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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: President's Plenary Meeting with the Amir of
Kuwait (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
Nicholas Brady, Secretary of Treasury
Richard B. Cheney, Secretary of Defense
James D. Watkins, Secretary of Energy
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
General Colin L. Powell, Chairman,
Joint Chiefs of Staff
William Webster, Director, Central
Intelligence Agency
Lawrence Eagleburger, Acting Secretary
of State
Robert Gates, Assistant to the President
and Deputy for National Security Affairs
Richard N. Haass, Special Assistant to the
President and Senior Director for Near
East and South Asian Affairs
Edward Gnehm, Jr., Ambassador-Designate to Kuwait
Sandra Charles, NSC (Notetaker)

Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, the Amir
Sheikh Sabah al-Sabah, Deputy Prime Minister
and Foreign Minister
Sheikh Ali Al-Khalifa, Minister of Planning
Sulaiman Al-Mutawwa, Minister of Planning
Abdul Rahman Al-Ateeqi, Advisor to the Amir
Sheikh Saud Naser Al-Sabah, Ambassador to U.S.
Abdulaziz Al-Sharekh, Ambassador to Tokyo and
Advisor
Tawfeeq Al-Nasser, Assistant Under Secretary,
Interpreter

DATE, TIME September 28, 1990; 12:00 - 12:30 p.m.
AND PLACE: Cabinet Room

The President: The Amir and I have been discussing the current situation in Kuwait. Before I was shocked, and now I am even more shocked at the brutality of Saddam Hussein's forces to the people in Kuwait. Inside I had a chance to reaffirm to him our commitment that Saddam Hussein will go out, and the rightful

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rulers will be restored. I also didn't thank you in there for your generous support for Desert Shield. With Secretary Cheney here and the Chairman, I want you to know how much we appreciate that. I also want to thank you for your part in helping others that have been most hurt by the sanctions. You feel like we do that it sends a strong, good message around the world. ~~(S)~~

I also want to tell you how moved we all were with your reception at the United Nations. I think it sent the clearest signal to Saddam Hussein ever sent on how the world feels about his aggression. ~~(S)~~

I also am concerned about the success of Saddam Hussein's propaganda, not in our country but others. He is making it the Arab world against the United States. No one knows better than you that is not the case. ~~(S)~~

Now with those opening comments, I will turn the floor over to you. You and your associates can make statements if you care to and I also am happy to answer your questions. We are all working to fulfill the commitments we've made. We have moved a lot of force into that area. I know there is a sensitivity to that but with your welcome and King Fahd's and the GCC states, our people feel welcome. And they will conduct themselves in a way to see that welcome continue. Now I'd like to hear from you and to respond to your questions. But the main thing is that I am glad you are here and that you came to Washington. ~~(S)~~

Amir Jaber: Thank you, Mr. President, for your remarks. There is no doubt and let me repeat this that we welcomed and do welcome the U.S. forces and we consider these forces are there not to occupy the area but to liberate a country -- a small country, a peaceful country that a larger, more powerful country wanted to solve the problems between us by occupying a smaller country, not by negotiations or talks around a negotiating table. This principle, if we are quiet about it, means a new law for the world, that each country that is stronger, instead of solving problems at the negotiating table could annex it. That was the way of the Middle Ages, not the twentieth century, when the superpowers are cooperating regardless of political differences, as is the case now between the United States and the Soviet Union. ~~(S)~~

The support for our delegation at the UN is clear evidence that the world rejects this approach for a large country to occupy a smaller one. Thank you again and I leave the floor to any one else to talk. ~~(C)~~

The President: Let me ask the Secretary of Defense to comment on the military perspective and maybe the Chairman also could in broad terms. I told His Highness that we are still moving in forces, they are not all there. ~~(S)~~

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Secretary Cheney: Your Highness, there are two things we are watching closely. Our own buildup has gone smoothly. There are 170,000 personnel in the region, three aircraft carriers, and the equipment and support including armor and tanks. On the Iraqi side, I've been impressed with the size of their force in Kuwait and southern Iraq. We estimate they have in excess of 400,000 troops in Kuwait. The best we can tell is that they have deployed in a defensive posture and on short notice. Our buildup will continue until the commander on scene says that there is enough force. (S)

General Powell: Let me start by saying the buildup has gone well. The troops are adjusting and doing operational training well in the desert. In their training activity, they are working with some Kuwaiti forces to improve their readiness and training. We will make sure we are doing what we can to assist your air force and your brigade. On sea actions, they are doing a very good job stopping commerce to and from Iraq. A number of ships have been challenged, and no oil is getting out. I think the importance of that is we are seeing vividly the difficulty they are having dealing with food and material not coming in. We will continue to work to enforce sanctions. (S)

The President: Who on your team is the best one to give us an appraisal of how you view Saddam Hussein's military, how effective a force they are? They are big, as the Secretary said, but the one question widely debated is how good are they. Can anyone comment? It would be interesting to hear this. (S)

Amir Jaber: The information we have and the information we receive daily from Kuwait and the people who go back -- as individuals not as families -- what we hear them say is that the road leading north is occupied by heavy troop concentrations, such as armored personnel carriers and tanks. But they didn't see any such tanks near the Saudi border, and even along the Kuwaiti coastline, they said these forces were in certain locations but not as concentrated a presence of these troops as there was twenty days ago. They are not military but ordinary individuals. Kuwait is a small country and it is impossible for a big number of soldiers and large amount of weapons to disappear in Kuwait. But the Secretary with his satellites may see things other than what we are receiving. (S)

The President: I would appreciate it if Colin could give you a rough estimate and more detail later on the numbers and quality of the forces. (S)

General Powell: I agree with your assessment along the Kuwaiti-Saudi border. There is infantry not armor or mech, and along the coast there is infantry. From the coastline across Kuwait and north toward Iraq there are five infantry divisions deployed. Then behind them reinforcing the delta is armor and mech in northern Kuwait and southern Iraq. Along the Iraqi-Kuwait border are the republican guard divisions. They are

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the most capable divisions for Saddam. Along the border, there are infantry divisions for reinforcement. Regular army units are north of Kuwait city, what we call second echelon forces. The republican guards and others are along the way going further north toward Basra at the end of what we call the theater of operations. That is approximately 435,000 troops including support elements. (S)

Amir Jaber: If combination of spirit and willingness to fight, based on what we hear and what is practiced in Kuwait, many troops don't want war. Many soldiers are selling their arms to Kuwaitis simply to get civilian clothes and flee. How much do you know about that? (S)

General Powell: I believe that units along the border are having difficulty based on reports we get from Saudi Arabia as soldiers cross to get something to eat and drink. Morale is not high. It is hard for them to supply units farthest from Iraq. Morale is better in the guard units. They have better abilities than the other units. (S)

The President: Bill, maybe you want to add something from an intelligence standpoint. He is the head of our central intelligence. (S)

Judge Webster: I have nothing more, except we have been working with a number of your people and we are impressed with the help we are receiving. Some are working 16 hours a day. They are training. We are pleased and proud to be working in concert with them. (S)

Amir Jaber: I think any cooperation between us and our friends is beneficial. It gives us clearer information because you have a sense here of the problem. (S)

The President: Your Highness, we are a little behind schedule. So why don't we walk to lunch, and we can continue to talk at lunch if that is okay with you. (S)

Amir Jaber: I agree. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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