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- hold date post - we?
ask
e.g.
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

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11 January 1991
F (various)
helicopters

Dear Charles,

Prime Minister's Meeting with President Mitterrand:
Gulf Issues

I have written separately about the non-Gulf aspects of the Prime Minister's visit to Paris on 14 January for talks and lunch with President Mitterrand. This letter deals with the Gulf and will be up-dated as necessary over the weekend, in particular to take account of the UN Secretary-General's activity. The Prime Minister may also wish to adapt the line suggested in the light of his discussion with Mr Baker on 13 January.

General

The French have assured us that they will fight if it comes to a war in the Gulf. President Mitterrand made it clear to the Prime Minister on 14 December that he was prepared for this and to shoulder the responsibilities it would involve. But of the Western allies the French must be counted among the awkward squad. The depth of their relations with Iraq (and military and other support for Saddam Hussain in the past) coupled with their instinctive reluctance to be seen to follow an American lead have made them more equivocal than most about action to get the Iraqis out of Kuwait if necessary by force. Since Mitterrand's speech to the UN General Assembly in September (in which he appeared to call for a referendum in Kuwait as part of a package deal which also included a Middle East Conference) the French have tended to mark out a distinctive position for themselves. At his new year reception for the press on 4 January Mitterrand suggested that the Security Council should meet after 15 January to discuss the position before any military action was taken (a position from which he retreated when he saw Mr Baker on 8 January - see below). The French Government have also argued that a firm statement of intent by the Iraqis to withdraw should be sufficient to justify the abandonment of the military option.

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With the approach of the 15 January deadline the French have been particularly active. Within the Twelve they argued strongly for an EC initiative independent of the Americans and pushed hard for the Presidency to offer a meeting with the Iraqi Foreign Minister irrespective of whether a meeting between Mr Baker and Tariq Aziz took place. We suspect they may have been active in setting up the proposal by the Presidency to transfer the proposed Troika meeting with Mr Aziz from Luxembourg to Algeria; earlier this week the Secretary-General of the Elysée visited Algiers carrying a message from Mitterrand to President Chadli (who is engaged in one of the Arab 'peace initiatives'). The UN Secretary-General also visited Paris on his way to meet EC Foreign Ministers in Geneva (and travelled with Dumas). At the meeting in Geneva, Dumas made a strong pitch for the Secretary-General to make clear to Saddam Hussain that the international community was closely interested in the Palestine question.

Mr Baker visited Paris for talks with President Mitterrand and M. Dumas on 8 January. The Americans have told us the French agreed that:

- there should be no Security Council action before 15 January. ✓
- the letter that President Bush had intended to send to Saddam Hussain said what needed to be said to the Iraqis. ✓
- the international community could settle for nothing less than the full implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions; ✓
and ✓
- the deadline of 15 January could not be changed. ✓

Against this the French said they had doubts about the presentation of the allies' position. Before 15 January the international community had a responsibility to get across to Saddam Hussain by all possible means the message that he would not be attacked if he withdrew from Kuwait but the Americans believed that the French would in fact try to present a more ambiguous message, holding out the prospect of a linkage between the Gulf crisis and the Arab/Israel dispute (on which see below).

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Against this background the Prime Minister might:

- emphasise the importance of not diluting the force of the international community's message to Saddam Hussain, particularly so close to the 15 January deadline.
- stress the vital importance of maintaining a united political front against Iraq if Saddam Hussain engages in some last minute chicanery designed to extend this deadline.

Arab/Israel

We have consistently rejected attempts to establish linkage between solutions to the Gulf crisis and the Arab/Israel dispute. President Mitterrand's attitude has been more ambiguous. We do not believe that it is realistic to expect progress on Arab/Israel until Iraq has left Kuwait, but we have made clear our determination to work to move the peace process forward thereafter. Meanwhile, we remain concerned about Israel's administration of the Occupied Territories. We and the French have recently voted for UN Security Council Resolutions 681 (which calls for enhanced protection for the Palestinian population in line with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention) and 672 (which condemned Israeli killings of Palestinians in Jerusalem on 8 October). We supported a Security Council statement on 4 January deploring Israeli violence in Gaza. The Security Council is now considering how to respond to the illegal Israeli deportation of four Palestinians on 8 January. It will be important to avoid implying linkage of any kind.

The Prime Minister might:

- reassure the President that we are as keen as he is on making progress towards a resolution of the Palestine problem;
- and that we remain committed to an international conference - but that we believe it would be a fundamental mistake to allow Saddam Hussain to be able to claim credit for this.

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Defence issues

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French reinforcements continue to arrive in the Gulf. By 15 January there will be 12,100 men with equipment which includes 40 AMX 30 B2 tanks, 83 Gazelle and 37 Puma helicopters. The French Naval deployment includes a destroyer, 5 frigates and a command ship; and aircraft deployed include 20 Jaguar and 25 Mirage of various types. The Mirage F1 variants will not fly during the first few days of hostilities, because Iraq also flies these aircraft. It is assumed that after 2-3 days the Iraqi aircraft will be destroyed or unable to take off.

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Prior to the adoption of Security Council Resolution 678, doubts were expressed about the firmness of French commitment to the military option, and their willingness for French forces to come under the tactical control of the US Commander. The attitude of Defence Minister Chèvenement has long given rise to concern, but since UNSCR 678 there have been a number of reassuring statements. The most recent was from Admiral Lanxade, Defence Adviser to President Mitterrand, who told the Foreign Secretary on 7 January that if it came to hostilities, "France would commit itself without hesitation". The French have also told us that some of their naval forces will take direct part in hostilities under US command. The Prime Minister may nevertheless wish to probe President Mitterrand's attitude to French air and ground forces coming under US control. He might also thank the President for the helpful response the French have given to our request for spare engines for Puma helicopters in the Gulf.

A copy of this letter goes to Simon Webb at the MOD.

*Yours ever,
Christopher Prentice*

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Private Secretary

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