



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

28 December 1990

MEETING RECORD
cc MASTER.

Dear Richard,

THE GULF

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary met at Chequers yesterday. Part of their discussion touched on the Gulf and follow-up to the Prime Minister's talks with President Bush at Camp David. This letter records the points for action arising from their talk.

The annex to this letter should be seen only by the Defence Secretary, the Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Robin Butler and Sir Percy Cradock.

BW Immunisation

The Prime Minister said that he had agreed in principle to the immunisation of British forces in the Gulf against anthrax, on the basis of the paper circulated by MOD shortly before Christmas. But before giving a final go-ahead, he would want a further note from MOD setting out details of the tests made on the vaccine, the approval mechanism and other similar details. I subsequently spoke to Jane Binstead (MOD) and her letter to me of 27 December deals with these points.

Embassies in Baghdad

The Prime Minister said that, on the basis of his talks with the President, he believed we should start thinning out our Embassy in Baghdad very soon and aim to withdraw it completely before the UN deadline of 15 January, unless very compelling reasons could be advanced for keeping a skeleton staff. Other considerations apart, withdrawal would be a powerful signal to Saddam Hussain. We should presumably consult other EC countries and the US, and try to co-ordinate action so far as possible.

The Foreign Secretary said that action was already in hand to thin out our Embassy from next week, and we were consulting other countries as to their intentions. He accepted that there were strong arguments for complete withdrawal. Equally, there was a case for keeping at least one person in Baghdad - not necessarily the Ambassador - to act as a channel of communication (not least in the immediate aftermath of a conflict) and to show that we had not abandoned people like Ian Richter, who was still in prison. The Prime Minister commented that anyone left behind in the Embassy must be a volunteer.

In subsequent discussion, it was agreed that further thought was needed before final decisions were reached. We should try to concert action so far as possible with the US and other members of the Twelve. The issue should be considered by OPD(G) next week on the basis of a paper by the FCO. The Foreign Secretary would talk to Secretary Baker and subsequently discuss our conclusions with other EC Foreign Ministers at the FAC on 4 January. Meanwhile, the action to thin out our own staff should go ahead, as should the planned expulsions of members of the Iraqi Embassy.

Contracts with the Iraqi Government

The Prime Minister said that the Americans were clearly uncertain whether Secretary Baker would visit Baghdad - or Tariq Aziz come to Washington - before the 15 January deadline. They would not be too concerned if there was no meeting. Equally, there were presentational difficulties about having a complete void between now and 15 January. On the basis of his earlier conversation with President Mitterrand, it seemed possible that the French might send Dumas to Baghdad, whether or not there were contacts between the Americans and the Iraqis. This would not be helpful.

The Foreign Secretary agreed that it would be better if Dumas and De Michelis did not go to Baghdad, in the absence of any US contact with the Iraqis. Otherwise it would be seen as a split in the hitherto united US/European position. If Dumas did go, it was all too likely that he would put forward a different view on linkage to the Palestinian problem. The Foreign Secretary continued that he had been reflecting on possible alternatives to a visit. One possibility would be for the Luxembourg Presidency, perhaps flanked by the troika or by Britain and France, to summon an Iraqi Ambassador and deliver a solemn message on behalf of the Twelve about the necessity for Iraq to comply with the UN Security Council's Resolutions. Such a message could be agreed at the FAC on 4 January. A further alternative would be to invite Tariq Aziz to visit Europe.

In discussion it was agreed that it would be better to avoid an invitation to Tariq Aziz. A message would be better, although even with that, there might be difficulties with some of our European partners on the aspect of an international conference on the Middle East: and it could not be ruled out that Dumas would still visit Baghdad. The Foreign Secretary should discuss the handling of this issue with Secretary Baker and subsequently with his colleagues in the Twelve.

Domestic Opinion

The Prime Minister said that domestic opinion in the United Kingdom about the Gulf had so far been gratifyingly firm. But we were just entering what was likely to be the most difficult period and consideration needed to be given to further possible steps to get across the Government's case.

In discussion, the following steps were identified:

- a number of Ministers had already been extensively briefed on the Gulf situation. They should now be encouraged to give interviews and put across the Government's case, concentrating in particular on the broad principles at stake in the Gulf. The FCO should consult the Ministers concerned and ask them to take up opportunities for interviews;
- as a basis for this, the FCO should prepare a briefing paper on the main arguments to be advanced (and those to be avoided). It should deal in particular with ways to answer the question: why not give sanctions a chance and wait longer before considering the use of force?
- more extensive use should be made of the Amnesty International report. Amnesty should be encouraged to send it to all MPs (if they have not already done so);
- it would be appropriate for the Prime Minister in due course to brief newspaper editors individually. The timing of this should be considered on his return from the Gulf;
- the Prime Minister should also see the Archbishop of Canterbury in the period 10-15 January;
- the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary should brief other party leaders on Privy Counsellor terms. In principle the Prime Minister should offer to see Mr. Kinnock and Mr. Ashdown, while the Foreign Secretary would see Mr. Molyneaux and Dr. Owen. While the briefings would be given in the week of Parliament's return, they should be offered now, not least because this might reduce pressure from the official Opposition for an early debate;
- the Prime Minister would in addition offer briefings in his room in the House to Mr. Heath and Mrs. Thatcher. The Foreign and Defence Secretaries should brief selected back-benchers, including Mr. David Howell and Mr. Michael Mates;
- the Prime Minister said that fuller argumentation needed to be worked up, for his own use and that of other Ministers, on our views on war crimes and on reparations. He had not felt entirely comfortable in dealing with these points in speaking to the media in Washington. The FCO should prepare a line.

Parliamentary Handling

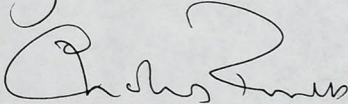
The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary agreed that there might be pressure for a debate on the Gulf in the week of Parliament's return: indeed there were already some demands for an early recall. There was no case for the latter. But if the Opposition front-bench were to seek an early debate, the

Government would be bound to agree. Indeed there was a case for the Government offering a debate, which might give less opportunity for awkward questions than a statement by the Prime Minister on his visit to the Gulf. The views of the Government's business managers should be sought in the week beginning 6 January. In either case, 14 January would probably be the most appropriate date (although that would necessitate postponing the Prime Minister's visit to Paris for lunch with President Mitterrand). It would almost certainly be right for the Prime Minister to open and the Foreign Secretary to wind up. Work should be put in hand now by the FCO on a draft speech.

Cabinet

Cabinet on 10 January would need to be briefed on the latest situation in the Gulf. It would be helpful if the Foreign Secretary were to circulate a paper as a basis for discussion.

I am copying this letter to Simon Webb (Ministry of Defence), John Neilson (Department of Energy), Juliet Wheldon (Law Officers' Department) and Sir Robin Butler.

Yours sincerely,


C. D. POWELL

Richard Gozney, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

ANNEXPrime Minister's meeting with the Foreign Secretary at Chequers
on 27 December

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary discussed President Bush's clear indication at Camp David that he was leaning towards initiating military action against Iraq in the period 15-20 January. The Prime Minister said that he could see no advantage in hanging on until the next 'window' in mid-February, provided that the military advice supported earlier action. Our wider interests, including the impact on the world economy, favoured the earliest possible resolution of the Gulf issue. The Foreign Secretary agreed this assessment, while underlining the need to do more to prepare public opinion in the United Kingdom. (Steps to achieve this are dealt with in the body of my attached letter).

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C. D. POWELL

28 December 1990

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