

PRIME MINISTER

IRAQ/KUWAIT

I had a private word on the secure line this afternoon with General Scowcroft, who is with the President in Kennebunkport.

I started by asking him to convey your congratulations to the President on his speech yesterday. You thought it had been excellent. General Scowcroft said the President would be pleased. He had already noted that you had said some pretty firm things at your press conference today. He was glad to hear you coming over loud and clear.

I then gave General Scowcroft an account of your telephone conversation with President Vassiliou. General Scowcroft was intrigued by this and said he would pass on the gist to the President.

Having dealt with these preliminaries, I said there was a sensitive matter which I wanted to raise on a personal basis. The Americans were no doubt doing some thinking about military options against Iraq. Obviously they would hold this tight, and we could understand that they might not want to reveal the details of their thinking, even to their close allies. We had good liaison with their people on the ground in Saudi Arabi about the tactical situation and contacts with CENTCOM. If they felt able to take us into their confidence about their strategic military thinking, I knew you would welcome that, although you would certainly not want to press inordinately. Any message could be conveyed in a way to ensure that it would reach you alone, if that was what they preferred.

General Scowcroft said that he had no doubt the President would want to share even their most secret plans with you. But they were not quite far enough along with them yet to do so. There was a growing feeling among a number of most senior American officials that the United States might have to acquire a

military option, either in response to some action by Iraq or because sanctions would not do the job of getting the Iraqis out of Kuwait. He had himself talked very privately to General Colin Powell yesterday, and they had a few preliminary thoughts. They related to things which the United States might have to do in order to resolve the situation. But they had not even shared these with the President yet. Of course if sanctions were to bite sooner, then military action would not be necessary. But he would be very happy to explain their thinking in greater detail to me on the secure line in a few days time, on the understanding that it would be passed on only to you.

I said I knew you would be grateful for this. I deduced from his remarks that the Americans had no military action in mind for the next two or three weeks at least, in the absence of any provocation by the Iraqis. General Scowcroft confirmed that this was so. We left it that he would contact me when their thinking had developed somewhat further.

General Scowcroft added that the President had telephoned President Mitterrand later yesterday afternoon and had found him much more supportive than before, including on the issue of the use of force (he did not specify whether this referred to implementing the UN embargo or military action against Iraq).

TEMPORARILY RETAINED J. Gray 24/12/2016

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It is rather hard to believe that the Americans have not taken their thinking on military options further. In practice, I am sure that the Pentagon and CENTCOM at least must have done so, although they may not have political endorsement for their plans. But I think this is probably as much as we can get for now from General Scowcroft. If I hear nothing further from him by the weekend, I will have another word.

I am not copying this minute to anyone else. You will wish to consider whether to say anything to the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary - perhaps that we have been in touch with the Americans at a very high level about military options and have the impression that they do not have anything in mind at this juncture, but have promised to keep you in touch as their thinking develops.

C.D.?

Thank you very much.

CHARLES POWELL
21 August 1990

No need to say anything
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