you hammered your message home in words that had the toughness of tempered steel. You have been tried once before and not found wanting. We are both relieved and reassured that you are still in charge now. With every passing week, the possibility of war tilts towards probability. Truly a terrible prospect only exceeded in horror by the nightmare of appeasing this ravaging aggressor.

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Times says that you were at your robust best yesterday. You firmly reject the notion that the detention of western hostages would inhibit naval action. But Douglas Hurd struck a slightly different note, implying that the hostages would count heavily and that "it is not in our interests to put our nationals in greater danger". Should military action become unavoidable, there must be no trace about ambiguity about Britain's will.

Mirror attacks the crude profits of the oil companies in the Gulf crisis. You make an appeal for restraint, but spoiled it by repeating the own arguments for their speedy increases.

Star - The petrol giants claim they are not profiteering from the Middle East crisis. Who are they trying to kid? The Government refuses to act because of its sacred cow market economy. Every increase swells the Treasury's coffers. So there is no incentive for any Government to impose controls. And we are the victims.

Today says the oil companies have a moral duty to support the nation during this frightening crisis. To do otherwise would be treachery.

In Today feature, your press conference is said to have been a consummate performance. The fact that we are not yet officially at war with Iraq makes no difference to Maggie. Not for you the false Chamberlain-like assurances of silly pieces of paper. You are cranked up and ready to go.

Express believes that Saddam Hussein has sealed his own fate by continuing to build his human shield. This cynical and barbaric assault on civilised codes of conduct will revolt decent people everywhere. Our hearts go out to all hostages, of whatever nationality. But far from weakening our resolve their plight should strengthen our determination to see that, having sown the wind, Saddam Hussein shall reap the whirlwind.

Sun asks you to record a message of hope to British people captive in Kuwait. Tell our people that they are not forgotten. How about it Maggie?

Philip Aylett
Press Office