

INTERNATIONAL

Hussein urges peaceful dialogue

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — Iraq's Saddam Hussein asked Sunday that a peaceful dialogue replace "threats and warnings" to resolve the Persian Gulf crisis, departing from his confrontational position in the standoff with the West.

In a message to the Arab and Islamic masses, he said he wanted to launch a dialogue with France to explore the possibility of using President Francois Mitterrand's ideas on the crisis as the basis for a settlement.

He urged his 1 million-member army to remain ready to fight any foreign attempt to drive Iraqi forces from Kuwait. But — in another departure from past speeches — not once in almost 45 minutes did he renew his pledge never to relinquish the emirate he seized two months ago.

Saddam's message was read over state television and radio by announcer Miqdad Murad and monitored in Nicosia.

The backdrop behind Murad alternated between a portrait of Saddam in a Western suit and one of him in military uniform praying in front of a picture of minarets.

The message marked the birthday of the 7thcentury Prophet Mohammed and was punctuated by lengthy recitations from the Koran, Islam's holy book

Saddam said reducing tensions could begin "if dialogue replaces the policy of threats and warnings, if the language of peaceful politics replaces the policy of troop buildups and threats of the use of force."

He withdrew his previous opposition to the involvement of foreign powers in the search of a settlement to the dispute.

"Should the international community be involved in a solution to the crisis, then the emphasis should be on the initiative of Aug. 12, 1990, which underlined that . . . peace could not be achieved without the settlement of all the problems of the region," he said.

In earlier statements, he rejected any outside involvement, insisting the problem was for Arabs to resolve.

Saddam said, "Withdrawal of foreign forces from the lands of Najd and Hejaz (Saudi Arabia) and the Arabian Gulf, and ending the blockade of Iraq, is a slogan for all Arabs and believers to raise."

But he did not repeat an earlier threat to dislodge these troops from the region by force.

