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LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

21 August 1990

Dear Jimon,

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH PRINCE BANDAR OF SAUDI ARABIA

The Prime Minister had a long talk this afternoon with Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia, who will be seeing the Foreign Secretary later this evening. I have to say that throughout this conversation, Prince Bandar was unusually overwrought and elated and did not invariably make sense.

I should be grateful if you could ensure that this letter is given a very restricted circulation and seen only by those people with a strict need to know.

The Prime Minister began by congratulating Prince Bandar on his interview on Channel 4 the previous evening. She had been very struck by his phrase that Saddam Hussein was sheltering behind women and children, and had adopted it herself at her own press conference. Prince Bandar preened himself mightily and said that he was sure the psychology of the remark was right: it was very demeaning to Saddam Hussein. We should get the BBC Arabic Service to carry it extensively. The Prime Minister said that it was very important to wage a skilful propaganda campaign against Saddam Hussein.

The Prime Minister said she had been very glad to be able to talk at length with King Fahd. Subsequently Alan Clark had visited a number of smaller Gulf states and we were now considering whether to send extra aircraft to the region. Prince Bandar jumped in to say there was a very strong case for stationing Tornado IDS in Saudi Arabia. Although the Americans had very considerable air power, there was still a need to strengthen the multinational force's overall anti-tank capability. The Prime Minister said that she was awaiting recommendations from the Chiefs of Staff, both on this and on how we could increase the sense of personal security of some of the Gulf rulers. Prince Bandar said this would be very desirable. He wondered whether the Prime Minister had considered sending ground forces to Saudi Arabia, for instance a paratroop brigade. He thought this would be an excellent step and hoped the Prime Minister would keep it in mind.

Prince Bandar continued that the Prime Minister's presence in Aspen at the time of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait had been God-given and enabled her to exercise a crucial influence on the

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President. This had ensured a firm American reaction. He and Prince Saud had themselves seen the President at Kennebunkport a few days ago, having previously talked to President Mubarak and President Assad. The joint conclusion of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria was that Saddam Hussein must not be allowed to get away with the invasion and occupation of Kuwait. Half measures would not achieve this, and the notion of proportionate response would not be enough. We would have to go after him fully and clear him out. He thought the US Administration were clearly moving in this direction and would be willing to look at scenarios. Meanwhile, the Egyptians were intending to step up their forces in Saudi Arabia, possibly to a whole division. Syria was also adopting a firm position and was a useful link to the Iranians. There were hopes that the latter would stir up the Kurds. President Ozal was also admirably steady.

Prince Bandar continued that the bottom line was that Saddam Hussein must be removed. Either he would do something to provide an excuse for the Americans to strike at Iraq: or the Americans would build up their strength sufficiently to liberate Kuwait. It would be important to have credible Arab participation in the latter exercise. But, given the time it took to get mechanised divisions into place, it was unlikely to be feasible much before the middle of September. His own assessment was that the Americans could deal with Iraq's air force within 24-36 hours, and then attack other targets with impunity. It was always a mistake to under-estimate one's enemy. But we should not over-estimate Saddam Hussein. His forces had not distinguished themselves during the war with Iran, which had been a much weaker adversary.

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S. Gray
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The Prime Minister reminded Prince Bandar that our chosen instrument for securing Saddam Hussein's withdrawal from Kuwait was the United Nations embargo. The immediate priority was to make this effective, and we were seeking a further UN Security Council Resolution to achieve that. There were still difficulties over this with the Chinese and, to a lesser degree, the Russians. Prince Bandar interrupted that he was travelling straight from London to Moscow. He would urge the Russians to join in a multi-national naval force to implement the embargo. The Prime Minister said she had been rather disturbed by reported remarks by Mr. Shevardnadze to the effect that Iraq's peace proposals had elements which ought to be considered. Prince Bandar should make clear to the Russians that now was not the time for faint hearts. In particular, it was vital that any further UN Resolution enforcing the embargo should not weaken the powers which we already had under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

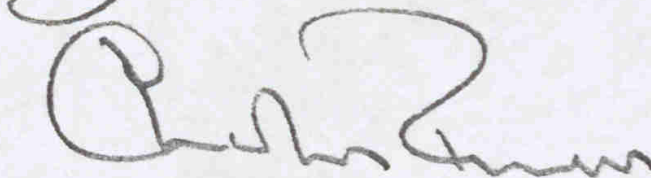
Prince Bandar said that the Americans had suggested that President Bush might visit US forces in Saudi Arabia in the period 5-7 September; and that there might even be a summit meeting of countries contributing troops. The Saudis were not very keen on this, since it would look as though it was part of preparations for an attack on Iraq, but would find it difficult

to refuse a visit if the Americans insisted. The Prime Minister said she agreed it was very important to get the timing of a visit right. Her view remained that we must give sanctions time to work. We should not rule out the military option. But that could only be considered when the Americans were 100 per cent certain that they had sufficient forces in place to win.

Prince Bandar made some disparaging comments about the role of the PLO in the present crisis. The leadership had shot themselves not in the foot but in the head. The Saudis had reminded the PLO that it was precisely because they opposed the occupation of territory by force that they opposed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. They were taking discreet action to squeeze Palestinians in Saudi Arabia and to make life difficult for the PLO generally. Prince Bandar continued that the Saudis were no less disappointed with King Hussein's performance. They had always helped him. But now he was not just keeping his options open, but supporting Saddam Hussein's cause. He had to realise who his true friends were. The Prime Minister commented that Jordan, Yemen and the PLO had all made the crucial mistake of thinking that Saddam Hussein would win. Actually he was going to lose and the danger was they would lose with him.

Prince Bandar repeated that he hoped the Prime Minister would keep in mind the possibility of sending additional Tornado ground attack aircraft to Saudi Arabia, and of putting in some paratroopers or some other ground forces as well. He would be going to Riyadh after his visit to Moscow but would then pass through London again on the way back and might ask to see her once more. He would also welcome a military briefing, to see to what extent our thoughts paralleled those of the American military.

I am copying this letter to Simon Webb (Ministry of Defence) and to Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,


C. D. POWELL

Simon Gass, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.