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Robin Butler

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From the Private Secretary

22 October 1990

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THE GULF: FRENCH VIEWS

I gave lunch today for M. Attali who is still acting as President Mitterrand's adviser, although spending a certain amount of time on his EBRD job. He thought that the Gulf was one of the main issues which President Mitterrand would wish to discuss with the Prime Minister on Saturday. He claimed that Mitterrand was convinced that there would be no resolution of the crisis without resort to the military option and was ready for this. I asked what view he had on the timing. Attali said that Mitterrand thought sanctions must be given some time longer to work. When I asked how long "some time" was, Attali hazarded two months. He added that the French would insist on going back to the United Nations for a resolution authorising use of military force, but saw no great difficulty in obtaining this. I asked how we got over the problem of giving Saddam Hussein warning of our intentions by seeking a UN Resolution. Attali's answer was that such a warning would actually be useful: it might finally bring home to Saddam Hussein that a military conflict was inevitable. Attali explained that it was impossible, in terms of French politics, to put French forces under American control, but in practice they would co-ordinate very closely indeed with American and British forces. He described the degree of co-ordination on the ground in Saudi Arabia as excellent.

I am copying this letter to Simon Webb (Ministry of Defence) and to Sir Robin Butler.

CHARLES POWELL

Stephen Wall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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