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10 DOWNING STREET - -

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

14 August 1990

Dear Dominic,

IRAQ/KUWAIT

I spoke to General Scowcroft at lunchtime to convey our concern about the use of the port of Aqaba to evade sanctions against Iraq. We were not aware of any action yet to interdict shipping going to or from Aqaba. We saw that mainly as a task for the Americans or other Western navies, since our effort was mainly in the Arabian Gulf. The worst outcome would be if the Israelis were to try to interdict such shipping. But until something was done, Aqaba would remain a major hole in the sanctions arrangements. General Scowcroft said that the Americans fully shared our concern. Quite by coincidence, he had just come off the telephone with King Hussein who had asked to come across to the United States immediately to talk to the President about this and other problems. He would probably come on Thursday morning. The King had not given much indication of how helpful or otherwise he was going to be, although it was probably a good sign that he had asked for a meeting. General Scowcroft said that it would be very helpful to the Americans if we could let them have any thoughts about what might be put to the King. I said that I would arrange for these to be passed through the Embassy in Washington.

I took the opportunity to suggest to General Scowcroft that it was important to avoid being heavy-handed in attempts to co-ordinate the actions of Western navies in the Gulf. This sort of co-ordination functioned best if it was done at an operational level, without a large political flag stuck on it. General Scowcroft said he had not been aware of sensitivities in this area and was glad to have them drawn to his attention.

I told General Scowcroft that the Prime Minister would find it helpful to have, on a very private basis, some indication of the likely American response to CW attack by the Iraqis should that happen. General Scowcroft said he would like to talk to me about that at some point. I said that I would be away for a few days. He said he would put some thoughts in a message.


SECRET

SECRET

- 2 -

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I am copying this letter to Jane Binstead (Ministry of Defence) and to Sir Robin Butler.

Yours sincerely,


C.D. POWELL

The Hon. Dominic Asquith,
Office of the Minister of State,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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