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PM/90/085

PRIME MINISTER

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His all seems sensible.

CB 16/11/90

GULF CRISIS: EXTRACTION OF BRITISH HOSTAGES AND
DETAINEES IN THE EVENT OF HOSTILITIES

att.

1. As I mentioned at OD(G) on 15 November, what we do about British hostages in Kuwait and Iraq is politically and practically a key element in the Gulf crisis. There are an estimated 516 British citizens in hiding in Kuwait, and 57 held at Iraqi "strategic sites". In Iraq itself there are an estimated 426 British citizens, plus 298 held at strategic sites. Public opinion is bound to remain very sensitive on this. There have already been complaints from relatives that the Government is taking no active steps to get them out. Most people will expect that we should somehow ensure their safety in advance of any hostilities initiated by the Allied side.

2. In practice, it is clear that it will not be possible to do anything to extricate the hostages in advance of hostilities. Any attempt might itself precipitate armed conflict. It will be correspondingly important to minimise danger to the hostages by ensuring that our targeting of Iraqi installations takes full account of all the information we have on their whereabouts, without compromising our military operations. Our military planning needs to take account of the scope for hostage rescue and to make the best possible arrangements for looking after the hostages once they are liberated. These questions are under

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discussion at official level between the MOD and the FCO.

Kuwait

3. In Kuwait we will have to rely on the Americans (who have roughly the same number of hostages in Kuwait as we do) for the liberation and initial handling of our citizens. We cannot expect 7th Armoured Brigade to take on the numbers involved, or even to be in the right place to do so. We are working on the assumption that British and other citizens liberated by Allied forces will be brought by a military evacuation chain as far as Al Jubail (7th Armoured Brigade's supply port in Saudi Arabia), and that the military casualty evacuation (Casevac) system will take on to hospital those who are injured. We envisage that HMA Riyadh and his staff, suitably reinforced, might take on the further evacuation of the uninjured from Al Jubail, and we are consulting him on the best way to achieve this. We may well have to ask for MOD assistance for a sea or airlift, though I recognise that MOD resources will already be stretched.

Iraq

4. In Iraq, there are two main scenarios we may face:
- If Saddam Hussein is toppled from power at a fairly early stage, we may well be able to secure the peaceful and speedy release of our citizens. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees and/or the Red Cross may be useful in helping to do so;
 - If Saddam remains in power after withdrawing from Kuwait, and there are reprisals against the hostages or he refuses to release them, we will have to consider



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further military options or (in the latter case) continued sanctions.

5. There is much at stake here. We need very soon to begin a detailed dialogue with the Americans. They share our interest in that they also have large numbers of hostages at risk, and of course in military terms they are in the lead. We need to ensure that we pool all available information on the hostages and detainees, and coordinate our planning both in relation to targeting and to rescuing the hostages.

6. I understand that a hostage cell has been established at the JHQ High Wycombe, and this should make an important contribution on all these aspects. The FCO Emergency Unit will work in close liaison with the cell, and in the event of hostilities the FCO will contribute an official to it.

7. It will be essential from now on to keep the eventual release of the hostages very high among our objectives, and to ensure that the Americans do the same.

8. I am copying this minute to the Defence Secretary and to Sir Robin Butler.

DH.

DOUGLAS HURD

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
15 November 1990

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