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FM MUSCAT 111015Z APR

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 123 OF 11 APR 84

INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK, UKDEL NATO, TEHRAN
BAGHDAD, GULF POSTS

FROM EGERTON

YOUR TELNO 659 TO WASHINGTON: GULF CONTINGENCY PLANNING: OMANI
REACTIONS

1. SUMMARY. OMAN ACCEPTS THE NEED FOR PLANNING BUT IS WORRIED BY MEMORIES OF LEBANON: A HASTY US INVOLVEMENT, MISJUDGEMENTS IN WASHINGTON, A WITHDRAWAL OF PUBLIC SUPPORT AND AN UNDIGNIFIED EXIT, LEAVING FRIENDS IN THE MIRE. BRITAIN'S ROLE SEEN AS SLOWING THE AMERICANS DOWN AND FINE-TUNING THEIR RESPONSES. PRINCIPLES OF THE APPROACH TO THE PLANNING EXERCISE EXPLAINED, ALSO THAT IN A SUDDEN CRISIS IDEAL COURSES MAY NOT BE POSSIBLE. NO SPECIFIC OMANI WORRIES, OR REQUESTS.

2. WHEN I CALLED WITH HM AMBASSADOR ON YOUSUF AL ALAWI ON 9 APRIL, I TOOK HIM THROUGH THE PRINCIPLES WE ARE SEEKING TO ESTABLISH WITH THE US IN OUR CONTINGENCY PLANNING. DIPLOMATIC ACTION SHOULD BE THE FIRST RECOURSE IN ANY CRISIS, MILITARY ACTION SHOULD BE KEPT TO THE MINIMUM NECESSARY TO MEET THE THREAT, AND SHOULD BE AT THE PUBLISHABLE INVITATION OF ONE OR MORE GULF STATES OR ORGANISATIONS. THE GULF SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO BECOME ANOTHER AREA OF EAST-WEST CONFRONTATION. I ADDED THAT IT SEEMED TO US IMPORTANT TO CONSULT OUR GULF FRIENDS AT EVERY STAGE OF THIS EXERCISE (HENCE MY VISIT TO OMAN AND THE UAE), SO THAT THEIR VIEWS COULD BE FED IN AND TAKEN ACCOUNT OF. OUR PLANNING WAS STARTING TO FOCUS ON OTHER THAN WORST CASE SCENARIOS, EG THE MORE SUBTLE PROBLEMS POSED BY IRANIAN-INSPIRED TERRORISM OR SUBVERSION OF THE FABRIC OF, OR AMENITIES IN, THE GULF STATES, INCLUDING THREATS TO OFFSHORE OIL INSTALLATIONS, DISTILLATION PLANTS ETC. HOW DID OMAN SEE SUCH THREATS IN RELATION TO HERSELF? HAD THEY DISCUSSED THEM WITH THE AMERICANS? HOW DID THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE US MILITARY NOW STAND?

3. ALAWI SENT HIS WARMEST REGARDS TO MR LUCE. OMAN WAS ALARMED AT THE SCALE OF US CONTINGENCY PLANNING AND THE VERY DETAILED NAVAL AND AIR FORCE MOVEMENTS THAT LAY BEHIND IT. IT SEEMED CALCULATED TO SCARE RATHER THAN DETER IRAN. HE WOULD PURSUE THESE QUESTIONS WITH UNDER-SECRETARY MURPHY, NOW DUE HERE NEXT WEEK, AND PERHAPS WITH VICE-PRESIDENT BUSH DURING HIS 3-DAY VISIT IN MID-MAY. THE BASIC OMANI FEAR WAS THAT THE AMERICANS WOULD DASH IN QUICKLY TO CORRECT AN IRANIAN 'PROVOCATION',

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USE TOO MUCH FORCE IN DOING SO, FIND THEMSELVES ENMESHED IN A SITUATION WHICH NEEDED THE PRESENCE OF GROUND FORCES (WHICH COULD ONLY BE PROVIDED BY THE US), AND THEN PULL OUT WITH THE JOB HALF-FINISHED, IN DEFERENCE TO CONGRESS OR AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION, AS IN LEBANON. THIS WOULD LEAVE AMERICA'S PARTNERS ^{AND FRIENDS} UP AGAINST A BRUISED AND REVENGEFUL IRAN. OMAN LOOKED TO THE UK TO PERSUADE THE AMERICANS TO BE REALISTIC BOTH IN THEIR CONTINGENCY PLANNING AND ABOVE ALL, IN THEIR RESPONSES TO IRANIAN PROBING AND PINPRICKS. "YOU MUST SLOW THE US DOWN". THE GCC AS SUCH WOULD NOT REACT TO US CONTINGENCY PLANS PUT TO INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS, AND OF THEM, PERHAPS ONLY SAUDI ARABIA AND BAHRAIN WOULD TAKE CONTINGENCY PLANNING TALKS WITH THE US SERIOUSLY. HE IMPLIED THAT OMAN WOULD DO SO TOO, BUT WOULD NOT (NOT) BE RUSHED INTO IT.

4. I SUGGESTED THAT OMAN OR INDEED THE GCC MIGHT ADOPT SOME OF THE UK'S PRINCIPLES, AS I HAD EXPLAINED THEM, IN RESPONDING TO US APPROACHES TO GET DOWN TO BRASS TACKS. A US TEAM WAS IN LONDON THAT DAY AND IT WAS LARGELY DUE TO THE OMANI REQUEST FOR AN MCM FORCE IN DECEMBER THAT OUR CONTINGENCY PLANS HAD MADE SO MUCH PROGRESS. THAT FORCE HAD NOW REACHED GIBRALTAR AND WOULD LEAVE FOR THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ON 14 APRIL. WE HAD NO (NO) INTENTION AT PRESENT OF MOVING IT CLOSER TO THE REGION, SINCE WE VERY MUCH AGREED WITH THE OMANI VIEW THAT NOBODY SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO GRATUITIOUS BUILDING-UP OF TENSION. ON THE OTHER HAND AN INCIDENT COULD FLARE UP QUICKLY, AND WOULD HAVE TO BE DEALT WITH PROMPTLY. HENCE OUR PLANNING.

5. I GAVE ALAWI A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF HOW THE HOSTILITIES ON THE GROUND STOOD, AND SUGGESTED THAT WHILE THE SHORT TERM PROSPECTS FOR IRAQ WERE NOT TOO BAD, THIS WAR WOULD NOT GO AWAY.

6. ON THE DETAILED POINTS IN PARA 9 OF YOUR TUR, ALAWI CERTAINLY ACCEPTS (A) THE NEED FOR A PUBLISHABLE REQUEST. HE IS A LEADING EXPONENT OF (C), APPROVAL FOR REQUIRED FACILITIES NOT (NOT) TO BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED (THE DIFFICULT NEGOTIATIONS OVER THUMRAIT). FURTHERMORE THE WHOLE TENOR OF HIS REMARKS SUGGESTS THAT HE GRUDGINGLY ACCEPTS (D), BUT HOPES AGAINST HOPE THAT ANY US MOVE WILL BE PRAGMATIC, PROPORTIONATE TO THE THREAT, AND INTERNATIONALLY DEFENSIBLE. I DISCUSSED (D) - EXTRA HELP AGAINST SUBVERSION - WITH TEMPLE, HEAD OF ORD. HE IS ALERT TO THE THREAT OF INFILTRATORS FROM IRAN BUT IS CONFIDENT THAT THOUGH THEY COULD CARRY OUT AN ACT OF MINOR SABOTAGE ON A "ONE-OFF" BASIS, THEY WOULD HAVE INADEQUATE BACK-UP FOR ANYTHING MAJOR AND WOULD BE QUICKLY EXPOSED AMONGST A SMALL AND SECURITY CONSCIOUS POPULATION (INCLUDING FOREIGN LABOUR).

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7. ON THE "GATEHOUSE" CONCEPT, WHEN I FLEW TO GOAT ISLAND IN THE HORMUZ STRAIT ON 10 APRIL I SAW ABOUT 12 TANKERS AND FREIGHTERS ASSEMBLED AND LYING SOUTH OF KHOR FAKKAN. THERE THUS EXISTS AN UNOFFICIAL BUT HABITUAL GATHERING POINT OUTSIDE THE STRAIT. IN THEORY SOME KIND OF CHECK OF THE NEUTRAL AND INNOCENT NATURE OF THESE VESSELS SHOULD BE EASY TO ARRANGE, AND PUBLICISE INTERNATIONALLY.

SLATER

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