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PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF NEW MARITIME HEADQUARTERS
SYDNEY - 25 FEBRUARY 1991**

More than ten years ago, in 1980, an idea for a Maritime Command Centre was developed as part of a larger plan to modernise the Garden Island Dockyard and Fleet Base facilities. In the years that followed, the project evolved to reflect the growing need for joint force operations, and to keep pace with the dramatic advances in the technology of computing and communications.

The result is that today we see a completed Maritime Headquarters building that brings together in one place all the functions of command, control, communications and intelligence that are essential to the effective maritime operations of the Australian Defence Force.

These Headquarters, staffed by members of the Army, Air Force and Navy, embody our commitment to ensuring that the three arms of the Defence Force work effectively together under joint commands.

It has been fortunate that the Maritime Headquarters commenced operations in August 1990 - the month that Iraq invaded Kuwait. From the outset, the Headquarters have been tested by the many operational demands placed on it by our deployment to the Gulf. And the results have proved that this maritime headquarters has been well-planned and is doing excellently the job of supporting our ships in the Gulf.

Our ships are serving today in the Gulf to support the United Nations determination that Iraq's invasion of Kuwait must not be allowed to stand.

On the very day on which Saddam Hussein invaded the Gulf, the UN Security Council in Resolution 660 demanded that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait unconditionally. That is still the UN's position.

At any time since his invasion, Saddam Hussein could have withdrawn; but at every stage he has instead rejected the UN's resolutions and ignored the actions of the international community, regardless of the cost to his country, to his people and to the world.

The international community has not acted hastily to force Saddam Hussein to leave Kuwait. It has acted steadily and deliberately for nearly seven months to persuade him, and then to coerce him, to give up what he had no right to in the first place.

First the UN applied mandatory and comprehensive economic sanctions. Saddam Hussein ignored them. Then the UN imposed a deadline of 15 January. Saddam Hussein ignored that too. When that deadline passed, the coalition with the backing of the UN undertook a major air offensive against Iraq's military and strategic capabilities.

With shocking recklessness and against all reason Saddam Hussein still clings to Kuwait despite the damage that has already been done to his country and people, and the tragedies that lie ahead for them.

He has spurned the diplomatic efforts of the Soviets and others over recent days to secure his compliance with UN resolutions, and he has ignored the coalition's deadline for withdrawal.

Saddam Hussein can have been under no doubt; had he started to pull his forces out of from Kuwait as the UN resolutions required, his armed forces would not have been attacked as they withdrew.

Diplomatic efforts to avoid the ground war failed for the same reasons that all previous efforts to solve the crisis have failed; because Saddam Hussein has refused to withdraw unconditionally from Kuwait.

Australia, through our naval task force in the Gulf, will play its part in this final phase of the Gulf crisis, just as we have played our part throughout the past seven months.

The deployment of Australia's naval forces to the Gulf has been a major undertaking.

I know a great deal of work had to be done by the ADF to ensure that our vessels and crews were quickly prepared and dispatched to the Gulf, and were at the peak of their performance on their arrival, ready to join with the multinational forces opposing Iraq.

One central key to our effective participation in that force, and to the efficient performance of that work, lies here in the Maritime Headquarters and in the command arrangements and philosophy which underlie its development.

The close link between the Maritime Headquarters and representatives of the other Services ensures that the most efficient and effective use is made of Australia's defence capabilities.

So let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Maritime Commander and staff at the Maritime Headquarters for all the outstanding work they have done in support of Australia's commitment of forces to the Gulf.

The public gaze often rests on the exploits of Service personnel abroad. And I am sure that everyone here today, in this grave climax of the Gulf crisis, shares with me a deep pride in the way in which our Servicemen and women are acquitting themselves in the Gulf.

But this is also a time to pay tribute to the professionalism and commitment of those whose contribution is made here in Australia, as an essential part of our Gulf operations. Here in the Maritime Headquarters lies the responsibility for the planning and coordination of Australia's first contribution to combat operations since the Vietnam War. It is your expertise and your dedication on which we all rely.

My congratulations to you all on the important job you are doing. Our men and women in the Gulf are in good hands.

I would now like to declare open the new Maritime Headquarters.

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