



CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister

PM/90/101

(1) to-activated approach.
(natl. representatives
of a non-involved
nation
in hostilities)

For discussion in
OPD (G) tomorrow.
C D ?
2/i

PRIME MINISTER

(2) A.S. prior.

British Embassy, Baghdad

1. We are considering whether we should pull out all the remaining UK-based staff from our Embassy in Baghdad before 15 January. I have already instructed that the staff should be reduced to a core of six before 3 January, when we are due to expel eight Iraqi diplomats and over sixty Iraqi students from the UK.

2. The arguments for and against withdrawing all our Embassy staff in Baghdad are finely balanced. The advantages are that, in the event of hostilities, staff would not be exposed to the threat of Iraqi reprisals which could be violent (whether officially inspired or the result of mob action); there would be no danger of staff being caught up in allied military action; and, if withdrawal were coordinated with the US and other Europeans, it would send a powerful additional signal to the Iraqi leadership that we are serious about military action.

3. On the other hand, the small residual British community in Iraq would be left without consular protection (this would be particularly hard on Ian Richter, the British businessman serving a life sentence in Baghdad); we would have no means of conducting business direct with the Iraqi authorities, whether over political or consular matters; our standing, and our ability to act to the full as a permanent member

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of the Security Council would be diminished. This might be particularly important if, as seems likely, there were a flurry of diplomatic activity around 15 January. We should not rule out at least a partial Iraqi withdrawal nearer the deadline, which might reduce the risk of early hostilities. Moreover, it may be important in the aftermath of hostilities to have someone actually on the spot ready to talk to whoever is in control about a range of practical problems. Once an Embassy is closed it is often hard to reopen.

4. My preference is to plan on the possibility of leaving a minimum of two people in the Embassy after 15 January. (One person alone is not really an option since he would need communications backup.) I do not underestimate the possible danger, particularly from mob violence. Iraqi history is strewn with attacks on Embassies, including our own. Those left behind would clearly have to be volunteers. In order to lessen the risk to their safety, we would locate them in the Deputy Head of Mission's house, which is in a residential area and has emergency communications. Mr Walker will discuss this with his staff when he returns to Baghdad on 31 December.

5. But much will depend on the intentions of the Americans and other Europeans. Some of the disadvantages of withdrawal would be reduced if a number of Western countries acted together. Jim Baker talked to you in Washington last week in terms of "breaking relations" with Iraq, possibly before 15 January. He may have simply meant withdrawal of staff. I would be against our taking the initiative in formally breaking relations, given the problems always associated with re-establishing them. With memories of the Tehran Embassy siege, the



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Americans are likely to be anxious not to risk their diplomats in Baghdad being taken hostage in the event of hostilities. Our European partners, whom we have consulted, have not yet reached firm conclusions, though a number see merit in a joint EC position. We shall need to discuss this in detail at the Foreign Affairs Council which I am attending on 4 January.

6. I hope that we can discuss the problem at OPD(G) if it meets on 3 January, though probably a final decision should wait until the following week.

7. I am copying this minute to the other members of OPD(G) and to Sir Robin Butler.

DH

(DOUGLAS HURD)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
31 December 1990

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