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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

*Letters to the Editor may be sent by facsimile to 071-558 6455.*

### Leaving Saddam alone is a fool's solution

SIR — It seems that Saddam Hussein can do whatever he will — start a war every 10 years, brutalise the population of an ally, hold hundreds of foreign hostages in appalling conditions. Yet many in the West are willing to let him be, if only he would permit them to do so.

The merest signal of some flexibility, especially a willingness to withdraw from Kuwait, would apparently convince many in the West that the Allied goals had been achieved. The expeditionary forces in Saudi Arabia could then return home without having endured a single war casualty.

But this is a fool's solution. Leaving the Gulf with Saddam still in power, his arsenal intact and his prestige enhanced ("The whole world dared not tangle with me," he will preen) will merely defer a confrontation. If he manages to stay in power we have assured ourselves a worse problem in the future.

Mr Baker is right, therefore, to contemplate visiting Europe to maintain support (report, Oct. 27). Saddam's record shows he will continue to build a military force of soldiers, tanks and aircraft. He will increase the deadliness of his chemical weapons and increase the range of his missiles. He will keep working on his biological and nuclear capabili-

ties. And the embargo imposed by the outside world, pious intentions to the contrary, will do no more than slow down these programmes.

Then, when Saddam feels strong enough, he will deploy this arsenal to gain decisive influence over the entire Gulf region. If he succeeds, he controls over half the oil reserves and determines the production and price of the world's most important commodity. With that he becomes not just the top Arab but a truly powerful figure on the world stage.

This calculus about the future should guide our actions now. Conflict with Iraq in the coming months will be fraught with difficulties, to be sure, but Saddam will pose problems in the years ahead that will make these seem like child's play. When he is ready for us, I believe the world will no longer dare confront him. We will then rue the lost opportunity of 1990.

Simply put, if war does not take place now, it will come later. Many in the Middle East realise this and have already made their decision; Kuwaitis, Saudis, and Israelis would rather take care of Saddam now, and they are right.

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