

PRIME MINISTER

27 September 1990

QUESTIONS FOR MR BUSH

You will want to exploit the opportunities in your private talk with the President to explore US thinking, and we hope planning, on the Gulf.

The questions fall under several heads.

A. US response to incidents

My guess would be that Saddam Hussein will continue to lie low and avoid provocations while seeking to break-up the coalition against him. But we cannot be sure. We need to know how the US would be likely to respond to incidents involving Iraqis, eg Iraqi attacks on allied vessels following interception of Iraqi shipping or some other deliberately provocative Iraqi move, eg attacks on oil rigs. We must also allow for terrorist incidents associated with Iraq. Presumably the US are thinking of a limited proportionate response such as would be unlikely to trigger full scale hostilities before we are ready. The possibility of escalation occurring nonetheless has, however, to be borne in mind and an incident late in the day, say in November, might prove providential. Are there any situations in the present early phase which the US would consider required an all-out response, eg maltreatment of hostages, readying of missiles with CW, threats to use BW? An imminent missile threat to Israel, or an attack on Israel?

B. Preparations for full-scale hostilities

We need to know more of US thinking on deployment of the allied force, command and control, and arrangements for consultation with foreign, particularly Arab elements, so as to ensure unified operations while preserving security. A number of these questions would probably best fall to military discussion, eg CDS with General Powell, but you will need to make some reference to this area of uncertainty and emphasise the need for speed. Our impression is that

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there is a great deal to be done to establish full coordination in a heterogeneous allied force.

C. Transition to major hostilities

This is the nub of the matter. Our assessment is that sanctions, though biting, are unlikely to produce the changes in Iraq we require within a period we would find sustainable. There will be a relatively brief spell between October/November and March when we shall be ready and still united and when weather conditions will be at their least bad. We assume the President is considering recourse to the military option in this period. Does he have any idea of timing?

On the mechanics of transition, although the Russians are now more amenable and speak of military force under a UN command, we assume that there is no intention to approach the UN before action. Obvious disadvantages. Mr Baker has nonetheless been touching on this possibility in discussions in New York this week with the Foreign Secretary. This does not rule out further Security Council resolutions to ratchet up pressure on Saddam, but recourse to Article 42 could complicate use of Article 51.

Presumably the intention is to invoke Article 51 plus a further letter from the Amir and cite the failure of sanctions to date to bring Saddam to compliance.

Does the Administration think it may need some additional casus belli, eg maltreatment of hostages? There were some signs of this during Robin Butler's visit. There is obvious danger in this course. We have all the justification we need already.

Presumably the US plan a very short notice notification to allies and friends, including the Russians of the decision to move, plus a suitable statement in the United Nations soon after fighting begins.

On the form of the assault, you will have seen an outline of likely planning in the JIC paper, Allied Military Options, ie an

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intense air bombardment intended to destroy the Iraqi airforce and missiles plus communications and a left hook into Kuwait separating it from Iraq. We hope the President can reveal something of this planning. Has he any assessment of the time likely to be required for the recovery of Kuwait? Has thought been given to means of reducing bloodshed in retaking Kuwait City if the Iraqi troops dug in there maintain their defence? What military problems most worry the President?

On the air bombardment, we shall need full consultation over targets if we are to be involved. There may be legal questions on the range of targets, eg infrastructure, which we shall need to consider.

Do the Americans have plans to attempt the rescue of any Western hostages in Kuwait? Do they have plans to deter Saddam from harming hostages/diplomats in Iraq?

Have the Administration thought of how they would respond to likely Iraqi use of CW and BW? They will obviously wish to keep this vague, with the suggestion of readiness in certain contingencies to use chemical or nuclear weapons in response, but our guess would be that they will want to confine themselves to conventional responses. Do they take seriously the possibility that the Iraqis as a last desperate measure may seek to use BW in foreign capitals?

D. Israel

Saddam would like to transform this into an Arab/Israel conflict. The Israel factor can intrude at a number of stages in the game. Saddam may seek to provoke or may actually attack Israel before major hostilities, or once such hostilities have broken out.

Presumably a minor attack could be borne by Israel without a military response, as the Israelis themselves have indicated. Generally the US would wish to act for Israel in order to keep them out, eg destroying Iraqi western missile bases, and generally the Israelis would like to see the dirty work done for them. But presumably there would be circumstances in which the Israelis would

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act for themselves, eg in face of a major attack, or if they saw the end-game developing unsatisfactorily, with Saddam escaping too lightly. Do the Americans agree with the above analysis? Are there circumstances in which they would acquiesce in, or even welcome, Israeli military intervention?

E. The end game

We have to allow for the possibility that Saddam, though badly battered and compelled to withdraw from Kuwait, may still survive. Have the Americans plans to deal with this eventuality and to compel the dismantling or destruction of Iraqi nuclear/CW/BW capabilities? Presumably the initial air assault will be broad enough to embrace much of this, but we must assume some facilities will survive. Are there circumstances in which the US would envisage continuing hostilities after the recovery of Kuwait? Have they any thoughts on a tolerable successor regime in Baghdad?

F. Long term security arrangements

We shall need to ensure the defence of Kuwait after its recovery. We shall also probably need to ensure the defence of Saudi Arabia. This would best be done by Arab forces, though with clear guarantees by Western allies. How much further geographically should the long term security arrangements extend? Role for Iran or Turkey? There will be a unique opportunity to tackle other major Middle East issues, both economic and military/political. There will at the same time be reluctance by the Americans to move on into these deeper waters and a tendency to confine long term security arrangements to the immediate Kuwait/Iraq issue. There is danger in this and in any piecemeal approach, namely that we shall tackle only the easier bit, miss a great opportunity and leave much of the Middle East discontented and unstable as well as heavily armed.

G. Iraqi nuclear capacity

There is one question which needs asking and can probably only be answered by the President or Scowcroft, namely is the American

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assessment still that the Iraqis are some four to five years away from acquiring a nuclear weapon.⁷

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Conclusion

The above is intended as a quarry rather than a precise brief. I fancy you will find the President still very cautious, partly because of the nature of the subject, partly he will not have thought it all through or reached conclusions as yet. What will be essential therefore is to establish channels for further privileged information and to ensure that we shall remain closely informed as his thinking develops. It would also be valuable to provide for more detail discussion at military level, ie CDS/General Powell.

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