

SECRET

FM WASHINGTON

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELNO 2792

OF 152335Z NOVEMBER 90

INFO IMMEDIATE UKMIS NEW YORK, UKDEL NATO, MODUK, RIYADH  
INFO IMMEDIATE CAIRO, MOSCOW, PEKING, BAGHDAD, ACTOR

SIC

MY TELNO. 2742: IRAQ/KUWAIT  
SUMMARY

1. NO DECISION YET ON EXERCISING THE MILITARY OPTION. MILITARY BUILD UP TO BE COMPLETED BY EARLY 1991. NOT HOWEVER SUSTAINABLE OVER THE LONGER TERM. AMERICANS ATTACH CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE TO SECURING FURTHER UN COVER. THE ADMINISTRATION HAS A PROBLEM IN PERSUADING PUBLIC AND, MORE ESPECIALLY, CONGRESSIONAL OPINION THAT IT MAY BE NECESSARY TO GO OVER TO THE OFFENSIVE. THE PRESIDENT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO RELY ON CONSENSUS WHEN HE DECIDES WHICH ROUTE TO TAKE, PROBABLY SOME TIME IN JANUARY.

DETAIL

2. I HAVE SEEN THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS, SCOWCROFT, KIMMITT, WOLFOWITZ AT THE PENTAGON AND TALKED TO PELL (CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE) ON THE TELEPHONE OVER THE LAST FEW DAYS TO GET A READING OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S CURRENT POSITION FOLLOWING BAKER'S RETURN TO WASHINGTON AND THE PRESIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT ON 9 NOVEMBER OF MAJOR NEW US DEPLOYMENTS TO THE GULF. AS I REPORTED IN MY TUR, EXPECTATIONS HAVE BEEN AROUSED. BUT SCOWCROFT TOLD ME ON 13 NOVEMBER THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHEN FURTHER DECISIONS ABOUT THE MILITARY OPTION MIGHT BE TAKEN. THERE WAS AS YET NO DEFINITE GAME PLAN. AS I SEE IT, HOWEVER, THREE FACTORS WILL FIGURE HEAVILY IN THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION-MAKING. EACH IS NOW A FOCUS OF ADMINISTRATION ACTIVITY.

3. FIRST, MILITARY CAPABILITY. THE RENEWED MILITARY BUILD-UP OUGHT TO BE COMPLETED BY ABOUT THE MIDDLE OF JANUARY. POWELL TOLD ME ON 13 NOVEMBER THAT HE WAS NOT WORRIED ABOUT LOGISTICS. BUT IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE TO HAVE 70 PER CENT OF US FORCES OVERSEAS FOR A LONG PERIOD. THE MORALE OF THOSE ORIGINALLY SENT OUT IN AUGUST, AND EXPECTING TO BE ROTATED FAIRLY SOON, WOULD FALL DRAMATICALLY AND CREATE A SERIOUS PROBLEM IF THEY THOUGHT THAT THEY WERE HAVING TO STAY FOR A FURTHER LONG PERIOD. HE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THIS WAS NOT A PRESENT CONCERN. INDEED, THE MORALE OF THOSE IN THEATRE HAD



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IMPROVED WITH THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF ADDITIONAL REINFORCEMENTS, BECAUSE THOSE THERE ALREADY THOUGHT THAT SOMETHING WOULD HAPPEN ONE WAY OR THE OTHER BEFORE TOO LONG. THE CLEAR INFERENCE FROM WHAT POWELL SAID WAS THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD IN JANUARY/FEBRUARY EITHER HAVE TO USE THE FORCES HE WOULD BY THEN HAVE IN THE AREA, OR SETTLE IN FOR THE LONGER HAUL AND BRING SOME OF THEM HOME ON ROTATION.

4. SECOND, UN COVER. THE AMERICANS EVIDENTLY ATTACH PERHAPS INCREASING IMPORTANCE TO SECURING THIS, AS WAS CLEAR FROM WHAT KIMMITT SAID TO ME ON 14 NOVEMBER (MY TELNO. 2873 NOT TO ALL). BAKER'S INTENTION TO MEET A FURTHER GROUP OF SECURITY COUNCIL MEMBERS OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS POINTS IN THE SAME DIRECTION.

5. THIRD, DOMESTIC SUPPORT. FURTHER UN COVER WOULD, IN THE ADMINISTRATION'S VIEW, ALSO HELP IN THE CRITICAL AREA OF CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC OPINION. ALTHOUGH THE LOGIC BEHIND THE PRESIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF FURTHER US TROOP DEPLOYMENTS WAS CLEAR ENOUGH VIEWED FROM THE ADMINISTRATION'S PERSPECTIVE, THE FACT THAT HE CHANGED FROM SPEAKING OF DEFENCE AND DETERRENCE TO USING THE WORD QUOTE OFFENSIVE UNQUOTE EXPLICITLY MADE IT SEEM TO MUCH OF THE PUBLIC, AND PARTICULARLY TO CONGRESS, THAT SOME FORM OF RUBICON HAD BEEN CROSSED. THIS MIGHT SEEM ILLOGICAL, GIVEN THE IRAQI BUILD-UP AND THE LONG-ESTABLISHED OBJECTIVE, ENDORSED BY THE UN, OF GETTING THE IRAQIS OUT OF KUWAIT. MOREOVER, IT WOULD PROBABLY ALWAYS HAVE BEEN THE CASE THAT ONLY ONCE THE INITIAL BUILD-UP WAS COMPLETE, WOULD SERIOUS DEBATE START ON THE RESPECTIVE MERITS OF STICKING TO THE LONG HAUL OR TRYING FOR EARLIER AND DECISIVE MILITARY ACTION. THE FACT REMAINS HOWEVER THAT THE PRESIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT SHARPLY FOCUSED THE ISSUE. IT IS WIDELY RECOGNISED THAT DELAYING THE ROTATION, WHICH HAD EARLIER CONFIDENTLY BEEN EXPECTED, MEANS THAT THE LEVELS TO BE ACHIEVED EARLY NEXT YEAR ARE NOT SUSTAINABLE FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN SOME READ-ACROSS FROM THE PRESIDENT'S HANDLING OF THE BUDGET CRISIS, WHICH DAMAGED HIS PUBLIC REPUTATION FOR MEASURED JUDGEMENTS. HENCE THE PUBLIC PRESSURES RECORDED, FOR EXAMPLE, IN MY TELNO. 2767.

6. THE ADMINISTRATION ARE AWARE OF THE PROBLEM AND ARE STARTING TO TACKLE IT. THE EFFORT, HOWEVER, HAS YET TO BE COORDINATED EFFECTIVELY OR TO PAY SIGNIFICANT DIVIDENDS. THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS FROM THE GULF ON 22 NOVEMBER WILL BE IMPORTANT IN THIS REGARD. SENATOR PELL TOLD ME ON 14 NOVEMBER, AFTER A TWO HOUR PRESIDENTIAL BRIEFING OF THE SENATE LEADERSHIP, THAT THERE WAS BROAD SUPPORT FOR THE PRESIDENT'S ACTION TO DATE, BUT THAT THE CLEAR MESSAGE WAS FOR THE PRESIDENT TO SLOW DOWN. THE DECISION



TO CANCEL ROTATION HAD COME IN FOR PARTICULARLY HEAVY CRITICISM (AND HAS SINCE BEEN SHADED BY CHENEY). PELL SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THAT WE WOULD FIND THE PRESIDENT BACKING AWAY FROM THIS DECISION. CRITICISM WAS ALSO FOCUSSED ON THE INCREASINGLY DOMINANT US ROLE IN THE GULF IN TERMS OF TROOPS COMMITTED. THE PRESIDENT NEEDED TO PRESENT THE ISSUE TO THE US PUBLIC IN SIMPLER TERMS AND TO AVOID THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS CHANGING HIS OBJECTIVES.

7. MUCH OF THE PRESSURE FOR THE EARLY RETURN OF CONGRESS TO DEBATE THE USE OF FORCE HAS NOW EASED, MAINLY BECAUSE THE ISSUE IS NOT RIPE FOR JUDGEMENT. SOME AT LEAST IN THE CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP WILL NOT WANT TO GIVE THE ADMINISTRATION A BLANK CHEQUE TOO FAR IN ADVANCE. THE SENATE HEARINGS DUE LATER THIS MONTH WILL MARK AN IMPORTANT STAGE IN THE ADMINISTRATION'S RELATIONSHIP WITH CONGRESS. IF A SUITABLE RESOLUTION CAN BE PASSED IN THE UN AND BE SUBSEQUENTLY ENDORSED IN SOME WAY BY THE CONGRESS, THAT WILL EASE THE ADMINISTRATION'S POSITION. CONGRESS IS DUE TO RECONVENE FOR A BRIEF FORMAL MEETING IN EARLY JANUARY, BUT WILL NOT DO SO SUBSTANTIVELY UNTIL LATE IN THE MONTH. THIS COULD MAKE IT HARDER FOR THE PRESIDENT TO EXERCISE THE MILITARY OPTION BEFORE THEN, UNLESS HE IS ABLE TO WIN CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT THROUGH INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS IN THE MEANTIME. AS THINGS STAND, THE MILITARY BUILD-UP OUGHT TO BE COMPLETED AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME AS THE NEW CONGRESS BEGINS ITS FIRST SESSION, LEAVING SOME FEW WEEKS BEFORE WHAT WE HAVE SO FAR SEEN AS THE QUOTE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY UNQUOTE IN THE GULF BEGINS TO CLOSE.

8. MY OVERALL CONCLUSION IS THAT IT WILL NOT BE UNTIL TOWARDS THE END OF THE YEAR OR, QUITE POSSIBLY, UNTIL SOME TIME IN EARLY JANUARY, BEFORE THE ADMINISTRATION MAKES ANY VERY CLEAR DECISION AS TO WHETHER IT WILL ORDER AN OFFENSIVE OR REVERT TO DEFENCE, DETERRENCE AND THE LONG SANCTIONS HAUL. THE PRESIDENT'S CURRENT DIFFICULTIES WITH PUBLIC OPINION AND THE CONGRESS WILL INFLUENCE HIS CHOICE, THOUGH THEY WILL NOT NECESSARILY LIMIT HIS OPTIONS. MUCH WILL DEPEND ON THE MAJORITY JUDGEMENT IN CONGRESS AND AMONG THE PUBLIC AT THE TIME AS TO HOW SWIFT AND SUCCESSFUL MILITARY OPERATIONS MIGHT BE. THE PROSPECT OF THOUSANDS OF US BODIES RETURNING HOME BECAUSE OF KUWAIT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR MANY IN THIS COUNTRY TO ACCEPT, PARTICULARLY IN THE CONTINUED ABSENCE OF A GENERAL SENSE THAT TRULY VITAL US INTERESTS ARE AT STAKE. THE PRESIDENT, ON THE OTHER HAND, WILL HAVE TO REALISE SOONER OR LATER THAT HE CANNOT MAKE THE JUDGEMENT AS BETWEEN PEACE AND WAR ON THE BASIS OF CONSENSUS. HE WILL HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST ASSESSMENT HE CAN OF THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL RISKS AND THEN DECIDE WHICH WAY TO

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GO, KNOWING THAT IF HE DOES NOT TAKE THE OFFENSIVE EARLY NEXT YEAR, THE NEXT CAMPAIGNING SEASON MIGHT NOT THEN BE UNTIL THE FOLLOWING AUTUMN.

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