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PRIME MINISTER

OPD(G): 19 December
Gulf Crisis: Visit to Washington

The second oral item on the agenda concerns your trip to Washington. You may want to use it to consider your main objectives in the Gulf context when you see the President. Alternatively you may prefer to hold this over until your formal briefing session tomorrow afternoon.

2. Whichever way you play it, I set out below some of the points you may wish to include under the head of "objectives".

a. You will want to convey that our policy on the Gulf remains as clear and firm as under your predecessor and that we remain as reliable allies of the United States in this enterprise, and others. You will also wish to demonstrate that you yourself are in command of the subject.

b. You will want to satisfy yourself that Bush himself, and Baker, remain firm, that any final contacts with the Iraqis will take place under the strictest constraints, that they are alive to the appalling consequences of an apparent climbdown or a fudged solution, and that they are prepared to lead and form US opinion rather than the reverse. This will obviously be a very delicate exploration, given the uncertain state of Congress and our relatively small military contribution; but our standing is high and with luck we should be able to perform our dual role of strengthening the Administration's will and helping to clarify their thinking. The latest assessment from Antony Acland is mildly encouraging.

Can't dial down
Can't hedge.

b

c. You will wish to underline the need for the closest US/UK co-ordination and joint planning. Planning talks between officials have already been held and have gone well. They are to continue in the New Year. We are in broad agreement on our strategic and military objectives, though further discussion on points of detail will be needed.

d. We need to explore how the US Administration plan to handle the period up to 15 January.

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- i. If talks with the Iraqis take place, how will they frustrate Saddam's likely objective of stringing things out beyond the deadline?
 - ii. If there are no talks?

We remain of the view that the less said to the Iraqis beyond the Security Council resolutions the better and that what little is said should be in strict unison. (We want no more surprises.)

e. We need to think through with the Americans the implications of partial or full Iraqi withdrawal and plan our reactions, both pre-emptive and if such events occur. This is in many ways the most dangerous contingency and we want to have as many defences in place against it as we can manage.

f. We need to check our assessment of likely Israeli policy and agree the need to keep Israel out of the conflict as far as possible. Provision of timely US intelligence to Israel will play an important part here.

M. Howard

c

g. We need to establish our joint policy on attacks on NBC targets. Further military discussion is needed here.

h. We need to stress the importance of tight and coordinated media handling on our own side. Further discussions are planned early in the New Year in Washington. On the Iraqi side we attach importance to silencing their TV and radio transmission capability.

i. We need joint planning on long-term security arrangements for the area, covering both troop presence and the sanctions régime, designed to deal with Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

3. Most of the above can be left as broad-brush statements of agreement with the President, leaving the details to be worked out elsewhere. What is more important than the fine print is the establishment of an atmosphere of openness, trust and determination. The stakes are now very high: great prizes in terms of the future international order could be in our hands if we can rise to the occasion and carry this operation through successfully; the downside risks if it is botched are even greater. It would be helpful if you could convey to the President your sense of the critical nature of the decisions to be taken.

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PERCY CRADOCK

18 December 1990