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10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

11A(a-a) Cole M  
TO BE RETURNED

TO DUTY CLERK

MEETING RECORD  
cc MASTER.

23 October 1990

THE GULF

The Prime Minister had a talk with the Defence Secretary and the Foreign Secretary this evening about some of the major issues which need to be addressed in advance of any military operations against Iraq. The discussion took place on the basis of the note which the Defence Secretary produced at the meeting (of which the Foreign Secretary and I also hold copies). The note should now be further worked up to take account of points made in the discussion, as recorded in this letter. Meanwhile, the note and my letter can serve as guidance for CDS' meetings with General Colin Powell over the next two days.

This letter contains highly secret and sensitive material. It should be seen in the MOD only by the Secretary of State, CDS, yourself and two other named officials: in the FCO only by the Foreign Secretary and his Private Secretary: and in the Cabinet Office only by Sir Robin Butler. I will show a copy to Sir Percy Cradock.

Strategic Objectives

Before seeing the Defence Secretary's note, the Prime Minister defined our strategic objectives in the following terms:

- Saddam Hussein to leave Kuwait;
- the legitimate government to be restored;
- release of the hostages;
- compensation to be paid by Iraq;
- those responsible for atrocities to be accountable for them;

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- Iraq's NBC capability to be eliminated (in the event of hostilities) or dismantled (in the event of peaceful withdrawal)
- maintenance of the widest possible alliance of Arab governments against Iraq;
- avoidance of Israeli involvement;
- establishment of a regional security structure to constrain Iraq in future.

It was noted that these objectives broadly paralleled those in paragraphs 2 to 6 of the Defence Secretary's note. It would not be a specific objective to bring about the downfall of the present Iraqi leadership, although that would be a desirable side-effect of our actions. We should aim for a situation where Saddam Hussein had to face his people as a beaten leader.

It was clear that military action to free Kuwait would involve striking targets in Iraq: we should be prepared to attack Iraq to the degree necessary to secure complete withdrawal from Kuwait and to destroy weapons which could be used against us now or in the future. Once military action was undertaken, therefore, we should aim to destroy Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons capability as completely as possible.

More widely, it should not be our policy to use "scorched earth" tactics. But further work needed to be done on defining precise targets. While purely civilian targets should be avoided, it was for consideration whether power stations and dams should be regarded as legitimate targets. There was a consensus that desalination plants should be avoided.

It was agreed that our ground forces might have to enter southern Iraq in order to attack Iraqi forces involved in holding Kuwait. They might also need to enter Iraq in hot pursuit of Iraqi forces. But there was no intention that our forces should occupy any part of Iraqi territory.

It was noted that we needed to refine our planning for two further situations:

- where Iraq withdrew completely from Kuwait. We would then have to consider how to constrain or dismantle Iraq's NBC capability. This would involve at the least the continuation of sanctions and no doubt other measures. We would want to maintain the widest possible alliance against Iraq.
- where Iraq withdrew from most of Kuwait, but continued to occupy a part of it. In these circumstances we would have to develop new military plans for ejecting Iraq from the remainder. It was noted that little work had yet been done on the implications of this.



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Co-ordination with Allies

The vital importance of keeping the French and the principal Arab forces with us, so that military action did not become a purely US/UK operation was emphasised. This would mean that we must find a way to involve them in co-ordination and planning. Without this there would be a very considerable risk of confusion. This was a priority issue for discussion with the Americans, together with the other points identified in paragraph 8 of the Defence Secretary's note. We had a major interest in avoiding being a party to a shambles.

Guidance to military commanders

Further work was needed - as recorded above - in relation to the choice of targets mentioned in paragraph 9(c). In relation to 9(d), it was noted that many military targets were in civilian areas. This raised the question whether some sort of warning should be given, at least in phases 2 and 3, to minimise civilian casualties.

The position of hostages, dealt with in 9(f), would be of intense public interest. It was recognised that the prospects of being able to exfiltrate them immediately before or during military operations were negligible. Consideration should be given to alternative methods of attack against legitimate targets where this might save hostage lives. But it was recognised that we could not allow ourselves to be deflected from our overall strategic objectives by the presence of hostages; and that there was broad bipartisan understanding for this in Parliament.

Treatment of Embassies

A point not covered in the Defence Secretary's note was what action, if any, we envisaged in relation to our Embassy in Baghdad and the Iraqi Embassy in London. It was unlikely to be practical to secure the withdrawal of our Embassy before a conflict. Depending on their treatment, we would need to have ready options for dealing with the Iraqi Embassy here.

Timing of Military Action

It was agreed that we should seek to lead the Americans towards acceptance that we could not not afford indefinite delay and that military action would in all likelihood have to be initiated before the end of the year. It was recognised that the US Administration found great difficulty in the idea of hostilities from a 'cold start'. This continued to incline them towards seeking prior authorisation for the use of force from the United Nations. We would have to continue to try to wean them from this, relying instead on Article 51.

Briefing of other Ministers

It was agreed that, as the possibility of military action drew closer, a slightly wider circle of senior Ministers would need to be brought into the discussions. The Prime Minister

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said that she would take steps to brief the Chancellor, the Home Secretary and the Transport Secretary and perhaps others. A full Cabinet would be needed before a final decision to initiate hostilities.

I am copying this letter to Stephen Wall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and Sir Robin Butler.

C. D. POWELL

Simon Webb, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

24 October 1990

Dear Charles,

The Gulf

The Foreign Secretary has read your letter of 23 October to Simon Webb recording yesterday's meeting. He thought your account was admirable but he has a comment on the paragraph on the timing of military action.

The Foreign Secretary's own view, which he sought to express at the meeting, was that we would need to find some way of solving the US problem, ie their political difficulty in engaging in hostilities from a cold start. The Americans had put forward various possibilities, on which we had blown cold. The Foreign Secretary did not think that we should exclude further action in the UN Security Council on the lines of the Opinion put forward by the Solicitor General, ie this need not necessarily be under Article 42. Failing that, the Foreign Secretary put forward the idea of a secret message from President Bush to Saddam Hussein to the effect that if he did not withdraw from Kuwait he would be hit but that, if he completely fulfilled the terms of the UN Security Council Resolutions, he would not be hit. The point was made that this could lose us the important advantage of surprise. The Foreign Secretary continues to believe, however, that some such message will be needed and that further work on this is required.

I am copying this letter to Simon Webb (MOD) and Sir Robin Butler.

Jans

Stephen Wall

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Private Secretary

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