

Warnings against war mount in gulf conflict

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service
WASHINGTON (CNS) — Warnings against premature U.S. military action against Iraq mounted in late November and early December as the Persian Gulf crisis moved a giant step closer to possible war in January if Iraq refuses to leave Kuwait.

"We have to be very careful — the stakes are too great, the potential loss of life is so very tragic," Archbishop John R. Roach of St. Paul-Minneapolis told Catholic News Service Dec. 3.

From the Vatican, in one of his last acts before retiring as papal secretary of state, Cardinal Agostino Casaroli Nov. 30 asked "all those of good will to promote a patient dialogue."

Calls for patience and time to let worldwide economic sanctions against Iraq take effect came not only from religious leaders, but also from diverse political and military leaders, including two former U.S. military joint chiefs of staff and several former secretaries of defense.

Key to the new phase in the crisis was the U.N. Security Council resolution Nov. 29 authorizing use of military force against Iraq if it does not get out of Kuwait by Jan. 15.

The next day President Bush invited Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to agree to a series of meetings in Baghdad and Washington to negotiate a peaceful solution.

Bush emphasized, however, that the United States would not compromise on

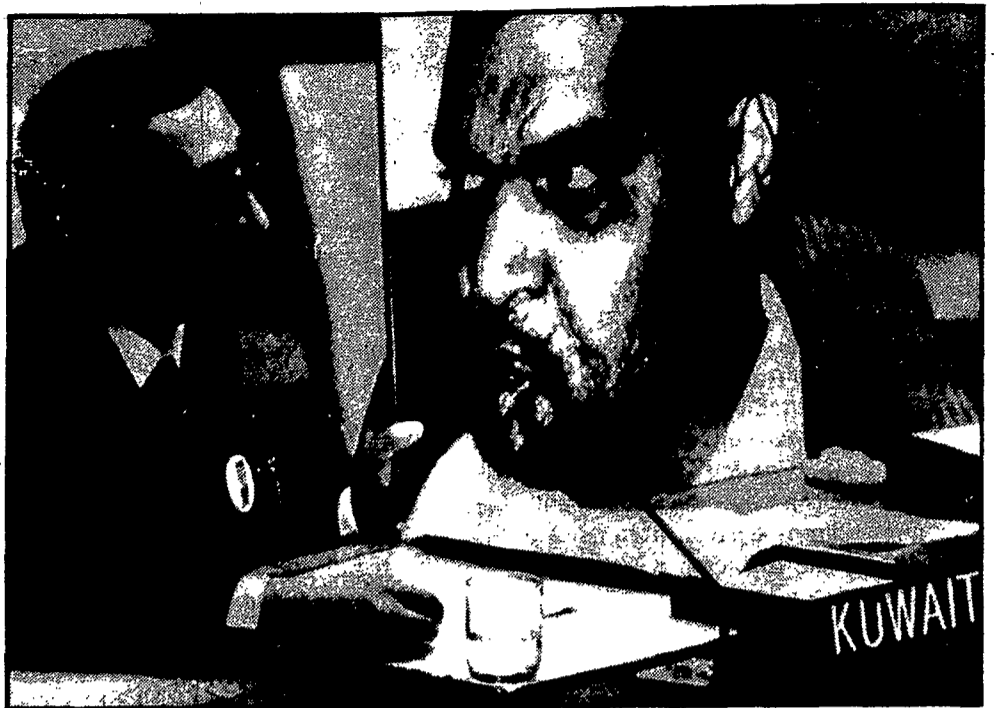
various U.N. resolutions since the August invasion demanding Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait, the freeing of hostages and the restoration of Kuwait's legitimate government.

Just before the U.N. resolution authorizing force against Iraq, Archbishop Roach, as new chairman of the U.S. bishops' International Policy Committee, wrote to all U.S. senators and representatives urging a "national dialogue" and "informed and substantive discussion on the ethical dimensions" of the Gulf crisis before embarking on a course of war.

The archbishop met with U.S. Catholic Conference staff members the weekend of Dec. 1-2 to prepare testimony on the Persian Gulf that he was to give Dec. 6 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

In an interview before he returned to St. Paul Dec. 3, he told CNS that he thought

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IRAQI ATROCITIES — During a U.N Security Council session Nov. 17, Dr. Essa Ibrahim holds a photo of a Kuwaiti man injured by Iraqi forces during the invasion of Kuwait.

AP/Wide World Photos

Archbishop believes Hussein ready to negotiate

By Agostino Bono
Catholic News Service

ROME (CNS) — Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is ready to negotiate an end to the Persian Gulf crisis "without any preconditions," said Melkite Archbishop Hilarion Capucci after returning to Rome with 70 Italian hostages he helped free.

The Rome-based archbishop said the U.S.-led alliance against Iraq should dialogue with Hussein because "a Gulf war would be apocalyptic, with many deaths,

and causing an economic crisis unprecedented in the world."

A solution to the Gulf crisis should be found within the framework of an international conference examining the entire range of Mideast problems, including Lebanon and the Israeli-occupied territories, he said Nov. 29, the day after returning to Italy with Italians previously detained in Iraq.

The Syrian-born archbishop, convicted in Israel in 1974 of smuggling weapons to the Palestine Liberation Organization, spoke at a Rome news conference and announced that he planned to return to Iraq Dec. 2 to seek the release of further hostages, including non-Italians.

Before returning to Iraq, Archbishop

Capucci planned to fly to Tunis, Tunisia, to meet PLO leader Yasser Arafat and seek his aid in securing further hostage releases. The archbishop said Arafat's intervention with Hussein helped in the release of the 70 Italians.

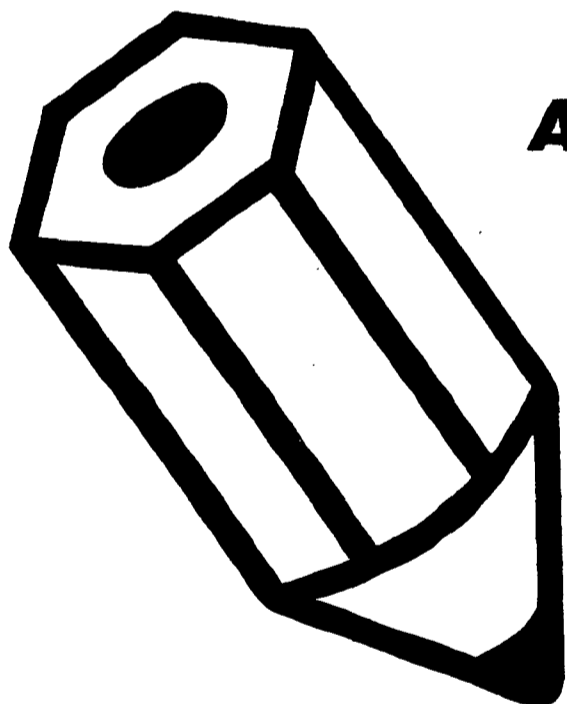
Archbishop Capucci, who met Hussein in Baghdad, said the Iraqi president "almost promised" that more hostages would be released.

Hussein also said he is willing to dialogue with his opponents, said Archbishop Capucci, 68.

"This is an opening in his attitude," the archbishop said.

"This is a notable step forward, and we should show our openness," he added.

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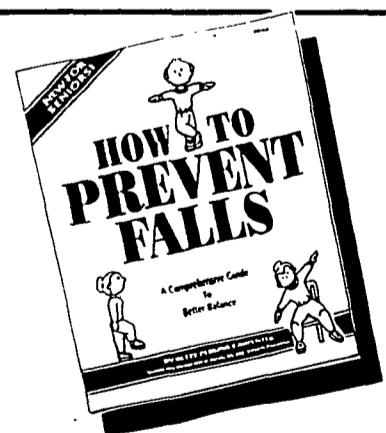
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