

FOREIGN SECRETARY - PC - LONDON - 20 AUGUST 1990

- 1 -

FROM JAMES LEE FOR COI RADIO TECHNICAL SERVICES

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE

GIVEN BY THE FOREIGN SECRETARY, MR. DOUGLAS HURD,

IN LONDON,

ON MONDAY, 20 AUGUST 1990

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All desks
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Prime Minister 20/8

You will want to see this before your own press conference tomorrow

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FOREIGN SECRETARY:

As you know, the Prime Minister has returned to London and she chaired a meeting this morning of the Ministers most closely concerned with the Iraq-Kuwait crisis; there have been further meetings and I will try and answer your questions. I do not want to make a long statement.

We went over the ground fairly thoroughly with those of you who were with us on Friday about British nationals in Kuwait and Iraq and, of course, this still continues to BE head of our concerns.

As I said on Friday, we are in a stage now which may last for a bit, when there are each day alarms and stories, some of them true, some of them not true, which circulate and which are extremely difficult to verify and find out whether they are correct or not.

What is not in doubt is that the Iraqis, by their own profession, are moving our citizens around, moving other western citizens around, and are using them as a shield and you will have seen that we have taken every opportunity over the week-end, public and private, to point out to the Iraqis that this behaviour is illegal and repulsive.

FOREIGN SECRETARY - PC - LONDON - 20 AUGUST 1990

- 2 -

It was a British initiative at the Security Council which helped first of all to secure informal conclusions and then a specific recommendation, as a result of which the Secretary-General of the United Nations has sent his Chef de Cabinet, Mr. Dayal, to the area - he hopes to reach Baghdad tomorrow - and he will be operating on the basis of the very clear and welcome Resolution which the Security Council passed about foreign nationals in Kuwait.

William Waldegrave will be seeing tomorrow Mr. Somorooga (phon), who is the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross and that will be in Geneva.

Tomorrow, after the WEU meeting in Paris, we will be having a European Community meeting of the Twelve and I will seek to make sure that the solidarity of the Twelve on this subject of foreign nationals, which has been very good up to now, is fully maintained.

We have got difficult decisions to take, particularly as regards our embassies in Kuwait which the Iraqis have said should close by the 24th. We are not accepting that instruction and we will seek to make sure that we have people in Kuwait able to keep in touch with our community there for as long as physically possible. That is just an illustration of the kind of difficulties, the kind of problems which we will have to tackle over the coming days and which we will do our best to tackle together.

Just a word about the WEU meeting in Paris tomorrow: that will be, I believe, a successful effort to bring together, under the cover of the WEU all the contributions which the different WEU members have been pledging in recent days and I hope that we can do that. The forces will stay under national command, our forces, French forces, Dutch forces, other forces, there is no question of

FOREIGN SECRETARY - PC - LONDON - 20 AUGUST 1990

- 3 -

that. What needs to be worked out is effective coordination of their effort including, of course, coordination with the Americans, with the Australians, with the Canadians, with others outside the WEU who are joining in this effort.

Can I just repeat finally, before I answer your questions, that the purpose of our deployment, as we made clear at the time of the decision, is to deter Saddam Hussein from attacking Saudi Arabia or other friendly states in the Gulf; and secondly, to help to implement the Resolution which the Security Council has already passed about sanctions against Iraq, following their annexation of Kuwait. Those are the two purposes of our deployment and that continues to be the position.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

JOHN DICKIE (DAILY MAIL)

Does that statement of your two purposes mean that at the moment you are opposed to any military solution? If so, have you conveyed that to President Bush?

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

The President of the United States has been very clear all the way through that the purpose of the United States deployment is as I have stated ours, that it is a build-up of forces adequate to deter further attack.

I believe myself that we lived through a very dangerous few days when there was a real prospect of an Iraqi attack on Saudi Arabia. I hope that has been deterred. One cannot be sure, dealing with someone like Saddam Hussein. That was the reason why we moved so quickly and why we, alongside the United States, have sent in aircraft up-front to the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia.

We may have moved past that moment of immediate danger but that deterrent needs to remain in place and so do the forces which are needed to implement the Security Council Resolution, that is to say the embargo against Iraq.

JOHN DICKIE:

Does that mean you are opposed to a military solution?

FOREIGN SECRETARY - PC - LONDON - 20 AUGUST 1990

- 5 -

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

That means that those are the purposes for the forces down there at the moment. I think, in answering your question - certainly other questions - I said that neither we nor the Americans or others have ruled out further measures if sanctions prove ineffective so that is the position. We have never ruled that out, but that is not the purpose of our deployments.

QUESTION:

Are you planning to call in the Iraqi ambassador if necessary...any other diplomatic action...take against Iraqis here?

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

The Iraqi ambassador is constantly being called in; he is left in no doubt day-by-day of what I have said, that the action taken by the Iraqis as regards foreign nationals is illegal and repulsive, so he has no doubts about that.

I am very keen that our embassy in Baghdad and so long as possible our embassy in Kuwait, should be able to function at full strength in helping the British community. It bears out a point I have tried to make for many months now: by having an ambassador in a place, we are not doing a benefit to the country involved - we are doing a benefit, among others, to the British citizens involved and so that influences our handling of the Iraqi embassy here.

QUESTION:

What positive action, Foreign Secretary, do you think can be taken to ensure the safety of British citizens in the region without

FOREIGN SECRETARY - PC - LONDON - 20 AUGUST 1990

- 6 -

endangering other people?

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

I mentioned three things: the action taken by the Secretary-General of the UN as a result of our initiative in the Security Council; I mentioned a visit that the Minister of State will make to the Red Cross tomorrow; I mentioned coordination, solidarity among the Twelve. In addition to those three things, which are part of the continuing effort, our officials in Kuwait and Baghdad are doing their utmost - doing a formidable job - to keep in touch with people in difficulty, find out what is happening. It is extremely difficult to do so. I pay tribute to Rob Haywood; I pay tribute to those who are in the same business. We are in close touch with them, tracing what is happening. Trying to relieve with accurate information the anxieties of friends and families is going to be a very difficult business which may, as I say, go on for some time but we are putting the necessary effort into that.

QUESTION:

Two questions:

First of all, is Britain seeking UN cover for a blockade against Iraq? Secondly, would Britain, under any circumstances, be prepared to risk British or indeed any of the expatriate lives by military action?

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

On the first point, there are more or less continuous

FOREIGN SECRETARY - PC - LONDON - 20 AUGUST 1990

- 7 -

discussions in New York by the Permanent Members of the Security Council, by informal meetings of the Security Council as a whole, by formal meetings. All this seems to be more or less continuous.

We have no doubt, as you know, about the legal basis of the action which we are taking to implement the embargo. Since there are others who are anxious to help but have a different legal view, there would be advantage in having a Resolution which put that beyond doubt. Whether that Resolution is attainable, whether it is attainable today or tomorrow, I do not yet know, but it is certainly something which is being discussed in a very friendly and constructive way, I must say, particularly by the Five Permanent Members of the Security Council.

On your second point, I do not think I want to add what has been said. I have set out again, I have repeated, paraphrasing and not in any way modifying what President Bush has said. I have set out the purposes, the reasons for which we are asking British sailors and airmen to go to the Gulf, the reason why they are now there. We have never ruled out further measures, if those prove to be necessary but they have not been decided upon and they are not the subject of present work.

QUESTION:

...the embassy in Kuwait, I understand that a short time ago the Iraqi authorities said that diplomats who did not move to Baghdad would lose their diplomatic immunity and be treated like other foreign nationals. Did that influence your decision to keep the embassy there open at all?

FOREIGN SECRETARY - PC - LONDON - 20 AUGUST 1990

- 8 -

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

This is a difficult business. We have discussed it with our partners; I have discussed it with my fellow Foreign Ministers and will do so again tomorrow.

Our view at the moment is that we should try and keep British officials in Kuwait as long as possible so that they can keep in touch and give what help they can to members of the British community. I say "as long as possible" - I do not know how long that will be.

QUESTION:

(inaudible)

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

I do not think that in the circumstances we have just been talking about it would be a great move to take refuge in the British Embassy in Kuwait. There are a number of Britons in the British Embassy in Baghdad and the ambassador will just have to handle that situation as best he can; he is clearly not turning people away but equally, there are hazards and difficulties about trying to receive British citizens into those premises.

QUESTION:

...this evening in New York says that Britain and the US are actually going to put forth a specific Resolution asking to spell out what military steps would be taken to enforce the trade sanctions against Iraq. Can you tell us at all about what that Resolution will say or what kind of steps you specifically are going to ask?

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

I think I have covered that really. I said there were discussions going on, particularly among the Five Permanent Members of the Security Council. We have no doubts about the legal cover for the action which we are taking, legal cover based on the collective right of self-defence, which is set out in Article 51 of the Charter, and the very specific request for help which we have had from the Kuwaiti Government, so we have no doubt about that.

There are others who have a somewhat different legal view - the Soviet Union I am thinking of in particular. If we can find a United Nations Resolution which clears up that matter, which clears that difficulty out of the way, obviously there would a considerable advantage in getting it. Whether it is possible, as I said, today or tomorrow, I do not yet know.

QUESTION:

Foreign Secretary, there does seem to be now a feeling that there is now an inevitability about armed conflict in the Gulf, particularly from America; indeed, Henry Kissinger said over the week-end that America has now crossed the Rubicon.

Would you agree that this is now likely to happen?

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

No!

JOHN DICKIE:

Secretary of State, can you clarify that answer you gave about Baghdad? Has ... Walker the authority to accept British

FOREIGN SECRETARY - PC - LONDON - 20 AUGUST 1990

- 10 -

citizens into the embassy or residence and in fact, have any done so already?

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

Of course he has the authority and as I have said, a number of Britons have been there for, I think, a day or so.

It is not something which we would specifically wish to encourage because it might not be something which could be sustained for very long but the ambassador, whom I know well and you know well, is a very sound man of good judgement. He of course has authority to deal with the situation. He will not be turning British people away; he will be seeking to make the best arrangements he can for their convenience and safety.

QUESTION:

Foreign Secretary, did you discuss with the Prime Minister the talk about the recall of Parliament?

Further to that, can you characterise her response and her mood at the moment and tell us when you think we might hear from her?

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

I have discussed the recall of Parliament with the Prime Minister - I did that yesterday. All I can say about that is that no decision to recall Parliament has been taken. You had better ask No. 10. I do not think it will be, in the nature of things, terribly long before your desire to hear from the Prime Minister in person is gratified.

FOREIGN SECRETARY - PC - LONDON - 20 AUGUST 1990

- 11 -

QUESTION:

Do you have any information where British nationals in Kuwait who have been rounded up have been taken and if so, where>

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

No precise information; that is why I said there are all kinds of stories and reports which are difficult to verify and people have certainly been moved though not I think so far from their own homes. The people who have been moved are people who have been in hotels and there are reports, which we are seeking to verify, about where they have been taken. I have no reports of them being harmed in this process but that, of course, does not alter the fact that, as I have said, it is an illegal and thoroughly repulsive policy which we are doing our best to check and reverse.

QUESTION:

If they are not far from their homes, do you...

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

Not taken from their homes yet.

QUESTION:

Taken from hotels?

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

That is our information to date.

FOREIGN SECRETARY - PC - LONDON - 20 AUGUST 1990

- 12 -

QUESTION:

Could you explain why you are so confident that military conflict can be avoided? You gave a one-word answer to the question the other side of the room.

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

I was asked if I believed it to be inevitable and I said "No!" That is my belief.

QUESTION:

Are you going to have any further advice, other than that which has been offered through the BBC World Service, to those in Kuwait? For instance, should people go into hiding, British citizens, should they go into hiding?

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

I think the advice which we are giving is a sensible one: they should stay at home and keep a low profile. I think that, in the circumstances, is the best advice.

QUESTION:

What is your reaction to reports today that....(inaudible) Should friendly embassies give refuge to nationals from countries that are threatened by...

FOREIGN SECRETARY:

I have no information about that and I certainly would not like to sit around this table in London and give a hard and fast

FOREIGN SECRETARY - PC - LONDON - 20 AUGUST 1990

- 13 -

answer on that, how people should behave in particular circumstances.

We have had very good cooperation, very good solidarity, among all western embassies, both in Kuwait and Baghdad, on these matters and I am very anxious that should continue and we will be able to carry that further in the meeting in Paris tomorrow.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)