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8 January 1991

J Neilson Esq
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Dear John

GULF: MEDIA ARRANGEMENTS

The Energy Secretary chaired a meeting at 12 Downing Street at 9.30 am today. The others present were the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Chief Whip, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Mr Perks, Mr Harris, Mr Cornish, Mr Hayes, Mr Verey, yourself and myself.

2. The following action points were agreed at the meeting:
 - a. The panel of Government backbenchers who would be called upon to deploy the Government's case with the local press and broadcasting media had been drawn largely but not entirely from the membership of the relevant backbench committees, with a due regard for geographical spread. Names would be added or deleted in the light of experience. Arrangements should be made for Ministers to meet the MPs concerned informally in the House next week; the Foreign Secretary might attend one such session and the Defence Secretary another.
 - b. If there were to be a Commons debate on 15 January, there was a strong case for sending a letter setting out the Government's case to all MPs on 14 January. The FCO should set drafting in hand. (Action: FCO). It would also be sensible for Ministers to speak to Government supporters who were planning to take part in the debate. The Government's strategy for the debate needed to be resolved not later than 10 January.

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- c. Cardinal Hume had written to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster following a meeting between the two, and the Chancellor had asked the FCO to draft a reply. A public statement on the crisis had been issued by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The Cardinal and the Archbishop of Canterbury were to see the Prime Minister on 14 January. It was important that the Chancellor's reply should be despatched before the weekend. The Chancellor would publish it only if the Cardinal's letter was published.
- d. The case against allowing further time for sanctions to work was essentially that, if it was accepted that use of force might be necessary, it was not sensible to postpone it indefinitely, since this could leave Saddam Hussain in possession of Kuwait and free to continue his atrocities. Sanctions could not be relied upon to secure withdrawal from Kuwait within a foreseeable timescale. The key points of the argument could usefully be expressed in sharper form in the FCO's briefing notes. The FCO would review the drafting. (Action: FCO)
- e. The Prime Minister had been given an album of atrocity photographs by the Emir of Kuwait. Such photographs could be used effectively to bring home the full measure of Saddam Hussain's inhumanity. Similar material had been presented to the UN Security Council in November. The FCO would examine what material was available and consider how it might be used. (Action: FCO)
- f. The continuing refusal of the Saudi authorities to issue a sufficient number of visas for British journalists was causing discontent among the press. The Prime Minister's Press Secretary, who was with the Prime Minister in the Gulf, had been briefed on the problem. The FCO would consider what further action could be taken. (Action: FCO)

2. There will be a further meeting under the Energy Secretary's chairmanship at 9.30 am tomorrow, Wednesday 9 January, in 12 Downing Street.

*Yours sincerely
Bill Reeves*

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Copies to: Simon Gass Esq FCO
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