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TOP SECRET

MR POWELL

17 October 1990

THE GULF: VISIT TO WASHINGTON

Your minute of 17 October.

I understand the difficulty, but I am afraid this agenda would raise problems for me. I do not want to get into military planning and strategy, on which I am in any case not competent. I do not want to ask Scowcroft when the US plans to attack Iraq, which he would not tell me even if he knew. But the main value of the visit, as envisaged when I spoke with the Prime Minister on 8 October, was as a means of encouraging the Americans to think through their options more clearly. This is essential if the whole operation is not to go wrong. In order to do this I have got to be able to cover the issue in broad terms. I have got to be able to make the basic points that sanctions will probably not do the trick in the time we have at our disposal; that time is probably not on our side; that we need to be able to use the relatively narrow timeslot available; and that the consequences of not doing so would be very serious for the West. I would also want to listen to any counteravailing thoughts on his side that this argument elicits. Failure to make these points if only in a general way would hamstring discussion and would be strange and positively misleading coming from the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Adviser, who must be expected to reflect her views.

By the same token, I can hardly avoid asking how Scowcroft sees the likelihood of Iraqi provocations, since US policy seems heavily reliant on that dangerous assumption, and giving my own view. In my discussions elsewhere in Washington, eg with the CIA or State Department in discussing Iraqi intentions, this issue is bound to come up.

To take the headings in your proposed agenda, I fear that the intelligence aspects of the conflict and strategic deception are not in Scowcroft's area of primary interest. I can pursue these elsewhere. I also fear that the long-term arrangements in the Gulf

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and the future of the Arab/Israel dispute lie too far in the future at present to engage much of his attention. To pass the agenda in its present form would encourage him to keep quiet on matters on which we are greatly interested and would deny me the opportunity of even reporting his views on them, as distinct from raising them myself.

As regards security, I fully understand the need to reassure Scowcroft and should be prepared to give whatever undertaking is needed, eg that I shall report only to the Prime Minister and, if necessary, am prepared to see him without anyone else on our side present.

To sum up, I do not think I shall in practice entrench on the Prime Minister's or Defence Secretary's domain, but some latitude has to be given to permit an intelligent discussion and to set out the main framework of our case. Otherwise we fail to grasp the opportunity and could leave a misleading impression.

I should welcome a chance to have a word with the Prime Minister on this.



PERCY CRADOCK