

~~SECRET~~Bilateral Meeting with Amir of Kuwait

DATE: November 21, 1990
 LOCATION: Al-Hamra Guest Palace,
 TIME: 8:40 p.m. - 9:25 p.m.

SUBJECT: Minutes of Bilateral Meeting with The Amir of Kuwait
 (U)

PARTICIPANTS:

U.S. Participants

THE PRESIDENT
 Secretary Baker
 Ambassador Des. Gnehm
 Governor Sununu
 General Scowcroft
 Marlin Fitzwater
 John Kelly
 Richard Haass
 Paul Wolfowitz

Saudi Participants

His Highness Sheikh Jaber
 al-Ahmed al-Sabah, The
 Emir of Kuwait
 His Highness Shaikh Saad
 al-Abdullah al-Salem
 al-Sabah, Crown Prince
 and Prime Minister
 His Excellency Shaikh
 Sabah al-Ahmed
 al-Sabah, Deputy Prime
 Minister and Foreign Minister
 His Excellency Mr. Sulayaman
 al-Mutawa, Minister of Planning
 Mr. Abdulrehman al-Antiqi,
 Advisor to the Emir
 His Excellency Saud
 Sheikh Nasser al-Sabah,
 Ambassador to the United States
 Interpreter

President Bush: I'm delighted to see you again; I'm looking forward to this, to see my old friend; I feel we're among friends. (U)

I'm anxious to hear from you and hear how you feel things are going; then I'll be glad to bring you up to date since we last met at the White House. (U)

Amir: First I'd like to thank you for the stand that is very dear to us, although I'd prefer to meet you in our own country. Of course, our people are under occupation and the occupation is encouraging Saddam Hussein to indulge his suppression, trying to force our people to leave Kuwait. The economic sanctions against Iraq--obviously, there are some opportunities for him to bypass

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them--no sign of appreciable impact on Iraq even though they have been in place for some time. The resistance is still active and getting stronger; they've systematized the resistance. This is in addition to hiding Westerners inside the country. Of course Saddam has decreed the death penalty for any Kuwaiti harboring Westerners. Some Kuwaitis have been executed for doing this. Iraq is trying very hard to prolong the agony, using every method to delay any action against him, for time serves Saddam's interest more than it serves those against him. (S)

I have some questions. First, if there was a military situation, what would be the effect of Western hostages? What if he decides to pull out before military action, will matters end at that point? Who would feel safe if he has all his weapons intact given his past behavior? (S)

President Bush: Let me respond. On the question of will the hostages have an effect on a decision we might have to make on sending troops into battle, the answer is "no." Locating hostages by possible military targets will not affect our decision to use military force. (S)

It's a terrible decision, because we know he is staking out innocent civilians near possible targets. He must not be led to believe that this policy will shelter him from attack. We've said this publicly and I'll be glad to repeat it, but obviously we'd like to see the hostages released. (S)

As I think about the second question, I'm convinced there has to be some kind of international safeguards should Saddam unilaterally pull out. Part of the UN mandate is the security and stability of the Gulf and I don't think that any of the countries putting sanctions on Iraq would think the security and stability of the Persian Gulf would be assured simply by returning to the status quo ante. There is a growing awareness that he's trying to get a nuclear bomb capability; in fact, this is one of the things that causes most of the concern in the U.S. (S)

His CW and BW capability and potential is another matter of international concern. So when we talk of objectives including "security and stability in the Gulf," we are talking about some kind of international safeguards. I'm sure that's your view. People I've talked to in Paris agreed with this. What is your latest thinking on whether he'll unilaterally and unconditionally withdraw? (S)

Amir: I do not think so. (S)

President Bush: We see no evidence of it. I do keep hearing he's more certain he may face attack and he's more worried; his frantic handling of the hostage question might be evidence of this point. I think the movement of significant combat ready U.S. troops has gotten his attention. He reads public opinion in the U.S. very carefully and I think he still hopes public opinion in the U.S. will swing against me and those who want to see this resolved without condition. But I remain convinced that if the decision comes to use force, the American people would support the President. They would not support a Vietnam-type conflict, but in my view this is not what we'd be in. So they always ask the question how strong and tough is Saddam Hussein, how capable is his military. He announced 200,000 more troops, but how capable are they? (S)

Amir: I'm sure you have ample ability to know what is going on in Iraq and the quality of his forces. But, we have information that there are a lot of people for the first time speaking of the regime of Saddam Hussein in a different way. (S)

President Bush: That's good. You mentioned what is happening to Kuwaitis; I want you to know I'm very moved by accounts of Kuwaitis hiding Americans. They are saving American lives despite the penalty of death. (S)

One thing we need to do a better job of is discussing the brutality and atrocities of Saddam for you know they'll be two days of UNSC testimony on this. To the degree you have the public relations capability in the U.S., it would be good to get this testimony circulated widely. I'll do what I can to help here. (S)

On sanctions, I'm disappointed they've not had more of an effect, but there is some indication they're having some effect. We're still moving a large number of our finest troops; time is required to get them there. While this is happening, I'm hoping sanctions will get tougher on Saddam. In the meantime, we're working hard to get a UN resolution that would authorize force to complete our objectives. I believe such a resolution will be attainable; the key is the USSR, and having just met with Gorbachev and Baker having just met with Shevardnadze, we both agree that they'll do the right thing. Press reports that meetings between myself and Gorbachev were "cold" or "chilly" are simply not accurate. You know the Secretary is travelling extensively to see we get the votes. China remains a question, but if the Soviets vote for, it is unlikely that China will veto. We're having to work on every member of the Security Council; Yemen is a question, but they've voted for some resolutions and we will work with them. We're also uncertain regarding Malaysia;

Cuba is difficult to get. But the rest are pretty much on board, including France, which says it is with us subject to the drafting of the resolution. It is clear to me that from every standpoint it would be good to have this final resolution. If Saddam shoots a missile in a Marine barracks tonight, we would not need a resolution. It would invoke an overwhelming response, but I don't think he's so stupid. Barring such a provocation, it is very important although not legally essential to have this resolution. We still have Article 51 authority. Margaret Thatcher, who never thought a resolution necessary, now is more inclined to think it useful. But Article 51 would require a request from you. And we would need the support of our coalition partners. With that in mind, I'll be meeting with Assad in Geneva on the way back. I asked Hosi Mubarak why Assad is saying his forces will stay in Saudi Arabia and not fight. Mubarak says this is for local consumption. I told him it doesn't help us. We're prepared to do the major share of what needs to be done militarily. This is the penalty, the price of world leadership. But it would be helpful if the coalition partners would be more helpful in what they say so support in the U.S. doesn't erode. Mubarak himself has said things that have been interpreted badly in U.S. regarding his preference for Americans to do the bulk of the fighting. (S)

I'm more determined than ever. The American press lives and dies by polling; they'd like to have people believe there's no support in the U.S. for military action. Clearly Americans prefer a peaceful solution. But some of those opposed to what I'm doing are opposed because they don't think I've done enough soon enough. And if you add these people to those who support us, we still have strong support. A decision of this magnitude must be shaped by what's right. I am determined to do whatever is right. When I get back I'll continue to speak out, highlighting why we're here. To answer complaints that American boys should not be the only ones at stake, we need to get foreign forces, Kuwaitis, Saudis, Syrians, etc., so the perception is that we're in this together. Any support for this principle you can give, the better. It is important to show international solidarity versus Saddam Hussein. (S)

The only other point is somewhat delicate. We're grateful for the financial support from Kuwait for operations and to the countries affected. I want to thank you for that. I'd like to ask you to consider providing as strong support as possible for next year. To the degree the Kuwaitis can do in 1991 what you've done in 1990 would send a good signal. We'd like to discuss this whole financial question with you in the future. The burdens of this are significant. (S)

Amir: I will wait for your officials to come and discuss this.
(U)

President Bush: I'm looking forward to my visit tomorrow. I hope the signal is one of American firmness and determination. We cannot fail or fall short. We're not going to fail. I've lost no determination, regardless of the criticism. (C)

Amir: We will do our best to get our friends to do their best to participate with the American troops in action. I know you're tired. (U)

President Bush: I feel better for seeing you. I wish you well. Next time I see you, I hope its in Kuwait City -- free Kuwait.

(The Amir handed the President a photo album depicting atrocities).

President Bush: Terrible what they've done. How tough do you think Saddam Hussein would be in battle? (C)

Amir: You have more accurate information, but from our information, Iraqi soldiers are so demoralized after eight years of war that they will not fight well against you in a war they know they cannot win. And what I've mentioned to you already is that for the first time there is open talk in Iraq against the regime. (C)

President Bush: Thank you. (U)