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28th February 1984

NOTE FOR THE RECORD OF A MEETING WITH THE US DEFENCE SECRETARY.
MR WEINBERGER, AT 0815 ON TUESDAY 28TH FEBRUARY 1984
AT ADMIRALTY HOUSE

Those present:

The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP
 Secretary of State for Defence

Field Marshal Sir Edwin Bramall
 Chief of the Defence Staff

Mr J N H Bletloch
 DUS (P)

Mr Knapp
 DG Marketing

Mr R C Mottram
 Private Secretary of the
 Secretary of State

Mr Weinberger
 US Defence Secretary

Ambassador Charles H Price II

Mr Richard Perle

Mr Lauder

Mr Burch

Major General C Powell

Mr Cassidy

2. Mr Weinberger referred to the importance of making contingency plans in advance against a possible closure of the Straits of Hormuz. Should the Iranians close the Straits, he saw the need for very prompt action because, if we delayed, resolving the situation would become that much more difficult. The Americans were in touch with other countries in the region who were as concerned as they were about the implications of the possible export of Shi'ite fundamentalism. They were, however, reluctant to commit themselves about any action in public. The Secretary of State commented that few things were more likely to encourage Shi'ite fundamentalism than a substantial US military presence in the Middle East. Such a reaction would also offer the Soviet Union the best chance to exploit the problem. Mr Weinberger commented that it was not a US presence which would stir up fundamentalist opinion since this was already inflamed.



3. The Secretary of State suggested that the Iranians would close the Straits only if their own capacity to export oil had been cut off. Perhaps in those circumstances we should look at ways in which we might help to get their oil flowing again. Mr Weinberger said that he doubted whether the Iranians would be interested in being placated in this way. They were not seeking a sensible outcome in the war itself: they were essentially demanding that the Iraqis should shoot their President and pay huge reparations. While they had not started the war, they showed no interest in stopping it. He emphasised that he was not advocating an invasion of Iran; but what was required was proper planning so that we could react quickly to events. The Secretary of State said that he accepted the need for this. He was just apprehensive about the response in the area should a significant US force be deployed there. The Americans would provide a focus for criticism. It would be better if the problem could be sorted out by the countries involved.

4. CDS referred to the alternative scenario that the war went against Iraq which then collapsed with a breakthrough of Shi'ite fundamentalism towards Israel, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Mr Weinberger agreed that this was a Jordanian nightmare. Such a development might suit the Soviet Union whose presence in Syria would then take on a different significance. He confirmed that the Americans were trying to step up their military assistance to Jordan with whom their relations had been fitful in the past. They also hoped to do more with Oman and Saudi Arabia. The Secretary of State said that a breakout of fundamentalism in this way would not necessarily suit the Soviet Union which with its large Muslim population had as much to fear from this movement as anyone else. Mr Weinberger said that the Russian Government could deal with this problem so much more easily than those which had to depend upon popular support. The Secretary of State asked whether the Americans would intend to make contact with the Soviet Union prior to any military operation in the Straits to make clear its limited nature and Mr Weinberger confirmed that this would indeed be their intention.

5. Ambassador Price asked the Secretary of State about the British Government's attitude towards the problem. The Secretary of State said that he very much agreed with Mr Weinberger's view that critical Western interests were at stake in this area. If the Straits were to be closed he would want to take a cool look at the best way of re-opening them rather than immediately moving to a military solution. He would have in mind two crucial questions: would military action make things better or worse in the region and, if we intervened, where might we find ourselves in three months time. Our experience over the deployment of the MNF to the Lebanon showed the importance of looking carefully at where events might lead us. He said this as someone who had supported the MNF deployment at the time and still believed the effort in the Lebanon had been worth trying. He would also have it in mind that it was not in the Soviet interest, at least in the short term, to exploit a crisis. DUS(P) pointed out that it was important to be clear on the objective of any Western action.



It would be much easier to justify action designed to keep open international waters than an attempt to reverse the spread of Shi'ite fundamentalism. Mr Weinberger agreed that the latter objective could not in any case be achieved by military action. The Secretary of State reverted to the importance of seeking to persuade Iraq not to take action in the first place which would prompt an Iranian attempt to close the Straits.

6. The meeting ended at 0930 hours.

[Handwritten signature]

Ministry of Defence

Mr R C Protherm
Private Secretary of the
Secretary of State

Major General C Powell
Mr Cassidy

2. Mr Weinberger referred to the importance of having contingency plans in case we do not have a complete closure of the Straits of Hormuz. He said that we should have the ability to deal with such a contingency. He said that the British Government was not in a position to offer the United States the best chance of success. Mr Weinberger commented that it was not a good idea to have a contingency plan which was not a contingency plan.



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-Sir O Wright, Washington

... also. ... this problem ... popular support. The Secretary of State asked whether the Russians would intend to make contact with the Soviet Union prior to any military operation in the Straits to make clear its limited nature and Mr Mainberger confirmed that this would indeed be their intention.

5. ... Government's attitude towards ... said that ... Western ... to be ...