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BRITISH EMBASSY

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FROM THE AMBASSADOR

C D Powell Esq  
Private Secretary  
No 10 Downing Street  
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10 October 1990

*Dear Charles,*

**THE GULF: CONTACTS WITH THE WHITE HOUSE**

1. As the time draws nearer to the US review of their options in mid-November, and to the point at which it may become more feasible for the Americans to exercise the military option, I would like to be clear on how the Embassy can be most helpful in ensuring that Ministers generally, and the Prime Minister in particular, are kept fully abreast of White House thinking.

2. Your link with Brent Scowcroft is clearly a crucial one for the direct and rapid conveyance of highly sensitive information. I am perfectly happy with that, and the purpose of this letter is not to seek information about those matters best kept strictly between the President and the Prime Minister, and Brent Scowcroft and yourself.

3. I would, however, like to be clear in my own mind about what you need or expect of the Embassy in this regard. There is both a particular and a wider aspect here. The particular one is that we clearly need to ensure that the Prime Minister is fully briefed about any imminent US military action, and that this briefing happens sufficiently in advance to allow her a real opportunity to comment. British aircraft will be part of the strike force and, if tasked against targets inside Iraq, there is a clear risk of civilian casualties and the deaths or execution of British hostages. Britain will also be most closely associated with the overall US action, and our ground forces will take casualties. Brent Scowcroft and you may well already have agreed on a procedure to ensure that both consultation and

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warning take place well before any military action initiated by the US and its friends. Or it may all come in from Peter de la Billiere. If not, there are suggestions that I would put forward.

4. The second, wider, aspect relates to our need to talk through thoroughly with the Americans all the available options. The received wisdom in Washington is that, unless there is some Iraqi provocation, the Administration will conduct a major review of where we have all got to in mid-November, and at that point the President will have to focus very seriously on the sort of questions set out in para 6 of my telno 2244 (copy enclosed). Britain is the country seen by the Americans to be closest to all of this, and we are clearly going to be the country most closely involved with them in any military action. It is therefore very important that British views are firmly fed into the American review, and the options very thoroughly discussed and argued through. This could be done either direct between the Prime Minister and the President, or by Foreign Ministers, or by intermediaries or by my being given detailed instructions to speak to Scowcroft or even the President.

5. Whatever the channel, my main concern, and the purpose of this letter, is to ensure that there are adequate arrangements for this consultation to take place. We here have no wish to waste our interlocutors' time, or cross wires, but at the same time it is obviously important that the right questions should be asked, and that I should be in the best possible position to keep the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary fully informed on the basis of regular and broadly-based talks with the Americans. I do not need, for that purpose, to cite, directly or indirectly, your exchanges with the White House. But, to the extent consistent with operational security, I need to have a clear picture both of the ground already covered and of the way your minds are turning. I do not wish to seem importunate, but you would rightly think me remiss if I did not satisfy myself that you have all the information that you need and that the mechanics for full consultation are in place, as we move towards what may be a very difficult period of decision.

*Yours ever*  
*Antony*

Antony Acland

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INFO PRIORITY DUBAI, BAHRAIN, ADEN, JEDDAH, AMMAN, CAIRO, MOSCOW  
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VISIT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE: IRAQ/KUWAIT  
SUMMARY

1. US POLICIES TO COME UNDER REVIEW IN NOVEMBER. PRESENT STRESS ON THE LONGER HAUL. QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED INCLUDE THE EFFICACY OF SANCTIONS, THE PERSISTENCE OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT, THE POSSIBLE MILITARY OPTIONS AND THEIR COST, AND WHAT THE LONGER-TERM RESULTS WOULD BE OF A CONTINUED SQUEEZE OR THE USE OF FORCE. BALANCE IN NOVEMBER PROBABLY AGAINST THE IMMEDIATE USE OF FORCE. PREDICTION FURTHER AHEAD HAZARDOUS.

DETAIL

2. IT IS VERY GOOD NEWS THAT MR KING WILL BE HERE FOR TALKS WITH CHENEY AND OTHERS ON 20/21 SEPTEMBER. THERE WILL BE A FURTHER CHANCE TO EXPLORE US THINKING IN DEPTH WHEN THE PRIME MINISTER MEETS THE PRESIDENT ON 30 SEPTEMBER. WE ARE WELL PLACED THEREFORE TO GET A FULL AND ACCURATE SENSE OF CURRENT AMERICAN THINKING FOLLOWING THE 14 SEPTEMBER ANNOUNCEMENT OF A FURTHER BRITISH CONTRIBUTION, WHICH HAS BEEN VERY WARMLY WELCOMED AND HAS RECEIVED GOOD PUBLICITY. OUR NEED TO BE INTIMATELY INVOLVED IN US THINKING AND CONTINGENCY PLANNING WILL ALSO HAVE BEEN INCREASED BY OUR HAVING SO MANY MORE MEN ON THE PROSPECTIVE FRONT LINE.

3. SUBJECT TO ANYTHING THAT THE CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF MAY LEARN WHEN HE SEES GENERAL POWELL ON 15 SEPTEMBER, I WOULD EXPECT CHENEY TO CONFIRM ON 20 SEPTEMBER THAT, UNTIL THE AMERICAN MILITARY BUILD-UP IS COMPLETED AROUND THE END OF OCTOBER, AND IN THE ABSENCE OF A MAJOR IRAQI PROVOCATION, THE PRESIDENT WILL HAVE LITTLE CHOICE BUT TO CONTINUE WITH THE EFFORT TO IMPOSE AND, WHERE NECESSARY, TIGHTEN SANCTIONS WHILE MAINTAINING AND STRENGTHENING A DEFENSIVE POSTURE IN SAUDI ARABIA. IF WE HAVE THE TIMING OF THE US BUILD-UP RIGHT, THAT IN TURN MAKES IT UNLIKELY ON PRESENT FORM THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL BE IN A POSITION TO CONSIDER DIRECT MILITARY ACTION BEFORE THE MID-TERM ELECTIONS ON 6 NOVEMBER. THE PRESENT PUBLIC MOOD (MY TELNO. 2231) IS SUPPORTIVE OF FIRM BUT MEASURED POLICIES. NEITHER THE US PUBLIC NOR THE CONGRESS ARE CLAMOURING FOR MORE AGGRESSIVE ACTION.

(AW/CHY)

//(4. AFTER.....)

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4. AFTER THE ELECTIONS AND BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR HOWEVER (ALWAYS ASSUMING NO MAJOR CHANGES ON THE GROUND WHETHER PROVOKED BY IRAQ, ISRAEL OR THROUGH EVENTS IN JORDAN), THE PRESIDENT WILL HAVE TO DECIDE BETWEEN TWO BROAD POLICY OPTIONS - THE LONGER HAUL AND USING FORCE. DEBATE ON THIS SUBJECT HAS BEEN UNDERWAY FOR SOME TIME BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE THE ADMINISTRATION. GIVEN THE PRACTICAL CONSTRAINTS IT IS STILL SOMEWHAT ACADEMIC. I VERY MUCH DOUBT WHETHER THE PRESIDENT HAS YET MADE UP HIS MIND WHICH WAY TO GO. THE PRESENT PUBLIC STRESS IS ON THE LONG HAUL, COUPLED WITH REMINDERS THAT THE MILITARY OPTION MIGHT STILL HAVE TO BE EXERCISED IF THE ADMINISTRATION'S FOUR STATED OBJECTIVES ARE NOT OTHERWISE ATTAINABLE. THE ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN CAREFUL NOT TO ENDORSE THE WIDER OBJECTIVES OF REMOVING SADDAM HUSSEIN FROM POWER AND CURTAILING LONGER TERM IRAQI MILITARY CAPABILITIES WHICH HAVE BEEN PRESSED ON THEM BY SOME COMMENTATORS AND, APPARENTLY, BY SOME OF THE ARABS. IF THE PRESIDENT DID DECIDE, PRIVATELY OR PUBLICLY, THAT IT WOULD BE RIGHT TO EXTEND US OBJECTIVES IN THIS WAY, THE BALANCE OF DECISION WOULD THEREBY BE WEIGHTED TOWARDS USING MILITARY FORCE. I DO NOT THINK HOWEVER THAT THINGS ARE FOR THE MOMENT MOVING IN THAT DIRECTION.

5. IN THIS SORT OF SITUATION PREDICTIONS ARE HAZARDOUS. MY CURRENT EXPECTATION HOWEVER IS THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL RETAIN SUFFICIENT DOMESTIC SUPPORT FOR SOME CONSIDERABLE TIME AFTER THE MID-TERM ELECTIONS TO ALLOW HIM TO ADDRESS THE QUESTIONS WHICH WILL GOVERN HIS EVENTUAL CHOICE, WITHOUT COMING UNDER UNDUE DOMESTIC POLITICAL PRESSURE IN HIS POLICY REVIEW. THIS MIGHT TAKE MUCH OF NOVEMBER, WHEN PUBLIC SPECULATION CAN ALSO BE EXPECTED TO BUILD UP. IT MAY BE HELPFUL IF I SET OUT THE SORTS OF QUESTIONS THAT MUST BE CONSIDERED IN DEPTH SO THAT MR KING WILL HAVE THEM AT THE BACK OF HIS MIND WHEN TALKING TO CHENEY AND OTHERS ON 20 AND 21 SEPTEMBER, AND TO SKETCH OUT SOME TENTATIVE ANSWERS.

6. THE PRESIDENT WILL HAVE TO CONSIDER:

(A) WHAT EFFECTS ARE THE SANCTIONS HAVING AND HOW LONG THEY MAY TAKE TO ACHIEVE US OBJECTIVES?

NO ANSWER IN NOVEMBER IS LIKELY TO BE ANYTHING OTHER THAN APPROXIMATE. UNLESS THERE HAVE BEEN SERIOUS AND LASTING BREACHES HOWEVER I DOUBT WHETHER IT WILL BE POSSIBLE BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR TO SAY THAT SANCTIONS ARE NOT GOING TO WORK.

(B) HOW LONG WILL THE PRESENT SUPPORTIVE DOMESTIC CONSENSUS PERSIST?

THE MAIN VARIABLE HERE MAY BE THE HOSTAGES. PUBLIC ANGER HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT MODERATED BY THE RELEASE OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN. BUT THE AMERICAN PUBLIC'S PATIENCE WILL BE STRAINED IF THERE IS NO FURTHER PROGRESS. FEELINGS WOULD INEVITABLY BE INFLAMED BY ANY MALTREATMENT OF THE REMAINING PRISONERS. AT PRESENT HOWEVER THE EXPECTATION IS THAT THE UNITED STATES IS IN FOR A LONG HAUL. I DO NOT THINK THAT ANYONE SERIOUSLY EXPECTS THAT ANY SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF TROOPS CAN BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS OR THE NEW YEAR.

(C) HOW LONG WILL THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION IN FAVOUR OF SANCTIONS HOLD TOGETHER?

THE AMERICANS AT PRESENT REST ON THE SOLID GROUND OF UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS. AS THE WEEKS PASS HOWEVER THERE IS BOUND TO BE INCREASING DEBATE OVER THE LONGER TERM AIMS OF US DEPLOYMENT. THE AMERICANS WILL BE LOOKING TO THEIR PARTNERS FOR CONCRETE SUPPORT, NOT JUST POLITICAL ACQUIESCENCE. US PERCEPTIONS OF GERMAN AND JAPANESE COMMITMENT IN PARTICULAR WILL INFLUENCE THEIR ASSESSMENT. PRESENT SPECULATION ABOUT POSSIBLE STRUCTURES TO PROTECT A REGIONAL BALANCE ONCE THE PRESENT CRISIS IS RESOLVED IMPLY A POLICY OF LONG TERM CONTAINMENT OF IRAQ RATHER THAN A VIOLENT RESOLUTION OF PRESENT PROBLEMS.

//(D) IF.....)

(D) IF MILITARY ACTION WERE TO BE TAKEN, WHAT FORM OUGHT IT TO TAKE? THIS MUST LASTLY BE A MATTER FOR MILITARY ADVICE BUT OBVIOUSLY THE OPTIONS WOULD RANGE FROM SELECTIVE STRIKES EITHER IN RETALIATION FOR IRAQI ACTIONS OR TO UNDERScore US DETERMINATION, THROUGH AN EFFORT TO LIBERATE KUWAIT AND HOLD THE LINE AT THE IRAQ/KUWAIT FRONTIER, TO THE DESTRUCTION OF HUSSEIN'S REGIME AND IRAQI MILITARY POTENTIAL. BUT ONE DOES NOT HAVE TO GO VERY FAR UP THE LADDER TO MAKE IT APPARENT THAT THE MOST SENSIBLE MILITARY OPTION WOULD BE TO GO ALL OUT FOR A DECISIVE DEFEAT OF THE IRAQIS. THE LIBERATION OF KUWAIT WOULD ONLY BE POSSIBLE WITH THE DESTRUCTION OF IRAQI MILITARY POWER IN THE WIDER THEATRE. THIS SORT OF LOGIC WOULD BE REINFORCED BY WHAT THE AMERICANS NOW SEE AS THE MAJOR LESSON OF VIETNAM, THAT GRADUATED INCREMENTS OF FORCE ARE INEFFECTIVE AS COMPARED TO MASSIVE INTERVENTION FROM THE BEGINNING.

(E) IF FORCE WERE EMPLOYED, WHAT WOULD BE THE COST IN MONEY AND LIVES AND HOW LONG WOULD IT TAKE TO ACHIEVE ITS OBJECTIVES? THIS MUST BE THE IMPORTANT UNKNOWN. THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE STRUGGLE COULD BE LONG AND BLOODY MUST WEIGH ON THE SIDE OF CAUTION.

(F) WHAT INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT WOULD THERE BE FOR MILITARY ACTION? IDEALLY THE AMERICANS WOULD LIKE UN BACKING FOR DIRECT ACTION AGAINST IRAQ, THOUGH THEY RECOGNISE THAT UN ENDORSEMENT UNDER ARTICLE 42 IS IMPROBABLE AND THAT THE MOST THEY COULD REASONABLY HOPE FOR IS A WIDE DEGREE OF INTERNATIONAL ACQUIESCENCE IN OFFENSIVE ACTION. THEY WOULD IN ANY CASE NEED A RESPECTABLE DEGREE OF ARAB SUPPORT, IF ONLY FOR THE SAKE OF ESTABLISHING A MORE STABLE POSITION AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF SADDAM HUSSEIN. WHAT MEASURE OF SUPPORT THEY MIGHT GET WOULD CLEARLY DEPEND ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES PREVAILING AT THE TIME AND, IN PARTICULAR, WHETHER OR NOT THERE HAD BEEN A NEW PROVOCATION FROM BAGHDAD. FRUSTRATION ALONE, PARTICULARLY IN THE RELATIVELY SHORT RUN, MIGHT NOT BE EASILY ACCEPTED INTERNATIONALLY AS A SUFFICIENT BASIS FOR TAKING THE OFFENSIVE. AN ADMINISTRATION WHICH SEES THE GULF CRISIS AS A TEST-CASE FOR US-LED INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT OF POST-COLD-WAR CRISES WILL NOT LIGHTLY PROCEED IF DOING SO WOULD SACRIFICE SOVIET AND UN SUPPORT OR ACQUIESCENCE. ON THE OTHER HAND THERE ARE ALREADY THOSE IN THE AREA WHO WOULD LIKE A QUICK AND TOTAL MILITARY SOLUTION, AND THE FACT OF A MAJOR MILITARY BUILD UP CREATES ITS OWN MOMENTUM AND EXPECTATIONS.

(G) IF THE AMERICANS TOOK THE OFFENSIVE, HOW WOULD THEY STABILISE THE SITUATION IN IRAQ ONCE IT WAS OVER? THE PRESIDENT WILL HAVE TO RECKON WITH THE PROBABILITY THAT DIRECT ACTION AGAINST IRAQ WOULD CREATE VERY CONSIDERABLE TURBULENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AS A WHOLE, PARTICULARLY IN THE ABSENCE OF A QUICK AND RELATIVELY EASY VICTORY. EVEN IN THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES IT WOULD BE HARD TO SEE IN ADVANCE WHAT SORT OF SUCCESSOR REGIME MIGHT BE INSTALLED IN BAGHDAD OR HOW THE AMERICANS COULD SUBSEQUENTLY REDUCE THEIR MILITARY COMMITMENT OVER THE LONG HAUL.

//(7. THESE.....)

7. THESE QUESTIONS WILL OF COURSE BE CONTINUING ONES AND THERE IS A CERTAIN ARTIFICIALITY IN CONDUCTING A REVIEW IN NOVEMBER RATHER THAN DECEMBER OR JANUARY, BUT THE POLITICAL TIMETABLE AFTER THE MID-TERM ELECTIONS IS LIKELY TO DEMAND IT. THE END OF THE YEAR ALSO HAS A PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE.

I WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF IT WERE DECIDED TO MAINTAIN PRESENT POLICIES UNTIL THAT TIME, THOUGH THAT IS NOT TO SAY THAT A DECISION WOULD BE TAKEN IN NOVEMBER TO GO FOR MILITARY ACTION EARLY IN THE NEW YEAR IF SANCTIONS FAIL TO ACHIEVE THE DESIRED RESULT.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS TELEGRAM IS TO SET OUT SOME OF THE CONSIDERATIONS THAT WILL HAVE TO BE EXAMINED IN DEPTH IN ORDER TO HELP TO ENSURE THAT WE REMAIN SECURELY ON THE INSIDE TRACK IN DETERMINING THE WAY IN WHICH US POLICIES EVOLVE.

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