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cc: FCO.

Subject c: Master  
Ops.



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

7 February 1984

PRIME MINISTER'S  
PERSONAL MESSAGE  
SERIAL No. T 21/84

Your Highness.

When you kindly received Mr. Richard Luce on 18 December, you told him of your concern that an escalation of the conflict between Iran and Iraq might put the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in danger of an Iranian attack. You asked him to indicate whether and in what way the United Kingdom would be prepared to help the UAE defend itself against such an attack. Your request has been given very careful and detailed consideration by Her Majesty's Government, and I am now able to provide a reply.

You will recall that when hostilities first began between Iran and Iraq in 1980, and fears were expressed that they might spread to other parts of the Gulf, Mr. Moberly visited you to convey a personal assurance from Lord Carrington that in the spirit of our very long-standing friendship we stood ready in principle to provide military assistance of a defensive nature if asked. Mr. Luce told you in December that we stood by this commitment, which I am happy to re-affirm.

In considering the United Kingdom's own defence needs, we have been guided by the belief that the best defence is collective self-defence. We have been substantially increasing our own defence expenditure in real terms. In the same way, we welcome the development of increased co-operation on defence issues between the member countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), including their first joint military exercises last autumn. As hitherto, we are anxious to provide all the assistance in our power, by way of training and advice in the United Kingdom and locally,

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and through meeting the GCC's defence equipment needs, to help the UAE and its partners to continue building up their capabilities for self-defence. General Dennis has just visited the UAE with a mandate to ascertain what more we can do to help you in these areas. If you believe that the UAE has specific needs which are being overlooked, I should be grateful if you could let me know immediately.

I also understand, however, that in the short term you are concerned that the UAE's own resources might not be wholly adequate to counter an Iranian threat, and have asked what forces the United Kingdom might be able to make available if the UAE called for our assistance. Although the United Kingdom's primary defence responsibilities will continue to be in the NATO area, one lesson of the Falklands crisis is that we need to retain and enhance our capacity to act outside that area. We therefore possess a number of defensive military capabilities, including naval mine counter-measures and escort vessels, tactical air defence, maritime reconnaissance aircraft, and air defence missiles and radar, that could in principle, and subject to availability at the time, and overriding national needs, be used to support such action; it would be imprudent to decide at this stage that particular forces would be allocated to specific tasks or specific areas of the Gulf, in the event of an escalation of the Iran/Iraq war, since we should need to deploy them where the need was greatest, taking due account of the capabilities of other friendly nations. Chief among these is of course the United States, with whom we are in close touch about the measures that might need to be taken if there were any escalation.

I cannot emphasise too strongly that the continued safety and security of the UAE is a matter of great importance to us. As I have said, if the UAE has specific defence needs which are not at present being met, I should be grateful if you would let me know. I should in any case like to keep in the closest possible contact with you until we are agreed that the threat of Iranian action against the UAE has passed.

Yours sincerely  
Rajesh Shetty

His Highness Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, G.C.M.G.

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