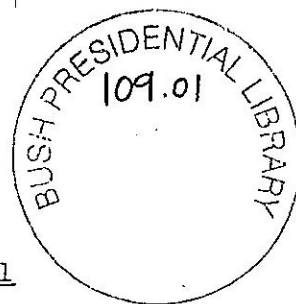


~~SECRET~~



~~SECRET~~

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

Meeting of the National Security Council

DATE: August 4, 1990
LOCATION: Camp David
TIME: 8:00 - 10:00 am

SUBJECT: Minutes of NSC Meeting on Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait (S)

PARTICIPANTS:

State
Secretary Baker

Treasury
Secretary Brady

DOD
Secretary Cheney

CIA
Director Webster
(b)(1); (b)(3) (Briefer)

White House
The President
The Vice President
Governor Sununu
Brent Scowcroft
Marlin Fitzwater

NSC
Richard Haass

JCS
General Powell
General Norman Schwarzkopf
LtGeneral Horner

The President: I want to concentrate this morning on military options. But first we can get an update from Bill Webster. (S)

Brent Scowcroft: I agree. First we'll look at intelligence, then the military operation, and then we will have the general conversation. (S)

Director Webster: The Saudis have mobilized two brigades along their Eastern coast. Iraqi forces occupy all of Kuwait. They are mopping up the resistance. Very little of Kuwait's Army survived. The Iraqi pursued some Kuwait forces across the Saudi border. We have reports of Iraqis moving against our Embassy in Kuwait but they are not confirmed. We are seeing a strong reaction from the world about willingness to freeze assets. Iran is reportedly arguing with Iraq for not informing them of their invasion plans. (S)

Secretary Cheney: You asked us to look at military options. Of course, much depends on what we decide are our goals. (S)

~~SECRET~~
Declassify on: OADR

DECLASSIFIED IN PART
PER E.O. 13526

2005-1682-MR

31 4/1/13

~~SECRET~~

Bush Library Photocopy

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

2

General Powell: What we will present is a longstanding plan defined over the last few weeks. This is similar to what we presented to Bandar yesterday. The plan is doable. It will achieve the mission of defending Saudi Arabia and a basis for moving north into Kuwait. It is difficult but doable. It will be enormously expensive to project and sustain a force of this size. It will require some reserve call up. There are two dimensions: deterrence and war fighting. The sooner we can get an invitation from the Saudis the better. I believe the Iraqis would think twice before engaging us. We can get our air power in quickly. We can handle the Iraqi Air Force. We also have some naval forces that can be augmented. Ground forces can be introduced over the course of a month. All of this would draw down our ability to act anywhere else in the world. The ultimate size of the force would be roughly 100,000. (S)

General Schwartzkopf: Iraq has over 1100 aircraft, but most are antiquated and they have almost no experience with using their air power offensively. The key is getting HNS from Saudi Arabia. Iraq is not 10 feet tall but is formidable. They have an army of 900,000 men, 63 divisions, over 5700 tanks. Once again we see a pattern of a large number of weapons but only a small number of high quality. They have no self-propelled artillery. One of our advantages is that they would have problems fighting over long distances. They have bigger forces but much lower quality than what we could field. Their aircraft could not reach the lower peninsula. It would be a short amount of time before we would gain air superiority. Their navy is insignificant. Very quickly we would gain control of the Gulf. They have dense SAM envelopes around key sites such as Baghdad. Overall their strengths include numbers, experience, CW, and some modern arms. Their weaknesses are centralized command and control, a dependence on foreign spare parts, and a lack of offensive experience. (S)

General Scowcroft: What do we know of their stockpiles? (S)

Director Webster: (b)(1) (b)(3) (S)

Governor Sununu: How centralized are their stocks? (S)

General Powell: Some are centralized but also there is some distribution. (S)

General Schwarzkopf: Their invasion of Kuwait stopped at one point, suggesting some shortage of parts. They have several attack options. They need one week to prepare a 7 division attack along three lines. They could mount a 3 division attack in 72 hours. (S)

General Powell: Saudi Arabia is not doing much to prepare for any of this now. (S)

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Bush Library Photocopy

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

3

General Powell: Saudi Arabia is not doing much to prepare for any of this now. (S)

General Schwarzkopf: Iraq maintains 56 divisions along the Iranian border. But this is a defensive force. As for ourselves, everything I am going to say is based on certain assumptions: Iraq has consolidated its position in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia provides HNS, there is no allied cooperation, we have a no-notice execution and there is no partial mobilization. The major problem for us is the distance. The time it will take for us to get forces there will extend if we have no warning and no mobilization. Everything we do would be visible. Within one week, we could get five tactical fighter squadrons and two carrier battle groups on the scene. We could double this over two weeks. We could also have a force slightly larger than a division in after two weeks. The overall plan would take 17 weeks. We don't have good ratios for attacking them in Kuwait. Our limitations include the fact that this would stretch us, POL would come from HNS, we would need to deploy reserves, water, and selected munitions shortfalls. (S)

Lt General Horner: We can have 400 aircraft in the area in 11 days. Our forces are on alert and ready to go. (S)

Secretary Cheney. We are concerned about their CW capability. (S)

General Schwarzkopf: All of our forces have desert environment experience as well as CW training. Iraq tends to use CW early on against command and control targets. We would obviously want warning of the attacks. (S)

Secretary Cheney: The history of air campaigns suggest they are not terribly successful. Why would this one be different? (S)

General Schwarzkopf: I am not an advocate of air power alone. But this is a target-rich environment. There is no cover in the desert. Their army has never operated under attack, and we have sophisticated munitions. (S)

The President: Would the Saudi Air Force be of help? (S)

Lt General Horner: Yes, especially their F-15 and AWACS. (S)

The President: Any other friendly help? (S)

Lt General Horner: GCC states as well as Egypt and Turkey. (S)

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Bush Library Photocopy

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

4

General Scowcroft: I worry over one thing. The Saudis are concerned about our seriousness. Ground forces are the best symbol of our commitment but this plan is air-heavy. (S)

Secretary Cheney: Bandar made a point that they were unhappy with our offer of one Tactical Fighter Squadron but they have no doubts now after hearing our briefing. (S)

The President: My worry is the lack of Saudi will and that they might bug out. We need to ask them. (S)

General Scowcroft: We have a chicken and egg problem. They don't want to get out in front and be left vulnerable, and we want to see if they have the will. (S)

The President: I am worried over the American lives at stake. (C)

General Scowcroft: This is the Middle East. Look at what happened to Kuwait. (S)

The President: What do we know regarding the report of an Iraqi pullout? (C)

Director Webster: It is all talk. (C)

General Scowcroft: I don't assume it is all talk. I can see him pulling out a brigade. This would give the Saudis a chance not to act. (S)

AT THIS POINT THE BRIEFERS LEFT THE ROOM

General Powell: I really think Saddam does not want to mess with us. Therefore, I believe we need to get the Americans in - we need to show the flag. (S)

Secretary Cheney: (b)(1) (S)

The President: I am inclined to feel a small U.S. military presence and the air option will do it. Iraq did badly versus Iran. (S)

Governor Sununu: He no longer has the Soviets as a friend. (C)

The President: I worry about the implications of attacking Baghdad. (S)

Secretary Baker: Our using air versus Baghdad could turn things against us unless it is done in conjunction with an Iraqi move into Saudi Arabia. (S)

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Bush Library Photocopy

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

5

The President: Our first objective is to keep Saddam out of Saudi Arabia. Our second objective is to protect the Saudis against retaliation when we shut down Iraq's export capability. We have a problem if Saddam does not invade Saudi Arabia but holds on to Kuwait. (S)

General Scowcroft: We accomplish what we want by closing his economic capability. (S)

General Powell: The Saudis will only shut down the pipeline if the U.S. Army is there. (S)

Secretary Cheney: We can only start this if we are prepared to see this through like Panama. You must be prepared to defend Saudi Arabia, put the Kuwait royal family back. The problem is that the American people might have a short tolerance for war. (S)

Secretary Baker: We can only bomb Iraq if they attack Saudi Arabia. If they don't, our policy must be to protect Saudi Arabia and sustain economic sanctions. Otherwise we will lose the economic advantage. (S)

Governor Sununu: The key is the pipelines. (S)

The President: Turkey is key. It may be doable. But Ozal wants a NATO assurance of support. I assume NATO groundrules would cover this. Why not move U.S. forces in Germany into Turkey? I'm also sure that the French would be supportive. (S)

General Powell: There is a tradition of informal arrangements among the allies in the Gulf. (S)

Secretary Cheney: If we start, this would cost one hell of a lot of money. (S)

The President: We should try to get the Saudis to help with this. (S)

Secretary Cheney: This could take months. It will not be cheap. (S)

The President: Can't we ask Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to help financially? (S)

General Scowcroft: My guess is that the American people will support this. (S)

Secretary Cheney: I don't know. The oil mostly goes to Japan. We will be seen as helping royal families. Their support may be short-lived. (S)

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

Bush Library Photocopy

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

6

Secretary Baker: Our goal should be to get Saddam out of Kuwait. We should make clear that if he goes to Saudi Arabia he is at war with us. We could lose the ability to hurt Saddam unless he attacks first. (S)

The President: Another ingredient of this is our embassies. We are not going to sit there like we did with Iran. What would we do? It would be an act of war. (S)

Secretary Baker: We should begin pulling people out. But this is another red line. (S)

Secretary Cheney: We can't let Saddam hold on to Kuwait. (S)

General Powell: Even the restoration of the Kuwait ruling family would not be enough because they would always be intimidated. (S)

General Scowcroft: I'm not sure you are right because Saddam might not be able to survive this. (S)

General Powell: Our long-term goal is to hurt Saddam. (S)

Governor Sununu: The best way do to this is to squeeze them economically. (S)

The President: If the Amir goes back Saddam will lose international support. (S)

Secretary Baker: International opposition to Saddam will be long standing. (S)

General Scowcroft: Covert options need looking at. (S)

Secretary Cheney: You must consider the possibility of what we will do if they don't attack. (S)

General Scowcroft: The issue is who fires first. (S)

The President: The worst thing would be for Israel to come in. (S)

General Scowcroft: We have laid down a marker on that. (S)

Richard Haass: Our objective is to get Saddam to fire first. (S)

Secretary Cheney: Again, all this will cost an enormous amount of money. (S)

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

7

The President: It is reasonable to ask Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to help. (S)

Governor Sununu: The most likely scenario is that we put air and limited ground forces into Saudi Arabia, Iraq does a partial pull out but stays in Kuwait. We need our presence to do the economic tightening. Shutting down the pipeline will be key. The issue will be whether Arab politics will permit this. (S)

The President: I don't like red lines when American boys are vulnerable. We can't agree to any approach that leaves us vulnerable. I think we are overestimating Saddam's will. I have lost confidence in King Hussein. (S)

General Powell: Saddam has a lot of oil and a lot of money but I don't think he will take us on. (S)

The President: He may be underestimating world opposition. Lots of people are calling him Hitler. (S)

General Powell: If we get request from Saudis, it would be wise that there not just be a U.S. flag. (S)

The President: It is too much to expect NATO to extend itself. (S)

Richard Haass: But we may be able to do something along the lines of the Korea war model of a U.S. led multi-national force. (S)

Secretary Baker: Our strategy is three-fold: to keep Saddam out, to make him a pariah, and to topple him through sanctions and covert actions. (S)

General Scowcroft: Our first goal is to get him out of Kuwait. (S)

Secretary Baker: Should we blockade? We may lose international support if we do this. (S)

General Scowcroft: I don't see why we would lose support if we blockaded. Closing shipping is no more than closing the pipeline. (S)

The President: We ought to try a blockade. (S)

Richard Haass: We need to consider options that are not based upon Saudi Arabia giving us what we want at the outset. (S)

Secretary Baker: We could do a blockade pursuant to a UN call for sanctions. (S)

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

8

Secretary Cheney: If the Saudis don't go along, we should consider air attacks on Iraq. (S)

Director Webster:

(b)(1); (b)(3)

(b)(1); (b)(3)

The President: We can't do much if the Saudis won't help or if they are going to double deal. (S)

General Scowcroft: We need to work with NATO. You could also call the Italians. (C)

Secretary Baker: We have no report yet about the EC. (U)

The President:

(b)(1)

(S)

Secretary Cheney: He also has to carry out orders. And Saudi Arabia is worried. We will take a look at non-Saudi options. (S)

The Vice President: Can we do anything more with the Soviets? (C)

Secretary Baker: They can help us in the UN. (C)

Secretary Cheney: We need to look at non-Saudi policy options. (S)

The President: We should consider what our naval forces could do. (C)

General Scowcroft: We may want to quarantine shipping. (S)

Richard Haass: We may want to send special emissaries to Saudi Arabia and Turkey. (C)

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

Bush Library Photocopy



This document is from the holdings of:

The National Security Archive

Suite 701, Gelman Library, The George Washington University

2130 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 20037

Phone: 202/994-7000, Fax: 202/994-7005, nsarchiv@gwu.edu

[Read related article:](#)

**Inside the Gorbachev-Bush “Partnership” on the
First Gulf War 1990**

2020-09-09