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PRIME MINISTER

cc Sir Robin Butler
Sir Percy Cradock

OPD(G): 12 December

Item 1: BW Immunisation

The Health Secretary is attending for this item only. You might invite the Defence Secretary to introduce his note which, although it touches on BTx and plague, is effectively concerned with immunisation against anthrax.

Threat/Def.

2. You might begin the discussion by asking whether Sir Percy Cradock or the Foreign Secretary have any comments on the threat (paragraphs 2-3). The section on countermeasures is purely technical. The key point under UK production of anthrax vaccine is in paragraph 9 which argues that if the anthrax immunisation programme begins on 17 December it can provide protection for all Service personnel in theatre by early February. You might ask the Health Secretary to say whether he accepts the impact which the calls for whooping cough vaccine, as an adjunct to the anthrax doses, could have on the NHS, and the political fall-out which this could cause (paragraph 8).

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3. The US position is more exposed, since they cannot apparently cover all their much larger numbers. Colleagues presumably do not share the US view (paragraph 11) that the minimum defensible programme will have to cover the whole of the multinational force and oilfield workers. You might ask the Defence Secretary whether US policy has evolved further since his note, in the light of the bilateral discussions on 10 December. Earlier contacts with the US Administration

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indicated that, in the US view, a unilateral UK decision could threaten the unity of the coalition. I understand that the latest position is that the US does not intend to initiate a programme at present but no final decision has been made.

4. You could ask the Attorney General to confirm that he is content with paragraph 13 on the legal considerations which mean that Service personnel will need to sign a consent form. You might then ask the Foreign Secretary if he endorses the Defence Secretary's conclusions (paragraphs 14-16) on other international considerations. He may want to question whether there will be more of an outcry than the paper suggests. In particular the Saudi request for 50,000 doses will need careful handling (paragraph 15).

5. You might ask colleagues to confirm that it is agreed that the first duty is to protect British forces and that an immunisation programme cannot be concealed. There is the additional point that a decision to immunise our troops will be a powerful signal of our seriousness of purpose to Saddam and might help to deter him from use of BW on the battlefield or against civilians.

6. You might ask colleagues to agree, as the Defence Secretary proposes, that an anthrax immunisation programme should be initiated as soon as practicable. Before this is done, major Allies should be informed. You might invite the Foreign and Defence Secretaries to concert on how and when this should be done, and whether offers to discuss post-attack ways of dealing with BW will be any real help. You may also wish to decide the order of priority to whom extra

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does can be allocated. Paragraph 20 of the paper suggests that the order should be BAe, WHO, Saudis, and British Airways and other UK civilians. The Foreign Secretary may have views, especially on the Saudi requirement. You might invite the Defence and Foreign Secretaries to commission their officials to prepare a low-key statement together with press and Parliamentary briefing (war correspondents will be covered) and to discuss the timing of an announcement. MoD will need to brief the troops and their families. Finally, you might ask the Defence Secretary to confirm that for BTx post-attack treatment is proposed: will that cover all UK front line troops? You might also invite the Defence Secretary to let the Group have the further proposals on dealing with plague (paragraph 7) as soon as possible.

Item 2: Current International Situation

7. You might invite the Foreign Secretary to brief colleagues orally on the latest state of play. Subject to overnight developments, we have identified four possible items of current interest: release of hostages; US/Iraqi contacts; the European Council; and Israeli policy.

8. The release of hostages is also relevant to Item 5: the future of the Embassy in Kuwait. By the end of 11 December, there should have been two flights direct from Baghdad to the UK, and a number of indirect flights, on which the great majority of British hostages (perhaps over 800) should have been evacuated from Iraq and Kuwait. This probably leaves somewhere over 200 British citizens in Iraq and a small handful in Kuwait, though the numbers can only be an estimate. There is likely to be an irreducible minimum of British citizens who stay on in Kuwait because

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they are married to Kuwaitis or because they feel their whole life is invested in Kuwait. You might ask the Foreign Secretary about the timing when we estimate that all those who want to leave will be able to leave.

9. On US/Iraqi contacts, it looks as though Tariq Aziz will travel to Washington for talks on 17 December, though this is subject to confirmation. No dates have yet been fixed for Mr Baker's trip to Baghdad, but he has said that it has to be before 3 January. The Iraqis are trying to spin out the process. No dates have been fixed either for the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Five Permanent members of the Security Council: this is essentially a diary rather than a political problem. Mr Shevardnadze has sent a message, after his talks with Mr Baker in Texas, to say that he will do his best to find suitable dates. The Chinese are still being difficult. It will be crucially important for the meeting of the Foreign Ministers to give Mr Baker a tight mandate to tell Saddam Hussain that he must withdraw otherwise he will be attacked, and to reject any form of pre-withdrawal negotiation. The Kuwaitis and Iraqis have denied being involved in secret talks about a compromise involving ceding the two islands and the oilfields.

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10. There will be a statement on the Gulf at the European Council, which will be prepared by the Political Directors and discussed by Foreign Ministers. The statement will reaffirm the commitment of the Twelve to UN Resolutions. Our objective will be to prevent any importation of compromise language undermining the UN Resolutions: the Italian first draft was not very attractive. At the

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Council you will want to pin down the Italians on the line to take at the contacts between the Presidency and Tariq Aziz on his way back from Washington.

11. Mr Shamir's visit to Washington, and Deputy Foreign Minister Netanyahu's talks with Mr Hogg on 10 December, illustrate Israeli concern over the possibility that Saddam Hussain might withdraw fully or partially from Kuwait. We have asked the JIC for an assessment of the likelihood of an Israeli pre-emptive strike and their capability to destroy Iraq's NBC installations and weapons (it is by no means self-evident that the Israelis could do the job alone). You may want to conclude the discussion of this point by suggesting that OPD(G) look at the Israeli angle next week in advance of your talks with President Bush.

Item 3: Media Handling

12. You might invite the Defence Secretary to introduce his paper. Many of the arrangements proposed have been agreed with the media.

13. You might begin by noting the differences from the Falklands operation: no exclusive UK control; heavy US leverage; Saudi sensitivities; other Allies; and geographic proximity in the age of the satellite. You might then ask the Defence Secretary if he is content with the arrangements for journalists visas and the balance of media representation on the outbreak of hostilities. This could be a major hassle if not tackled effectively in advance: the Foreign Secretary may have views on this and on co-operation with the US and Saudi Governments. The FCO will need to be fully involved in the arrangements.

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14. From an operational standpoint, it is vital that the Media Response Teams should not be in a position to reveal operations in advance or to prejudice ongoing operations by revealing current dispositions. You might ask the Defence Secretary to confirm that this is the case: especially for the initial strikes. This control has to be exercised very largely, if not entirely, in theatre. The co-ordination between London and the Gulf seems to be well in hand, with the Defence Secretary the principal Ministerial spokesman and members of OPD(G) plus the Home Secretary and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster briefed as additional presenters of the Government's case. It would be useful to check that arrangements for these briefings are being made. You might ask colleagues to confirm that there should be no general home censorship but you will need to be satisfied that there are mechanisms to persuade editors at the last moment not to print/show items likely to add to casualties among our troops if such items slip through the in-theatre net. You might also ask for colleagues' advice on how to minimise the impact of combat and casualties on civilian morale. The best antidote is rapid military success combined with obvious combat efficiency: but a long drawn out battle is much harder to deal with.

15. You might conclude the discussion by asking colleagues to approve the paper subject to points made in the discussion, and invite the Defence Secretary to come forward with more detailed recommendations on how to minimise the damage to civilian morale caused by reports of bombing and casualties and (as proposed) how to deal with broadcasts from Iraq.

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Item 4: Advice to British Communities in War Risk Countries

16. You might invite the Foreign Secretary to introduce his minute. You might then ask whether colleagues have any general comments.

17. The advice to British communities seems entirely right in the light of UN Security Council Resolution 678 and the 15 January deadline, which provides a convenient benchmark on timing. You might invite colleagues to approve the proposals in the Foreign Secretary's minute, including informing other countries in advance, and that the announcement should be made before Christmas. The announcement will have the incidental benefit of giving another clear signal to Saddam that we mean business.

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Item 5: British Embassy in Kuwait

18. You might ask the Foreign Secretary to remind colleagues why he believes it right to announce later tomorrow the decision to withdraw Mr Weston and Mr Banks. The precise timing has not yet been set (depending in part on hostage departures) but it will be before 18 December. Colleagues are unlikely to object, but in approving the proposal you might ask the Foreign Secretary to convey the appreciation of yourself and colleagues for the courage and resilience shown by Mr Weston and Mr Banks.

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L V Appleyard

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Cabinet Office
11 December 1990

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