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PRIME MINISTER

cc Sir Robin Butler
Sir Percy Cradock

OPD(G): 13 December

Objective of the meeting

The meeting will now only last half an hour, so that you may wish to use the time for a brisk first-reading discussion of the key issues covered in the first two items. This will provide useful guidance for the UK team at the UK/US talks on 14 December, which will cover some of the ground. The last paper, Item 3, seeks a decision. However, you may wish to ask the Defence Secretary to begin with a word on the BW programme, on which there appears to be bad news.

BW Immunisation

2. The Defence Secretary will explain. Apparently we have heard from the Department of Health that one of the first three batches of anthrax vaccine is defective. The MoD are assessing the implications. At first sight it looks as though we may not be able to do a full programme. Nor will we know for another week whether the other two batches are satisfactory. So no question at present of contacting the US Government until we have a clearer picture. The Defence Secretary will report further.

Item 1: Implications of Iraqi partial withdrawal from Kuwait

3. There are two papers under this item: OPD(G)(90)6 by the FCO and OPD(G)(90)7 by the Defence Secretary. They both describe neatly the problems partial withdrawal would pose but, reasonably enough, do not come up with any ready-made solutions.

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4. You might open the discussion by inviting the Foreign Secretary to highlight briefly the conclusions of his paper (OPD(G)(90)6). The problems for us include the probability that Saddam might spin out and obfuscate the process to prevent being attacked in the pre-Ramadan window, that partial withdrawal would encourage moves to settle for a compromise, put strains on the Western/Arab coalition and undermine the determination of the international community and US public opinion to insist on full implementation of UN Resolutions. While the effect on British public opinion might be less damaging than in the US, it is worth exploring with colleagues how they would expect the British Parliament, press and public to react. The risk that the Israelis might launch their own attack is a further factor.

5. The responses set out in paragraph 15 of the FCO paper include ensuring that the meeting of the Five Foreign Ministers sends a tough message in favour of full withdrawal via Mr Baker: this seems sensible. The Italian Presidency may be disposed to take a less firm line, but this point could usefully be raised at the European Council before Signor de Michelis meets Tariq Aziz. The further measures in paragraph 16 after a partial withdrawal seem less likely to have an impact on Saddam: giving Saddam a further deadline (option h) could weaken the effect of the military option on Saddam. This section would benefit from further analysis and work.

6. You might invite the Defence Secretary to introduce his paper (OPD(G)(90)7) which presents an equally bleak picture though there is no evidence so far that the Iraqis are preparing a defensive line (paragraph 3). You might then ask Sir Richard Vincent for his brief assessment of the three military options in paragraphs 5-10 of the paper. The paper comes to no firm conclusions: everything depends on circumstances at the time.

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7. You might conclude the discussion by instructing the UK team to seek US views at the UK/US talks and to report back. Thereafter the FCO and MOD might prepare a joint contingency paper with firmer proposals marrying the political and factors for discussion in OPD(G), though the detailed military planning will presumably need to remain highly confidential.

Item 2: Implications of a total Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait

8. You might invite the Foreign Secretary briefly to introduce his paper. The intention had been for the FCO to produce a companion piece on constraining Iraq's nuclear, CBW and missile capability but it proved impossible at the last moment for the Foreign Secretary to approve it in a satisfactory form.

9. [If there is insufficient time, you might skip this section.] The major objectives in paragraph 2 seem uncontroversial. The section on means (paragraphs 4-5) rightly distinguishes between a unilateral and a forced Iraqi withdrawal (the latter not automatically enabling us to impose our will to the full on Saddam) and points again to the Israeli factor, which OPD(G) dealt with earlier today. You might ask the Foreign Secretary how realistic are the chances of maintaining credible sanctions after full withdrawal, securing the compensation provided for in UN Resolutions and persuading arms supplying countries to maintain an effective embargo. The Defence Secretary will have views on retaining Western forces in the Gulf: probably unavoidable in the short term even if at a tripwire level, though better under UN cover. Similarly there may need to be a fuller peace-keeping force with Arab and other contingents. As the paper suggests, the Kuwaitis may well have to democratise their government (paragraphs 6-7). The section on negotiations on a settlement (paragraph 10) can justifiably be left for later consideration.

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10. Since the separate NBC paper is not available you might ask the Foreign Secretary to highlight the key features of an NPT regime and regional security structure (paragraphs 11-13). Further work could perhaps be done in this area. You might conclude the discussion by inviting the UK team at the UK/US talks to cover this issue too with the US Government and report back. Thereafter, as above, the FCO and MoD might prepare a joint paper with firmer proposals for discussion in early January, incorporating the elements of a revised NBC paper.

Item 3: Gulf Crisis: Distribution of Respirators to Civilians

11. You might invite the Foreign Secretary to introduce his paper. For the sake of speed you might focus discussion on paragraph 14 containing conclusions and recommendations. The first decision is whether to distribute respirators. If it is agreed that distribution should go ahead, the next decision is timing: (i) as soon as adult respirators are in place on 12 December; (ii) when supplies are also available for children (7 January) and at any rate before 15 January; (iii) or when the risk is assessed to have increased. MoD favour option (ii) since the risk of a pre-emptive attack is minimal and it would be administratively simpler and presentationally easier: you may wish to seek approval for option (ii).

12. On the scope of distribution (paragraph 14 b), you may think it would be sensible to be consistent with the consular advice by including Riyadh, as OPD(G) decided today. You might also agree that we should inform but not consult the US Government, if the Foreign Secretary is confident that this will not cause problems.

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13. Finally, you will wish to look at the press line in paragraph 13. The Energy Secretary and Defence Secretary will have views.
14. You may wish to conclude the discussion by approving the Foreign Secretary's paper subject to the points made in discussion.
15. The next meeting of OPD(G) will be Wednesday 19 December at 0900.

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Cabinet Office
12 December 1990

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