

Bush's message to Iraq is played during prime time

WASHINGTON - President Bush warned the Iraqi people in a television broadcast Sunday they stand "on the brink of war" because Saddam Hussein misled his countrymen into invading Kuwait.

Bush, in a taped message from the Oval Office, said, "Iraq stands isolated and alone." "Saddam Hussein tells you that this crisis is a struggle between Iraq and America. In fact, it is Iraq against the world," said Bush, standing in front of his desk with the American flag behind him.

Iraqi television broadcast the Bush message Sunday evening around 7 p.m. local time (11 a.m. EDT).

The White House had expressed skepticism beforehand that Saddam would let his people hear Bush's words. But the Iraqi president kept a promise to broadcast the taped message in prime time.

"Our embassy in Iraq monitored this and it appears that it ran in its entirety," said a White House spokesman, Sean Walsh.

The eight-minute broadcast was followed immediately by an even longer rejoinder from Saddam, read by a spokesman, that met Bush's words of warning with a mixture of ridicule, disdain and defiance.

"Iraq finds itself on the brink of war," Bush said. But "war is not inevitable. It is still possible to bring this crisis to a peaceful end."

Bush pulled a paper from his pocket and quoted the Iraqi president's own words in a Nov. 28, 1988, speech saying "An Arab country does not have the right to occupy another Arab country."

If Iraq invaded another Arab nation, "We would want Arabs to send their armies to put things right. If Iraq should become intoxicated by its power and move to overwhelm another Arab state, the Arabs would be right to deploy their armies to check it," Bush quoted Saddam.

Iraq invaded Kuwait on Aug. 2, prompting the U.S.-led military buildup in the Middle East and a United Nations-sanctioned economic embargo. Bush told the Iraqi people Saddam had misled them.

"Saddam Hussein has told you that Iraqi troops were invited into Kuwait. That's not

true," Bush said. "Your own returning soldiers will tell you the Kuwaitis are fighting valiantly in any way they can."

Bush taped his address last Wednesday after an Iraqi information minister suggested Bush would be given time on the country's television network, as Saddam Hussein has been by American television.

The tape, including a voice-over translation and captions in Arabic, was ferried by a State Department courier to Baghdad and turned over to the government there.

The Iraqi ambassador in Washington had declined to take possession of it Thursday, but assured Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger it would be shown in full on Iraqi television once it reached Baghdad.

The Iraqi rebuttal called Bush's remarks full of lies. Citing Bush's call in a recent speech for "a new world order," the statement said Bush fancied himself "the dictator of the whole world."

"Bush was trying to fool the Iraqi people with certain words," it said.

It offered no reply to what Bush called Iraq's "barbaric" holding of foreign hostages in Iraq and Kuwait. But it scoffed at Bush's words about the "shameful" plight of foreign workers stranded as refugees on Iraq's borders.

These workers left Kuwait "because of the U.S. threats of war," Saddam said through the spokesman.

To Bush's argument that the world was united against Iraq, the Iraqi leader called it "a dispute between right and wrong." The struggle pits "the United States and its allies... against Iraq and all Arabs and all Muslims and all believers in the whole world."

And it said Bush was naive to think he could drive a wedge between the Iraqi people and their president.

Bush said the United Nations sanctions against Iraq are meant "not to punish the Iraqi people, but as a peaceful means to convince your leadership to withdraw from Kuwait. The decision is in the hands of Saddam Hussein."

"No one -- not the American people, not this president -- wants war. But there are times when a country, when all countries... must stand against aggression," Bush said.

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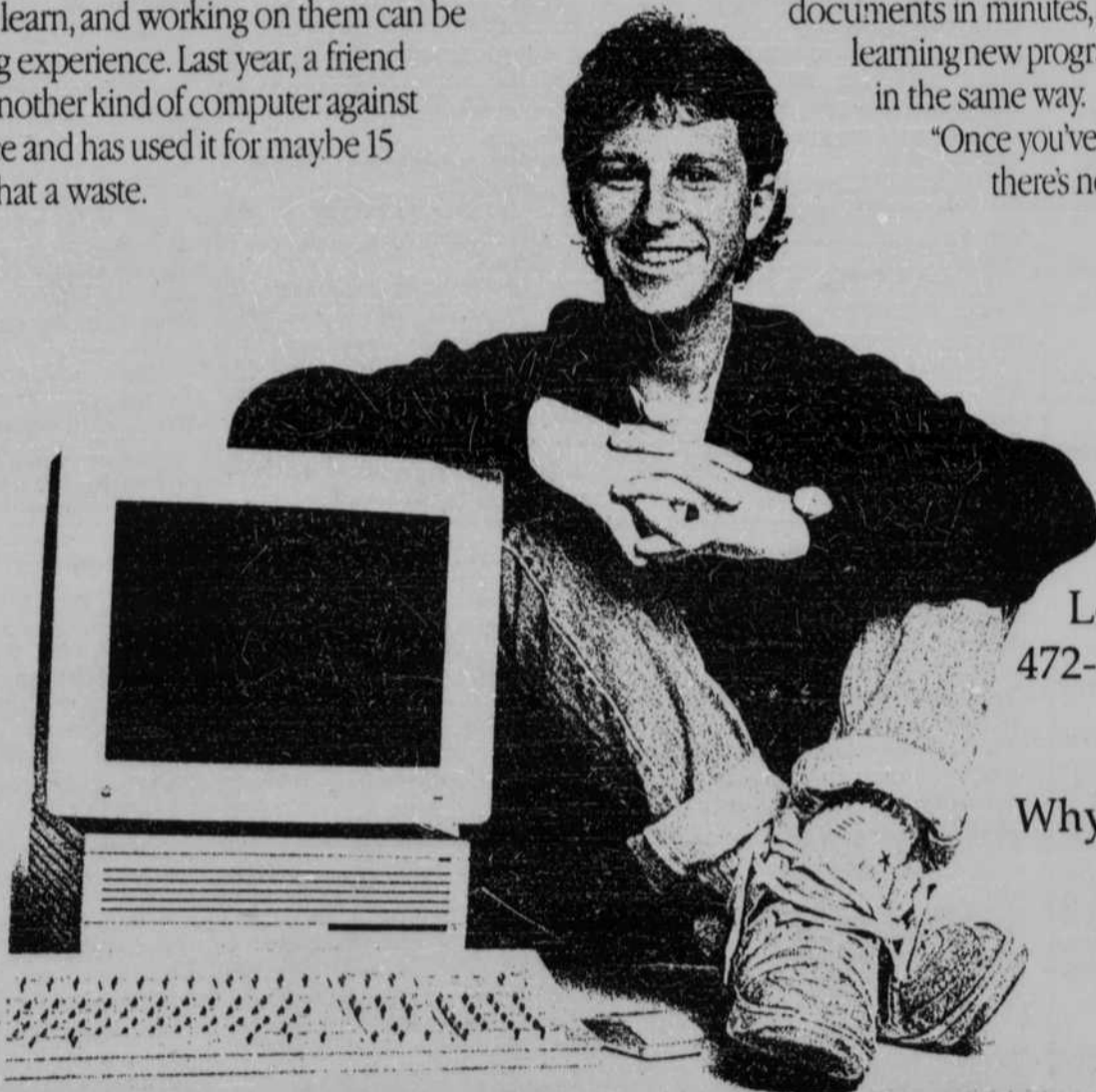
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