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*From the Private Secretary*

*Me from  
a. / Breen /  
debate  
all*

3 January 1991

POSSIBLE DEBATE ON THE GULF

OPD(G) this morning considered the case for an early debate on the Gulf once Parliament reassembles. I enclose the relevant extract from the minutes, from which you will see there was support for the Government offering a debate on 15 January. The matter also came up in a subsequent discussion between the Prime Minister and the Chief Whip.

The Prime Minister would welcome the Lord President's views, although he does not envisage reaching a final decision until late next week. He is disposed to think that the offer of a debate at the time when the UN deadline for Iraqi withdrawal expires would put the Government in a strong position. By opening it himself, the Prime Minister would avoid the need for a separate statement (with possibly awkward supplementaries) on his visit to the Gulf. We would need to decide whether the debate should be on the adjournment; or the Government should put down a motion for instance reiterating the House's commitment to the full implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions (including Resolution 678, which authorises the use of force if Iraq does not withdraw from Kuwait by 15 January). Such a motion would be hard for the Opposition to oppose or amend. The Prime Minister would welcome the Foreign Secretary's view on this last point.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Foreign Secretary and the Chief Whip, and to Sir Robin Butler.

C. D. POWELL

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c. Parliament was due to re-assemble on 14 January. There had been no pressure so far from the Opposition for a debate on the Gulf. Nevertheless, there might be advantage in the Government's taking the initiative to propose a debate, preferably on 15 January, in which the Prime Minister would open and the Foreign Secretary would wind up. This would demonstrate that the Government was dealing with the Gulf issue in a straightforward manner. It might also pre-empt demands for a debate during the conflict.