

Title: LOBBY BRIEFING 6 SEPTEMBER 1990 4 PM

We repeated this morning's briefing.

Gulf Crisis

We said that Cabinet had lasted for nearly 90 minutes. A substantial portion of that time had been taken up with various Cabinet members (Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Defence Secretary, Energy Secretary, Chancellor and Attorney General) reporting on Gulf issues. We confirmed that the disposition of forces had not been discussed and said that we doubted that the Defence Secretary would be in a position to make any announcements during the debate tomorrow. We said we could not rule out that ground forces might be deployed and we reminded the Lobby that the Prime Minister had always made this clear. When we announced that we were sending forces to the Gulf shortly after the invasion of Kuwait the Prime Minister had said they were adequate at that time but that we would keep the position under review.

Asked to sum up the impact of Neil Kinnock's speech, we said we thought it had been pretty strong until he came to the point of considering the use of force under Article 51. We stressed, as the Prime Minister had made crystal clear in her speech, that the highest legal authorities in the land were of the opinion that the authority already existed. It was necessary to retain flexibility of response and this implied that we should not make it easier for Saddam Hussein by telling him in advance that we would go back to the UN for a further resolution before taking military action.

In response to a question about why we were contemplating sending ground forces to the area, we said it was one way of continuing to ensure the enforcement of sanctions by demonstrating our determination that the UN resolutions be upheld.

Pressed as to what precise forces might be being considered for despatch to the Gulf, we said we could offer the Lobby no guidance. They should speak to the MOD. Nor could we give any guidance as to the likely timescale in which this would take place. Asked whether this indicated a move from a defence posture to a more aggressive stance, we reminded the Lobby that military action had never been ruled out although in her interview last Sunday with David Frost the Prime Minister had indicated that she thought it might take months for sanctions to work.

Asked if we could provide clarification of what the Prime Minister said about the BA flight trapped in Kuwait at the beginning of the crisis we said no it had been news to us. We undertook to let the Lobby have further details later.

Mr Hashimoto

Asked whether the Chancellor took the opportunity of his discussions today with Mr Hashimoto to encourage Japan to participate in the American burden sharing initiative, we said we were sure the Chancellor would have done so but we had no detail of their discussion and suggested the Lobby speak to the Treasury Press Office.

Michael Forsyth

We said we had no information about possible reshuffles although we had read the speculation in today's media. We knew of no plans for a meeting with the Prime Minister - certainly there was nothing in her diary. We acknowledged that with both of them in the House for today's debate it was impossible to say what might take place within the confines of the building. Asked whether the difficulties in Scotland at present might result in Ministerial changes we said we could offer the Lobby no guidance although we acknowledged that if one believed what one read in the media they had already speculated that this was the case.

Asked if the fact that Malcolm Rifkind was today undertaking the engagements which the Prime Minister had had to forego in Scotland because of the emergency debate meant she had full confidence in him, we said yes. She had total confidence in him as a member of the Cabinet. Pressed as to whether she had confidence in Michael Forsyth, we said yes. She had total confidence in him as a member of the Government.

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