

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Thomas King, Secretary of State for Defense, United Kingdom

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
Richard B. Cheney, Secretary of Defense
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
Robert M. Gates, Assistant to the President and Deputy for National Security Affairs
David Gompert (Notetaker), NSC Staff

Thomas King, Secretary of State for Defense
Sir David Craig, Chief of Defense Staff
Sir Antony Acland, UK Ambassador to the U.S.

DATE, TIME February 12, 1991, 2p.m. - 2:30p.m.
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: Please tell John Major I appreciate the cooperation of the United Kingdom and his personal role. He took hold at a very difficult time and has earned all of our confidence. The British military is doing extremely well. The British briefers help show that the United States is not going it alone. The American people find it reassuring when they see we are not in this by ourselves. This is terribly important. I know that the UK is doing a disproportionate share. I gather that the command structure is working well. It is also working with the French. They have an assignment, and I firmly believe that they will fulfill their role. (S)

I am increasingly concerned about the propaganda campaign, especially these one-sided CNN reports. I think that some of the British journalists I've seen do a more balanced job. (S)

Tom King: We need to establish that the reports are not merely censored as CNN says. In fact, the reports are what the Iraqis want us to see. (S)

The President: I made a number of phone calls over the weekend. Perez de Cuellar says that the Iraqis have circulated a paper in the United Nations about civilian casualties. I also talked to the Indian Prime Minister who is very concerned. And now we have

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this statement by Gorbachev. Also the NAM is active. Who knows what Primakov will come away from Baghdad with. But despite all of this, I think the coalition will hold. (S)

Tom King: The SCUD attacks have actually been helpful in a perverse way. (S)

The President: Yes, but our television seems to focus more on the damage that we do than the damage Saddam Hussein does. (S)

What are your thoughts on the timing of the ground campaign? (S)

Tom King: The purely military analysis would argue for waiting. The purely political analysis would argue for moving quickly. A political-military analysis would indicate the following. It is important to hold the coalition and timing could be important in that regard. The longer this goes on, the more pressure obviously can build on the coalition. Also we don't want the Iraqis to conclude that they can endure the air campaign. But on balance, we put political considerations lower and place the higher priority on military factors. This would argue for waiting say, 15-20 days. It would be best to act before Ramadan and before the temperature starts rising. (S)

The President: (To Secretary Cheney) How long will the ground war last? I should point out that our Congress is concerned about a ground war because they think it will be lengthy and involve high casualties. (S)

Secretary Cheney: We briefed Congress today. Our belief is that once the ground war starts, it could be over in a few days or at most a few weeks. (S)

General Craig: It could take a while for us to dig them out of the buildings they are in in Iraq, if we have to go from street to street, building to building. Otherwise, as far as the forces that are out in the open, we don't think they will hold very long. (S)

The President: We think they are short on rations. (To Secretary Cheney) How long will their rations last? (S)

Secretary Cheney: They are in difficult straits already especially along the Kuwaiti and Saudi border. We think that the Revolutionary Guard takes the best provisions before they make it down to the troops along the border. So they are not being resupplied very much as it is. (S)

The President: We should all be very pleased with the way our weapon systems are working under these conditions. (S)

General Craig: It is very impressive. Not only the technology but also the air crews and the ground crews and all of the support systems. It is very difficult to maintain such a high

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sortie rate. I must say that the U.S. side is performing in a splendid fashion. (S)

Tom King: In the end, Her Majesty's government will back the military judgment on when to move. I told Dick Cheney that once you have concluded that it is time for a ground campaign, you should ring up the Prime Minister. Then we'll have to be sure that we are all singing the same song. (S)

The President: You are absolutely right. It is important that our governments and also our briefers be on the same line. I am delighted to see you and again want to express my admiration and gratitude for the British role. (S)

Tom King: I'll be doing some interviews now with ABC and CNN, and then I will have a press conference. (U)

The President: We will miss Ambassador Acland. We are looking forward very much to the Queen's visit. (S)

-- End of Conversation --

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