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IMMEDIATE

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FM FCO

TO IMMEDIATE MOSCOW

TELNO

OF 20

OCTOBER 90

IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON, ROME, PARIS, RIYADH, BAGHDAD, CAIRO
ROUTINE OTHER EC POSTS, OTHER MIDDLE EAST POSTS, ANKARA
ROUTINE ANKARA, TEL AVIV, ACTOR

TELNO 1841 (NOT TO ALL): PRIMAKOV'S TOUR: MEETING WITH THE
SECRETARY OF STATE

SUMMARY

1. Primakov repeats his suggestions for a face-saving gesture to Saddam Hussain, though in a somewhat watered-down form. Stresses the Russians are not backsliding but want to avoid a war. I tell him it is not on.

DETAIL

2. The Soviet Embassy arranged for Primakov, Gorbachev's Special Envoy on the Gulf, to pass through London en route to Moscow after his talks in Washington, Paris and Rome. He had an hour's discussion with me on 20 October and will be calling on the Prime Minister at Chequers later in the day.

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2 3. Primakov began by emphasising that there had been no retreat
3 from the Soviet position on the Gulf crisis. Saddam Hussain must
4 withdraw from Kuwait. The status quo ante 2 August must be
5 restored. Any speculation that the Russians were engaging in
6 talks behind the backs of their partners was false. But it was
7 clear to him as a result of his talks in Baghdad that Saddam
8 Hussain would be prepared to face a war (which he knew he could
9 win) rather than withdraw from Kuwait under the barrel of a
10 gun. He had a fortress mentality (a quote Massada complex
11 quote) and claimed that the West and the Gulf states had been
12 working for ways to bring him down well before the invasion. He
13 had argued that Iraqi military and public opinion would not allow
14 him to withdraw empty-handed. In Primakov's view, if a peaceful
15 solution to the crisis were to be found, it would be necessary to
16 give him some way of saving face, particularly as sanctions
17 seemed unlikely of themselves to have the desired effect.

18
19 4. Primakov said the Russians appreciated that Saddam could
20 not be rewarded for his aggression. They quite appreciated
21 Western concern that any face-saving measures might be construed
22 as such a reward. But one way forward might be to flesh out the
23 correlation (not direct linkage) between a solution to the Gulf
24 crisis and the problems of the Middle East generally. He
25 suggested that some way should be found to tell Saddam in private
26 and in advance that after he had withdrawn unconditionally,
27 started negotiations with the legitimate government of Kuwait,
28 and released all foreign hostages, discussions would start on
29 other Middle East issues. The discussions could be set in hand
30 by means of a call by the US, EC and the Soviet Union shortly
31 after the withdrawal for an international conference.

32
33 5. Primakov argued that in the meantime sanctions and the
34 threat of military action should be maintained, and perhaps

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2 intensified. But Arab support for Saddam was on the increase and
3 time was not on the side of the Allies. The offer of a
4 face-saving gesture would not be without risk but there could be
5 benefits too. If it succeeded we would be able to beat Saddam at
6 his own game by arguing that a solution to the Palestinian
7 problem depended on withdrawal and continuing good behaviour from
8 Iraqis. Saddam could not be allowed to consolidate his
9 position. A mechanism would have to be established which would
10 allow him to be kept under control if he survived as a political
11 figure.

12

13 6. I said that the pressures currently being applied on Saddam
14 fell into three categories: diplomatic isolation, sanctions, and
15 the knowledge in Saddam's mind that unless he withdrew peacefully
16 force should be used against him. We could not be sure they
17 would work but it was important that all these elements,
18 particularly the latter, should be maintained. Saddam would need
19 some ammunition to use with his own people and it was most
20 unlikely that any face-saving gesture could be kept private. It
21 would be unsafe - and very much resented by the Arab members of
22 the coalition against him - to give him any grounds to argue that
23 the invasion had been a success, if not for Iraq itself then, in
24 saving the Palestinians. I questioned Primakov's assertion that
25 Arab support for the alliance was on the wane.

26

27 7. Primakov said these problems should be manageable. The
28 Allies could argue that the Iraqi withdrawal was a success for
29 sanctions and the deployment of the multi-national force. There
30 was a growing tendency in the Arab world to see Saddam as the
31 leader who had had the courage to throw down the gauntlet to the
32 super powers. His support would be strengthened if hostilities
33 took place. He did not think a quick victory was possible: the
34 difficulties would be compounded if Western troops remained in

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 2 Saudi Arabia until the Hajj. If Turkey and Israel became
 3 involved, Arab support for Saddam would grow more quickly. If a
 4 decision had already been taken on military action, there was no
 5 sense in talking about additional measures. But if not, there
 6 was room for further action while the military build-up
 7 continued. He acknowledged ~~however~~ that my arguments had
 8 validity and repeated the Soviet Union's interest in preventing a
 9 deterioration of the crisis. But he stressed that time was not on
 10 our side. Attitudes towards Saddam were changing and even in
 11 Europe were far from united (this may have been a result of the
 12 less robust line that may have been taken with him by the
 13 Italians and the French).
 14

15 8. News Department are telling the press that Primakov took the
 16 opportunity to give an account of his meeting with Saddam Hussain
 17 and his talks in Rome, Paris and Washington and reaffirmed the
 18 Soviet commitment to the implementation of Security Resolutions
 19 on the Gulf. They are refusing to be drawn further pending the
 20 outcome of his meeting with the Prime Minister.
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26 IRAQ/KUWAIT (EU)

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