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From the Private Secretary

20 November 1990

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT GORBACHEV

The Prime Minister had an hour's meeting with President Gorbachev at the Residence of the Soviet Ambassador in Paris this morning. President Gorbachev's adviser, Mr. Chernayev, was also present. The discussion dealt almost entirely with the Gulf and with developments in the Soviet Union, followed by a brief exchange on bilateral matters at the end. President Gorbachev was in lively form, as indeed he has been throughout the CSCE Summit, and did not appear at all overwhelmed by the problems which he faces.

The Gulf

The Prime Minister proposed that she and Mr. Gorbachev should begin by discussing the Gulf: and then he should tell her about developments in the Soviet Union. She understood that he had discussed the Gulf with President Bush the previous evening. She and the President very much agreed on the way ahead. She did not believe that Saddam Hussain would withdraw from Kuwait: he was not that kind of person. Indeed he appeared to be putting in more troops. She doubted that sanctions would work within a reasonable timescale. Equally, we and the Americans could not keep our forces in the desert indefinitely. If the military option had to be used, we would have to take account of climatic factors and the timing of Ramadan. Personally she believed that the military option would have to be used. We already had legal authority for it under Article 51. Public opinion in the United Kingdom understood what a terrible man Saddam Hussain was and would support military action. Even if, against expectations, Saddam Hussain did withdraw, we would still have to deal with Iraq's nuclear, biological and chemical weapons capability. Otherwise we would simply face the same problem in a few year's time.

The Prime Minister continued that President Bush and Secretary Baker were hoping to obtain a further Security Council resolution during their presidency, which would authorise the use of force. This was very important to them from the point of view

SECRET

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of securing the support of Congress for military action. General Scowcroft had told us earlier that the President had the impression from his meeting with President Gorbachev that the Soviet Union would accept a further resolution, indeed would be ready to vote for it, but would prefer to make that decision explicit in their own way and in their own time.

President Gorbachev said there was absolutely no difficulty about the need for the Soviet Union, the United States and Britain to tackle this crisis together. He could promise that the Soviet Union would work with us to untie the knot. A new relationship was being built, and if cooperation on the Gulf failed, it would be a set-back for all that had been achieved so far. It was also very important to continue to act through the United Nations. That would make the position much stronger and clearer. He agreed with the Prime Minister that we could not countenance the sort of concentration of weapons which Iraq had accumulated. He therefore shared her view that it was not only a question of securing Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait but also of demilitirisation. Indeed, there were far too many weapons in the Middle East as a whole. The question was how best to achieve these objectives. He believed we were all acting in a responsible manner. He had agreed with President Bush the previous evening that there would have to be another discussion in the Security Council and this would probably lead to adoption of a further resolution. There were some nuances in the approaches of different countries, for instance China. But he did not believe the Chinese would veto a resolution. The language of the resolution should be such as to make Saddam Hussain recognise that he would face extreme measures if he failed to withdraw. At the same time it must be such as to make it possible for all members of the Security Council to give their support. But he was clear on the substance: the signal to Saddam Hussain should be in the nature of an ultimatum, if necessary with a deadline.

The Prime Minister said she was wary of a deadline: it would just warn Saddam Hussain of what was coming and encourage him to take pre-emptive action. You should never let your enemy know your plans. Our first responsibility was to protect the lives of our forces. The signal to Saddam Hussain should be that we were authorised to use force at any time. We had many British citizens hiding in Kuwait, and they were hoping for military action to secure their release. President Gorbachev said that, frankly, he did not expect military action to earn a lot of applause. He thought a conflict would be bloodier than Vietnam. If we decided to go in, we must also decide how to come out. The international community could not afford to lose. The Prime Minister said that was why we were holding up action until we had enough forces to be certain of success. President Gorbachev asked whether the Prime Minister was sure that it was impossible to bring Saddam Hussain to his knees by other means, and thus resolve the problem peacefully. His question was only intended to elicit a view, not to suggest that we were wrong to contemplate use of force. The Prime Minister said that Saddam Hussain was just not the kind of person who would withdraw. There could be no question of compromising on the requirements of the Security Council resolutions. President Gorbachev

SECRET

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interjected that he entirely agreed. The Prime Minister continued that she did not think Saddam Hussain could survive pulling out of Kuwait, although he ought to recognise that he would be in even deeper trouble if he chose to fight on.

President Gorbachev said there seemed to be a basis for adopting a further UN resolution without delay. The precise language could be discussed and Mr. Shevernadze would talk to the Foreign Secretary and Secretary Baker about this. The Prime Minister warned that it could take time to get a resolution through the Security Council. President Gorbachev said he had agreed with President Bush that they would say to the press that further consideration by the Security Council was now necessary. That would help prepare public opinion. The Prime Minister said she understood that the Americans were aiming at 28/29 November for tabling the resolution. President Gorbachev said we must all get to work on other members of the Security Council.

The Prime Minister told President Gorbachev that we were intending to send additional forces to the Gulf. She felt President Bush was entitled to expect support from his European allies. We were also sorting out our precise objectives. She agreed with President Gorbachev that action must be successful, and the quicker the better. But there was always some adverse and unexpected factor. The big unknown was CW and BW, although we did not think Iraq had nuclear weapons yet. President Gorbachev said the Soviet assessment was that Iraq did not have nuclear or BW, but certainly had CW and was capable of using it.

President Gorbachev said that he and the Prime Minister should tell the press that the situation was becoming more difficult because of Iraq's failure to implement Security Council resolutions, and the Security Council must therefore consider the matter again and take action. The Prime Minister agreed, adding that they should both also condemn the holding of hostages.

Soviet Union internal

President Gorbachev then turned to the situation in the Soviet Union saying that, although the Prime Minister knew all about it, he was honour-bound to say something. Nothing extraordinary or supernatural was happening, only what had to happen. Everything was undergoing change, every aspect of life, a profound and dramatic change towards political and economic freedom. This was very difficult in a multinational country. At the same time the Soviet Union was being opened up to the world, with a new foreign policy, new military doctrine and so on. Every vested interest was feeling the impact. He was constantly being criticised by people who said he had no clear plan or alternatively that he acted too hastily or that he delayed too long. He was reminded of some lines from a Georgian poet: everyone believes he is a strategist while looking at the battle from afar. Change was an enormous undertaking in a country over-burdened by problems and inferiority complexes, and it was actually remarkable that so far it had succeeded without spilling much blood. But now the priority was to take drastic measures to cope with instability. People wanted destructive

SECRET

pressures to be halted. Even in the Baltic Republics they were unhappy with the degree of breakdown. In Riga the crowd had thrown flowers at Soviet soldiers during the 7 November parade and there had been a bigger crowd than in Moscow. People like Mrs. Prunskiene and President Landsbergis were being undermined, and pro-facist forces behind them were coming to the fore. That was why it was so important to stabilise the situation. Central authority simply had to work more effectively. There had to be an end to squabbling over whether Union or Republic law had priority.

President Gorbachev continued that the Soviet Parliament had returned from a two week recess, having felt the heat from constituents, and had demanded an immediate discussion of the overall situation in the Soviet Union. They had sent for him and he had agreed to appear before them within 48 hours. After his report, they had more or less accepted his assessment. But the measures which he had proposed were not, in their view, satisfactory. They wanted tougher measures to stabilise the situation. He had therefore come to the conclusion that he had to propose something more far reaching. He had spent all night writing out some proposals which were subsequently approved with only a very few people dissenting. Before setting out for his visits to Italy and France he had instructed his people to work up the details. The central issue now was the crisis of authority in the Soviet Union. The country had moved from the extreme of centralisation, but must stop in time and not swing right across to the other extreme of disintegration. It was time to stop, look around, re-group and act. It was no coincidence that there had been quite a large group of people in Red Square on 7 November carrying Stalin's picture. They wanted order to be restored. The Soviet Union had left one system but had not yet arrived at another.

President Gorbachev continued that, at a time of profound change, personal ambitions came to the fore and poured fuel on the flames. To make sure that the process of reform was successful, there had to be tougher and more effective authority, and he was the one who had to take the necessary steps. So more determined action and measures would be adopted, perhaps even harsh measures. It had been noticeable that after he had given a tough speech last week, much more food had suddenly appeared in the shops in Moscow. The Prime Minister said there had been a danger that people would interpret freedom as absence of authority. There had to be a rule of law and a reasonable distribution of power between the centre and the republics. The essence of freedom was to find the right framework of authority. If one took all powers to the centre, it would put all responsibility on President Gorbachev himself. And even he, big man that he was, could not do it all alone. She had noted his reference in his speech the previous day to the intention to create a federation of sovereign states. But the detail had to be worked out. President Gorbachev said that, as soon as he returned from Paris, he would publish a new draft Union Treaty. Then the whole country would see what he meant. There would be a tremendous shift of authority and responsibility to the Republics. The centre would be in charge only of strategic decisions on what every Republic needed. The Prime

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Minister said that President Gorbachev would surely need an Executive Council or Cabinet to help him. President Gorbachev appeared to agree, adding that everything would come to a head in a few months.

The Prime Minister gave President Gorbachev a brief account of her meeting with President Landsbergis, as she had promised the latter she would. We hoped a solution to the problems of the Baltic States could be found through negotiation. Gorbachev appeared faintly bemused but made no substantive comment.

Bilateral relations

As the meeting ended, the Prime Minister said she understood discussions on the proposed agreement on bilateral relations were going well. President Gorbachev said he very much hoped he and the Prime Minister could have another and longer meeting soon. There should be an early discussion of dates.

I am copying this letter to John Gieve (HM Treasury), Martin Stanley (Department of Trade and Industry), Simon Webb (Ministry of Defence) and Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

(C. D. POWELL)

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