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From the Private Secretary

20 November 1990

See Stebbins.

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT MITTERRAND

The Prime Minister had a 45 minute meeting with President Mitterrand this morning, in the margins of the CSCE Summit in Paris. The President was accompanied by Mme. de Margerie and M. Henekine, his diplomatic adviser. The conversation was concerned entirely with the Gulf.

President Mitterrand said that he had worked out his thinking on what to do about the Gulf and wanted to tell the Prime Minister the conclusions which he had reached. He had decided to accept President Bush's request that France should join in working out a new Security Council resolution authorising the use of force. Unfortunately the Americans had given the impression that France was prepared to go along with anything. In fact he had made clear that all he was doing was agreeing to discuss the wording of the resolution. There was no question of just rubber-stamping a draft worked out in Washington. But he considered that the moment had come to adopt a resolution authorising the use of force. There was no question of France taking military action without such a resolution. It was a last chance to convince Saddam Hussain that he must withdraw.

President Mitterrand continued that, unfortunately, the Americans did not all say the same thing. Some of them seemed to want hostilities at all costs. Others were more guarded. His own view was that, if Saddam Hussain did not make up his mind rapidly to implement the Security Council resolutions, then the only possibility left was to use force. He preferred not to talk of restoring the Amir of Kuwait: that was not a sufficient motive to send French soldiers to get killed. Discussion had to focus on withdrawal and observance of international law. So in short he was ready to look at a text for a resolution as soon as the Americans produced one.

The Prime Minister said she was very glad to hear the President's account and took a very similar view. She thought Saddam Hussain was unlikely to withdraw from Kuwait. Even if he did, we would still have to deal with Iraq's chemical, biological and nuclear capability. The period for use of force was constrained by the climatic conditions. Moreover we needed to

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agree a resolution during the American presidency of the Security Council, which meant by the end of the month. She suspected some members would not want to use the word 'force', in which case we would have to talk about 'necessary measures'. But we would never accept a resolution which tried to attach conditions. If we had to use our forces to uphold international law she would not allow any constraints to be put on them. President Mitterrand commented that instructions issued to French forces would depend very much on the circumstances. For the moment, their mission was defence. They were stationed north of the American forces right up on the frontier. He would be the one to decide how and under what circumstances they should be used. He would only consider that if the United Nations made clear that it approved. He was not saying that France would hide behind a text or veto one: he was sure there would be a resolution. He had no difficulty with the use of the word 'force'. The important thing was that the resolution should be explicit enough to leave the Iraqis in no doubt about what would happen. If the formula was too complex, they would not get the message. He did not know exactly what Gorbachev thought. He had the impression that Gorbachev wanted to push the search for a peaceful solution to its limits. But on balance, he thought the Soviet Union would go along with a resolution. It was unlikely that China would veto it.

The Prime Minister said that she was confident, in the light of her talk earlier that morning with President Gorbachev, that the Soviet Union would come along: and she agreed with the President about China. But we had to move rapidly. The period in which force could be used was relatively brief and we would need to move before many weeks were passed. President Mitterrand said that the main effort would inevitably be American: they would bear the brunt. They would not find decisive military help from France. He thought that President Bush really wanted political cover and perhaps military protection for the flank of the American forces. He had no intention of sending 10,000 more troops. He had difficulties enough in France already. People asked why France was rushing to defend Kuwait and not Lebanon.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the two situations were not similar. If we failed to stop Saddam Hussain now he would simply undertake further aggression elsewhere in the Gulf. But the United Kingdom would send more forces. She detected some feeling among people in the United States that Europe was not doing enough. After all, the Gulf was a vitally important source of oil for Europe. President Mitterrand said it was rather different for the United Kingdom: we had historical links with Kuwait. France had no defence agreement with Kuwait: indeed the Kuwaitis had not even bought French aircraft. The Prime Minister said that our forces in Saudi Arabia were co-operating closely with the US Commander and she was confident that British and American forces would work together well.

The Prime Minister continued that we would probably have to take more forces out of Germany for the Gulf. She and the President needed to talk at some point, perhaps when the Gulf crisis was over, about the longer term question of forces in Germany. We were now prevented from practising low flying and

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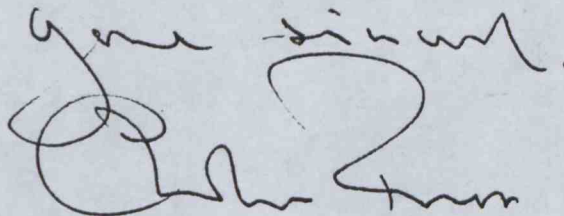
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our training of all sorts was greatly restricted. President Mitterrand said it was indeed a sorry business. France was being asked to keep troops in Germany but hindered from being able to train them. Foreign forces were seen simply as a useful contribution to the local economy. France's forces would be reduced by a half over two years, and the other half would leave as well although he had not set a timescale for that. The Prime Minister said that British forces would also be reduced. But we must always keep some in order to encourage the Americans to remain.

President Mitterrand said he wanted to come back to the question of use of force in the Gulf and make France's position absolutely clear. There was a distinction between authorisation by the United Nations for the use of force, which he supported, and the actual decision to use force. There was nothing automatic about the latter. He did not want to wake up one morning and find the sky full of American aircraft and President Bush on the telephone telling him to move French forces. He would have to get the authorisation of Parliament before any decision. The Prime Minister observed that the timing of the use of force would have to be mainly a question for the United States, but she was confident they would consult with close allies. That was why we were working very closely with them.

President Mitterrand asked what view the Prime Minister took about the sort of resistance which Iraq was likely to put up. The Prime Minister said that both President Ozal and Mr. Peres had told her that the Iraqi forces would fade away under attack. But you could not plan on that basis. President Mitterrand observed that some people predicted a campaign would take weeks or even months. The Prime Minister said she doubted it would take six days as some hoped. President Mitterrand said their mutual friend President Mubarak had suggested six hours would be enough. The truth was that Iraqi equipment was fairly ancient. The Prime Minister said it would probably be prudent to plan on the assumption of a campaign which could last two to three months. It was better to err on the side of caution.

I am copying this letter to Simon Webb (Ministry of Defence) and to Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).



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