

File 2(A8)
EA

SUBJECT CC MASTER

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA*From the Private Secretary*

18 December 1990

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE LEADER OF
THE OPPOSITION: THE GULF

The Prime Minister had a talk with the Leader of the Opposition in his room in the House of Commons last night about the situation in the Gulf. They met on Privy Council terms.

The Prime Minister spoke generally to your letter of 15 December. In reply, Mr Kinnock made a number of points:

- he did not entirely accept the assessment that, if the US and UK failed to initiate military action within the reasonably near future, then the moderate Arab states would seek their own accommodation with Saddam Hussein. He doubted that Arab opinion was as volatile as that. If we decided to give sanctions more time to work, he thought we could keep moderate Arab Governments with us;

- he questioned whether it would be enough for de Michelis alone to see Tariq Aziz on the European side. He was not a very credible figure. It might be better if the Foreign Secretary and Monsieur Dumas were also present, representing countries making a significant military contribution, to bring home the point that force would be used if Iraq failed to withdraw. The Prime Minister said that he would discuss this point with the Foreign Secretary.

- in discussion of the Defence Secretary's decision to call up some reservists to strengthen medical services in the Gulf, Mr Kinnock suggested that we should ask the Australian Government to provide medical personnel. The Prime Minister said he would consider this: he was likely to be in touch with Mr Hawke in the next few days;

- he wondered how long the UK could sustain a military effort in the Gulf. Some reports reaching him suggested that the position on spares and supplies generally meant that we were in a position to fight for only a relatively short time. The Prime Minister said that no one could predict how long a war might last. But he had discussed this with the Chiefs of Staff and was confident that our

forces had sufficient stocks to enable them to sustain a conflict. Mr Kinnock said that, from various accounts he had received, the Falklands War had finished just in time, before our forces ran seriously short of essential supplies;

- partial withdrawal by Iraq from Kuwait would present a very difficult problem. It was only realistic to recognise that, in the event of a substantial but partial withdrawal, support for the immediate use of force would be much diminished and we would probably have to give more time for peaceful persuasion to work. He was not suggesting there would have to be a deal: that was ruled out. But our dilemma would be very much more difficult. The Prime Minister acknowledged that we would face difficult choices, but our position would remain that the Security Council Resolutions must be implemented in full.

The Prime Minister invited Mr Kinnock to get in touch at any point if he had particular questions to pursue or wished for a further briefing.

I am copying this letter to Simon Webb (Ministry of Defence).

CHARLES POWELL

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