



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

7 November 1990

Dean Charles,

Mr Primakov's mission

Mr Yevgeni Primakov, Mr Gorbachev's special emissary on the Gulf, whom the Prime Minister met on 20 October, undertook a second tour of the Middle East from 24-30 October. In addition to Iraq (where he spent two and a half hours with Saddam Hussain) he visited Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Apart from his talks with King Fahd in Riyadh, Primakov had a meeting with the Amir of Kuwait in Taif. We have received accounts of his discussions from the Saudis and Egyptians and direct from the Russians both in Moscow and London.

We now know that Primakov put to Saddam Hussain a proposal that envisaged the convening of an Arab summit to approve a six point plan to resolve the crisis. The elements of the proposal, which are intended to be more or less sequential, are as follows:

- (i) complete Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait and restoration of the legitimate government;
- (ii) subsequent withdrawal of multinational forces within an agreed timeframe;
- (iii) lifting of international sanctions;
- (iv) start of negotiations between Iraq and Kuwait;
- (v) a public commitment by the permanent members of the Security Council to an early settlement of Middle East issues (ie Palestine);
- (vi) discussion of regional security arrangements.

These proposals are cleverly designed to appeal to weaker Arab - and Western - members of the coalition against Saddam. They include the main elements of the Security Council resolutions on the Gulf crisis (though there is no reference to hostages, compensation and war crimes) and could thus be said to meet the international community's stated objectives for a resolution of the crisis. But the proposals would still allow Saddam Hussain the possibility of gaining something from his aggression.

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The details of Soviet proposals are not yet widely known. Although Primakov claimed to have won the support of the Egyptians and Syrians in putting them forward, the Saudis and Egyptians have reacted strongly against them, pointing out that the divisions in the Arab world rule out a Summit. It is by no means clear that the Primakov plan would be acceptable to the Iraqis, who are continuing to consolidate their hold on Kuwait, although they have been quick to use his visit for wedge driving purposes. The French (whom Mr Gorbachev will have briefed in Paris on 29 October, and where he told the press that military action was unacceptable) may also see attractions in Primakov's ideas despite President Mitterrand's comments to the Prime Minister at their meeting on 27 October. If they became public we would have to argue that the Iraqis' actions since 2 August have turned the crisis into much more than a bilateral dispute: Saddam Hussain's behaviour has been such that he cannot be allowed to benefit in any way from his invasion of Kuwait and the international community cannot afford to let such a thing happen again. What is required before any package can be concocted is Iraqi withdrawal.

The Russians have told us that they believe that under pressure of circumstances Saddam Hussain is coming slowly to realise that Iraqi troops will have to leave Kuwait. But they do not think (nor do we) that he has given up trying to play for time. They have not given us a clear picture of how they believe we should go about exerting additional pressure on Saddam to withdraw. It seems likely that, as our Ambassador in Moscow has reported, the Russians are in a bind. They want to avoid a war with Iraq while maintaining the cohesion of the Permanent Five and demonstrating their support for the United Nations. They want to maintain a distinctive policy in the Middle East and do not want to see Saddam's downfall. They also have to worry about their own Muslim minorities; and it is clear that there would be considerable opposition from ordinary Russians to Soviet involvement in a war in the Gulf. But if forced to choose Mr Gorbachev is likely to come down in favour of preserving Soviet relations with the West. The tenor of all Soviet reporting to us has been reassuring about their intentions. Primakov told our Ambassador in Moscow that the Soviet Union had no intention of breaking ranks with the United States over the crisis. Primakov asked that this message should be conveyed personally to the Prime Minister and assured Sir Rodric Braithwaite that the Russians were not ruling out military action as a last resort.

Yours,
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