

Bush's letter refused

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — It sat on the conference table — a letter from the president of the United States to the president of Iraq.

Its exact contents are still a secret. But not the overall message: Withdraw your 500,000 troops from Kuwait by next Tuesday or risk the probability of war.

Secretary of State James A. Baker III had brought the letter to Geneva to turn over to Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz.

As recounted by sources familiar with the meeting, the letter remained sealed in an 8-by-10 manila envelope with the "White House" logo in black on the cover.

Three times during the 6 hours and 27 minutes of talks the two delegations left the room.

The letter did not. It remained on the table, watched over by one of Baker's security guards — with an open invitation to Aziz to pick it up.

But Aziz left it there. Just before they parted, Baker asked him to take the letter with him to Baghdad.

Aziz refused, and the letter is now making the rounds of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East with Baker.

If anything symbolizes the stalemate it is the letter and Aziz's reaction.

Baker had handed over a copy in English to the foreign minister during their talks.

His hands trembling, and reading slowly, Aziz digested the contents — and denounced them later at a news conference as threatening and undiplomatic.

As Tuesday's deadline approaches, U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar is working on a formula for the withdrawal of the half-million Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

Aziz's rejection of Bush's letter is graphic evidence that the U.S. message — quit Kuwait or face war — just may not be getting through.

Troops disappointed by failure of peace talks

EASTERN SAUDI ARABIA (AP) — The people who would fight listened anxiously to Armed Forces Radio in the desert or watched television in the cities as U.S. and Iraqi delegations met in Geneva.

Then Wednesday's talks ended and Secretary of State James A. Baker III announced that he saw no signs of an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

A few groans broke the silence among viewers at the U.S. military's Joint Information Bureau.

"I think we're going to war," said Sgt. 1st Class Earl Godette, 36, from Ellesheim, Germany, where his 11th Aviation Brigade is based.

"I think the guys in the military want peace the most since they're the guys who are going to get shot at. But I'm not surprised it came to this point," he said after the failed talks between Baker and Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz.

At a commercial port where the first shipment of M1A1 tanks for the Marines was being unloaded, Sgt. Bernard Castro was resigned.

"OK, so we'll go in and do our job then. At least we've got something to go on," said Castro, 24, whose Marine Reserve unit operates amphibious assault vehicles.

An army tank unit from Germany that had stopped at a ho-

tel near an air base in eastern Saudi Arabia to make phone calls, seemed stunned by the news as its members in green camouflage milled in the lobby, their rifles slung casually on couches.

"I hope it won't come to a whole lot of casualties," said a staff sergeant, who spoke on condition he not be identified.

Spec. Justin Van Schaik, 20, questioned the entire rationale of war.

"It's more or less a world gone mad," he said. "Great, there are justifications, rationales but I don't think it goes far enough. Where do you find the reason for men killing men? OK, maybe I should have declared conscientious objector years ago.

"Now I'm stuck here. I can live with it but I am a little disappointed," he added.

Pfc. Douglas McGahey, 19, an Army operating room technician, said "it would be suicide for the Iraqis not to move out.

"The stubbornness of Saddam Hussein is just mind-boggling," he said. "I hope that he comes to his senses. It's obvious he's a very intelligent man ... but regardless of what his motives are, to me that's not worth the amount of lives that would be the result of his stubbornness."

Shevardnadze favors troops in Baltic

MOSCOW (AP) — Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze said in an interview that deployment of Soviet troops to seven secessionist republics is not an excessive use of force.

He also said in an interview with The Christian Science Monitor Television in Moscow, released Thursday, that his successor probably will take part in the scheduled Feb. 11-13 summit between presidents Bush and Mikhail S. Gorbachev.

Shevardnadze cited fears of a dictatorship in a speech last month in which he resigned as foreign minister, a position he has held since 1985.

Gorbachev on Monday ordered Soviet paratroopers to help track down draft resisters in seven republics. Baltic leaders charged the move was intended to suppress their inde-

pendence drives and was confirmation of Shevardnadze's warning of impending dictatorship.

However, when asked on Wednesday whether the deployments were further evidence of dictatorship, Shevardnadze said no.

"I can't say this is the display of some kind of dictatorship," he said. "This is a simple desire to introduce order, because it's impossible to live under conditions of chaos and anarchy. It's chaos and anarchy that can lead to a dictatorship. That's my answer."

Shevardnadze, a native Georgian, acknowledged that "there's very serious concern in the Baltics and in Transcaucasia in general, including Georgia. We have to combine our efforts to instill order so that people stop being afraid for their lives, for their

children, and this is a real, real danger."

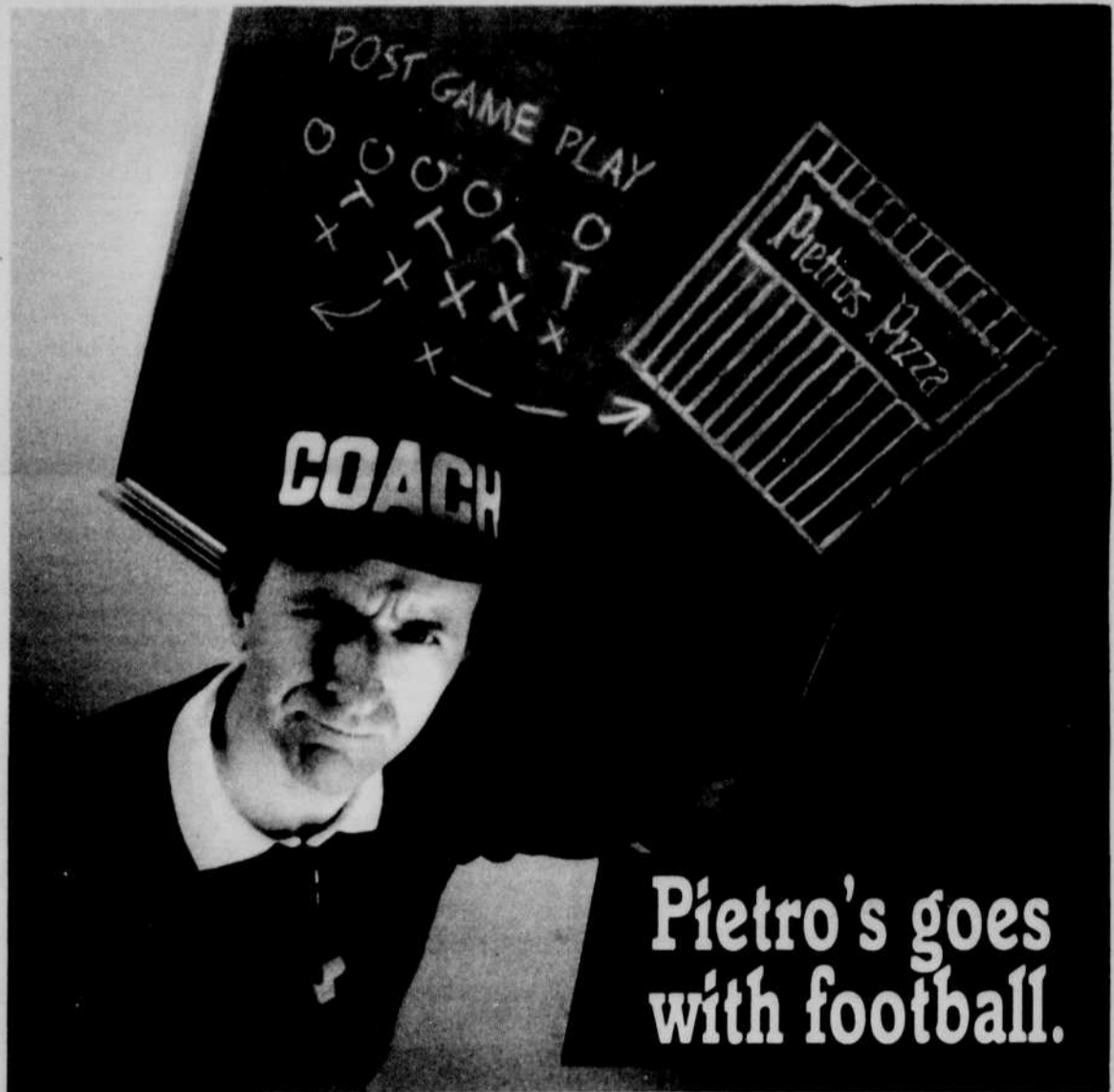
He said after his resignation that he had considered resigning last year after Soviet paratroopers killed 19 demonstrators in a nationalist rally.

His comment about whether he would stay on the job until the Bush-Gorbachev meeting was his first since he resigned.

Asked whether he would take part in the summit conference, Shevardnadze replied, "I don't think so. I don't think so. I am sure that in the coming days the Supreme Soviet (legislature) will decide."

Gorbachev has said Shevardnadze will remain foreign minister until a successor is chosen, but has given no date.

Shevardnadze has been instrumental in helping thaw relations with the United States through direct meetings and summits.



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