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MESSAGES FROM SULTAN QABOOS: REPLY FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

**PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE**

Your Majesty,

SERIAL No. T120AA184

Thank you for letting me have your views on the present state of the Gulf war in your conversation with our Ambassador on 27 June. He has subsequently passed on a request from your Government that in the light of the present situation the United Kingdom should consider temporarily deploying an airborne early warning aircraft to Oman. I should like, if I may, to cover both messages in this reply.

As you know, I have repeatedly expressed our hope for the earliest possible end to the conflict between Iran and Iraq, and to the appalling loss of human life and material damage that has resulted from it. All efforts aimed at bringing this about, particularly those of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, have our support. I am encouraged by the response by both sides to the Secretary-General's appeal for an end to attacks on civilian centres of population. Although it is too early to be sure that this restraint will continue, I hope that in time it may provide a foundation on which moves towards a wider ceasefire might be based.

In the message passed to British officials by Major General Ali Majid al Ma'amari, you asked us to try to persuade Shaikh Zaid not to accept Saudi Arabia's offer to position fighter aircraft in the United Arab Emirates. In the subsequent message passed by General Creasey you expressed concern at possible American pressure on Saudi Arabia to involve Oman more actively in preparing to counter Iranian incursions. You also suggested that it would be to Oman's advantage to demonstrate independence of American assistance through the availability if needed of help from elsewhere.

I should like to assure you that I have studied both messages very carefully and sympathetically. My own

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conclusion is that stationing Saudi aircraft in the United Arab Emirates is more likely to diminish than to increase the threat of attack on the Emirates or on Oman. Since the shooting down of an Iranian F4 by the Royal Saudi Air Force on 5 June, Iranian aircraft have been more circumspect in their movements. The only attack which has been made on an Arab ship since then took place much further out in the Gulf than earlier Iranian attacks in an area where there was markedly less chance of interception by the Saudis. To extend Saudi air cover to the Emirates would surely put the Iranians still more on the defensive. We have also noted that the tone of Iranian public statements in recent weeks has been more restrained, and that they have declared themselves willing to stop all attacks on shipping provided that Iraq exercises similar restraint.

I can see that it could be argued that if the UAE's air defences were strengthened, the Iranians might decide to concentrate their attacks on Oman. But surely against this the Iranians would have to calculate that gratuitously to attack a country like Oman, which has been neutral in the conflict, would rouse opinion in the Gulf and in the world at large against them.

The Nimrod early warning aircraft to which you referred will not in fact enter service with the RAF for some considerable time. We would still hope to continue deploying the maritime reconnaissance version of the Nimrod to Oman from time to time, as we did earlier this year. But we must take account of the risk that the deployment of British or other non-Arab forces to the area at present could be regarded by the Iranians as a provocation and might actually increase the danger of their taking precipitate action. But I want us to do everything we can to help at this time. We shall pursue the matter with General Creasey when he is in London on 9 July.

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I found your views on the possible motivation of the various participants in this question profoundly interesting. We ourselves have had extensive contact with American officials, both diplomatic and military, and have gained the clear impression from them that United States policy is exactly as Vice-President Bush has described it to you. That is to say, they wish to ensure that the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, have the means to defend themselves so that the need for any direct US involvement is reduced. They are also being careful to avoid any provocative action of their own in the Gulf area. Recent inaccurate press reports about the movements of American warships stationed at Bahrain have caused the Americans as much concern as they have caused us. While no country can ever answer unreservedly for the policies and attitudes of another, I do not believe our confidence in American motives and intentions is misplaced.

As regards the other members of the Gulf Security Council, I understand and respect your concern that closer military cooperation with them should not lead to Omani involvement in the conflict. In general, however, I welcome progress by the members of the Council towards greater cooperation in their own defence, since this again should reduce the risk of external military involvement in the Gulf and hence the danger of escalation. I understand that the meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers on 12/14 June made some useful progress towards cooperation between the air defence systems of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain. In my view, the arguments in favour of greater cooperation at this difficult time, in the common interest, are very persuasive. I hope that my discussions on this subject with His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zaid al-Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, when he visits London in two weeks' time, will help to substantiate the point.

With my best wishes and greetings for the Eid.

Margaret Thatcher