

PERSONAL

EAM

File

be: KC

PRIME MINISTER

---

IRAQ

I had a talk last night with Professor Bernard Lewis, the orientalist. I retain four points which you might find of interest:

- the need to be clear and explicit when dealing with Saddam Hussein. It was no good using diplomatic language or nuances: he did not operate in that way. One had to be direct, even brutal. You were doing far better than other world leaders in this respect. He went on to suggest that Saddam has misread the signals from the West in the period immediately before the invasion: the decision of the US Congress to continue agricultural credits: the fulsome British response to the release of Mrs Parrish. Saddam would have assumed that the West knew what he was up to over Kuwait, and would not have felt he was being warned off;
- if it came to a military option, we should bear in mind that a number of countries had territorial claims against Iraq. There were the Kurds: the Iranians would want frontier rectifications: the Syrians would want something: and the Turks had a claim to Mosul and the surrounding area. Indeed, he was inclined to wonder whether this was not one of the motives behind the strong Turkish support for action against Iraq. One result of a conflict could be the dismemberment of Iraq itself;
- speculating about possible successors to Saddam Hussein, he strongly discounted the theory in some newspapers that the Iranians would engineer the emergence of a militant Shia successor. Although the Shia were a majority in Iraq, the country had been run by a Sunni ascendancy since the 10th century, and this was very unlikely to change;

PERSONAL

PERSONAL

- 2 -

- in our counter-propaganda, we should make more of the way in which Saddam Hussein's conduct over the hostages offended both Arab customs of hospitality and Arab conventions over hostage-taking (which were extremely detailed and complex).

CHARLES POWELL

10 September 1990

eam a:\foreign\iraq

PERSONAL