



SUBJECT CC MASTER

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From the Private Secretary

29 October 1990

Dear Sir,

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH PRINCE BANDAR

Prince Bandar came to see the Prime Minister this morning on his way back to Saudi Arabia from Washington. The clear if unstated purpose of his call was to encourage the Prime Minister to put pressure on the Americans to take military action against Iraq soon. That apart, he had relatively little to say, although I am writing separately about two or three matters.

Prince Bandar started with some highly critical remarks about the French (fairly obviously designed to curry favour with the Prime Minister in the wake of the European Council in Rome). The French forces in Saudi Arabia were pretty much of a rag-bag, mainly Cambodians and wanted criminals. The French were very macho as long as there was no risk of their actually having to fight. But they refused to allow their forces to be counted into General Schwarzkopf's military planning, and were engaged in moving them further back from the front line. King Fahd was very unhappy with the French posture on Iraq/Kuwait, and was convinced that they had done a deal to secure the release of their hostages in Iraq.

Prince Bandar was no less disparaging of Mr. Primakov's peace mission to Baghdad. Thankfully it seemed to have come to nothing. Primakov was about to visit Saudi Arabia. He (Bandar) had met him in Washington and had not at all liked the cut of his jib. His basic argument was absurd. If you could secure a settlement of the whole Arab/Israel problem by invading Kuwait, Saudi Arabia would be in there tomorrow. But he would be inclined to think that Gorbachev had gone along with Primakov's mission simply to show that the Russians had tried everything to avert hostilities, if they did eventually break out.

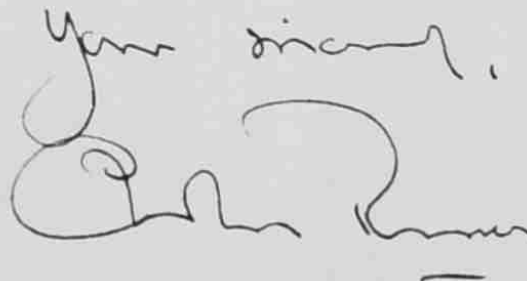
Prince Bandar said that Secretary Baker would be visiting Saudi Arabia on 3 November. He understood he would pass through London on his way back. He hoped the Prime Minister would take the opportunity to see him and try to stiffen him. He was still hankering after a further UN resolution to authorise the use of force and was responsible for the continued hesitation in American policy. The purpose must now be to get the President to set a firm date for military action. The Saudis favoured the period 5-15 December. The Prime Minister said we shared reservations about a return to the United Nations. Experience

over the resolution on compensation showed just how much delay this could involve. There was only a limited window during which military action could be undertaken and she had urged the President not to miss that. She thought the point was well understood. But the Americans were very anxious to have everything in place before they made a move, and further forces and tanks were on their way from Germany. Prince Bandar said it was very important that this message should be clearly understood in Washington and he hoped the Prime Minister would reinforce it. All the indications were that Saddam Hussain still thought that hostilities would not break out. America's liberals were convincing him that a peace movement was growing apace in the United States, that the President had been seriously weakened by the budget dispute and that the French were working for a negotiated solution. We had to counter this.

Prince Bandar said that the second Egyptian division was due to start arriving today and that the Syrians were also finally about to move. The only cloud on the horizon was a fear among the Arab governments ranged against Iraq that the United States would back away from military action. The Prime Minister said it would be wrong to question American resolve. She was sure the President understood exactly what was at stake.

There was also a brief exchange on the role of the press should hostilities break out, with the Prime Minister counselling extreme caution. They must not be allowed to file reports until after action had taken place, otherwise there was the risk they would leak our plans. Prince Bandar said that the Saudis could help contrive this, for example by suspending the availability of facilities such as satellite communications. The Prime Minister said they would simply slip over to Bahrain. Prince Bandar said that perhaps we would have to jam the Western media as well as Iraqi broadcasts.

I am copying this letter to Simon Webb (Ministry of Defence) and Sir Robin Butler.

Your sincerely,


CHARLES POWELL

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office.