



10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

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Prime Minister

CB

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GULF CRISIS: ISRAELI VIEWS

I had a talk this afternoon with Lord Weidenfeld who has just returned from a visit to Israel during which he met Shamir, Arens, Peres, Rabin and Netanyahu.

Lord Weidenfeld said that he found them all resolved that Israel should keep a low profile, while maintaining a state of great preparedness. They were very concerned that Saddam Hussain might try to involve Israel in the conflict. They tended to discount a pre-emptive air strike as impractical, and thought a movement of Iraqi forces into Jordan much more likely. This might be quite small and carried out by stealth to test the Israeli reaction. He was in no doubt that the Israelis would regard this as a casus belli.

Lord Weidenfeld continued that he also found the Israeli leaders preoccupied by indications last week that the United States was toying with compromises to resolve the crisis. They were inclined, too, to give some credence

that Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia had discussed possible compromises with the Russians during his visit to Moscow. By their account, this would include allowing the Iraqis to lease the Kuwaiti islands and an agreement on constitutional reform in Kuwait. Prince Sultan's press conference yesterday, during which he said that Saudi Arabia would not be a jumping-off ground for an attack on Iraq had fuelled these suspicions.

Several of the Israelis to whom he had spoken expected the United States to come to Israel for concessions over the Palestinians. There would be a crucial difference between whether the United States came after having achieved success against Saddam Hussain or before tackling the Iraqis head on. In the latter case, Saddam Hussain would exploit the situation for all it was worth, and the Israelis would be very resistant to any sort of movement. It was vital that Saddam Hussain should be seen as a man who gambled and lost.

Lord Weidenfeld said that Arens was worried about the lack of sufficient money for Israel's defence needs. He would shortly be seeing Chancellor Kohl and hoping to extract some money from the Germans, using the argument that they were partly responsible for the present situation by the help which they have given the Iraqis. I commented that one could say the same about the French in spades.

Lord Weidenfeld said that public opinion in Israel was moving strongly towards the Likud party, and the peace movement was in tatters. Siniora was doing dreadful damage to what little sympathy existed in Israel for the Palestinians on the West Bank by a succession of leaders in the East Jerusalem press supporting Saddam Hussain.

Lord Weidenfeld's conclusion was that, while outwardly calm, the Israeli leaders were very nervous indeed. He could detect virtually no nuance of difference in the analysis of the military situation between Government and the opposition.

I should be grateful if this account could be treated in strict confidence and not quoted back to either Lord Weidenfeld or any Israeli representative.

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

(C. D. POWELL)

Richard Gozney, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.