

✓ Thankr. /

PRIME MINISTER

THE GULF

I had a talk on the telephone this afternoon with General Scowcroft about developments in the Gulf.

I started by asking General Scowcroft whether the Americans had reached any final view on what to do about their Embassy in Baghdad. We were taking steps to reduce ours, but were still debating whether to keep it open with a skeleton staff or remove all staff before 15 January. I did not know which way the debate would come out: we would be discussing it tomorrow and would then want to sound the views of the other Europeans. We were unlikely to reach a decision until next week. General Scowcroft said the Americans had not reached a decision either, but were thinking of withdrawing all their staff while not breaking diplomatic relations. He thought it important that we should act together if possible.

I said there seemed to have been some inspired articles in the press suggesting that Secretary Baker was likely to visit the Gulf fairly soon and possibly be available to go to Baghdad. Was a visit in fact planned? General Scowcroft said the reports were uninformed speculation. No decision had been taken, but the Administration were focussing on whether or not to do something between now and 15 January. Did we have a view on whether a further move would be desirable or not? I said that you had mentioned to me this morning your feeling that some further effort between now and 15 January would be helpful for public opinion, provided it could not be interpreted as weakening of our resolve or as divisive. From that point of view, it might be better for a move to come from the Americans than the Europeans. Some of the EC Governments were anxious to send a mission to Baghdad. We were trying to restrain them from this. General Scowcroft repeated the Americans had reached no final view yet on what best to do: he would keep me posted. I asked whether the Americans still thought a meeting of the Permanent Five Foreign

Ministers would be useful in advance. General Scowcroft said the Americans were worried about the role which the Soviet Union might play at such a meeting in the absence of Shevardnadze.

I recalled that the President had suggested to you that he might send General Scowcroft to Paris to explain his thinking on the nature and timing of military action against Iraq. Had this been taken any further? General Scowcroft said it remained uncertain whether he or Secretary Baker would go to Paris: but one of them would do so.

Finally I asked whether the position on the likely timing of military action remained as the President had described it to you on the way to Camp David and reiterated in his subsequent message. General Scowcroft said there was no change on dates "give or take a few days".

Incidentally he did not raise the question of the missing papers.

I am copying this note, on a strictly personal basis, to the Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary, Sir Robin Butler and Sir Percy Cradock.

*e.D.P.*

(CHARLES POWELL)

2 January 1991

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