



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

16 June 1981

Dear Michael,

UN Security Council: Israel/Iraq

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We spoke, and you have a copy of the Iraqi draft Resolution (UKMis New York telno 525) and of the telegram of instructions which issued to the Delegation this evening (FCO telno 312 to UKMis New York). We hope that on the basis of these instructions Sir A Parsons will be able to persuade the Arabs not to table a Resolution including mandatory sanctions - which would be certain to attract a US veto, and negative votes or abstentions from other members of the Council fully prepared to subscribe to an appropriate condemnation of the Israeli action.

The problem will be if the Arabs nevertheless decide to go ahead with a sanctions provision. The Secretary of State had a meeting this evening to discuss the options, which look roughly like this:

1. A Vote for the Resolution

The Iraqi draft provides in paragraph 3 for mandatory sanctions, albeit for sanctions which fall well short of an embargo. Taking the words at their face value (and I have not had time to consult Legal Advisers), it seems clear (and is certainly arguable) that member states would be required to refrain from giving assistance but that there would be no impediment to normal trade. We could seek to distinguish on this basis our vote for the Iraqi Resolution and our consistent vote against sanctions on South Africa. Moreover, as we do not give such assistance to Israel, we would be voting for no more than our present policy. On the other hand, a decision to vote for a sanctions Resolution would expose us to considerable US and domestic political criticism; and it would be widely alleged that the real basis for the difference between our response to sanctions Resolutions against South Africa and against Israel was that we valued our economic links with the former much more highly than those with the latter. Lord Carrington's view is that it would be extremely difficult for us to vote for such a Resolution.

2. A Vote Against the Resolution

It is probable that the French would abstain and we should therefore find ourselves with the Americans in vetoing the Resolution in the face of a flagrant breach

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of international law by the Israelis which we had already publicly condemned as such. Our ability to work constructively with the Arabs in favour of a peaceful settlement would be much diminished, and the effect would be unlikely to wear off to any significant extent during our EC Presidency. Our bilateral interests in individual Arab countries would also be likely to suffer. In short, the prospect is an extremely unattractive one. We have not voted against a Middle East Resolution for over 25 years and this would obviously be a very bad occasion on which to do so.

3. To Abstain

This is the [redacted] cowards way out, and there are [redacted] political arguments in favour. It is however difficult to produce a logical defence of such a course which would be likely to appear convincing in public. The best we might do is to say that the crucial phrase in the Resolution ('any military, economic or technical assistance which might encourage it to pursue its policy of expansion and aggression') was much too vague to be acceptable in a mandatory Resolution; and that, while there was a limited field of assistance which we would be prepared to have UN members obliged to refrain from, the present text - and the interpretations put upon it by some of the speakers in the debate - had much wider implications which we were not prepared to support. In the circumstances therefore we had had no alternative but to abstain. This line of reasoning is pretty contorted; and, if we were to decide on this course, we would in effect be committing ourselves in principle to support at least [redacted] one form of mandatory sanctions in a subsequent Resolution.

The only other thought that I can offer at this stage is that it might be possible for us to remove some of the political disadvantages of a veto by subsequently tabling (in as good company as we could muster) our own Resolution. To have any chance of helping politically with the Arabs it would have to contain a toughly-worded condemnation of Israel and reproduce as much as possible of the Iraqi text. It would also have to be something on which the Americans could (just) abstain, as there would be no overall advantage in tabling a Resolution which they would feel bound to veto. We have not had time to take this idea any further, but we are putting it to Sir A Parsons with a request for urgent comment.

(B J P Fall)
Private Secretary

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