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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 244 OF 18 JULY 84

INFO IMMEDIATE MODUK (DS11)

YOUR TELEGRAM NUMBER 226: PRIME MINISTER'S MESSAGE

1. I HAD AN AUDIENCE OF THE SULTAN IN SALALAH YESTERDAY IN ORDER TO DELIVER THE PRIME MINISTER'S MESSAGE.
2. AFTER READING THE MESSAGE THE SULTAN COMMENTED THAT IT WAS EXTREMELY CLEAR: HE WAS MOST GRATEFUL TO THE PRIME MINISTER FOR TAKING THE TROUBLE TO WRITE. HE WAS ALSO VERY GRATEFUL TO THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT FOR RESPONDING SO QUICKLY TO HIS REQUEST BY AGREEING TO DEPLOY A NIMROD AIRCRAFT TO OMAN ON EXERCISE. THE SULTAN SAID THAT HE TOOK THIS AS A FURTHER DEMONSTRATION OF BRITISH SUPPORT FOR OMAN: I REPLIED THAT IT SHOULD CERTAINLY BE SEEN IN THAT SENSE.
3. TURNING TO THE SECOND PARAGRAPH OF MRS THATCHER'S MESSAGE, THE SULTAN SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN CONCERNED ABOUT THE POSSIBLE DEPLOYMENT OF SAUDI FIGHTER AIRCRAFT TO THE UAE, PARTLY BECAUSE IT WOULD REPRESENT A FURTHER EXTENSION OF SAUDI INFLUENCE, BUT ALSO BECAUSE IT MIGHT SEEM PROVOCATIVE TO THE IRANIANS. THE UAE, LIKE OMAN, HAD SO FAR AVOIDED BECOMING TOO MUCH INVOLVED IN THE IRAN/IRAQ WAR: THE UAE HAD DONE NOTHING TO OFFEND IRAN AND IRANIANS HAD RECIPROCATED BY LEAVING THE UAE ALONE. IF THE UAE ALLOWED SAUDI FIGHTERS TO BE STATIONED ON HER TERRITORY, THIS SITUATION MIGHT CHANGE. THE PRESENCE OF THE SAUDI FIGHTERS MIGHT DETER THE IRANIANS FROM LAUNCHING AN AERIAL ATTACK, BUT THE IRANIANS PRESUMABLY HAD OTHER WAYS IN WHICH THEY COULD MAKE THINGS DIFFICULT FOR THE UAE. THE SULTAN WENT ON TO SAY THAT AS FAR AS HE WAS AWARE, NO SAUDI AIRCRAFT HAD, IN FACT, ARRIVED IN THE UAE SO IT LOOKED AS IF SHEIKH ZAID HAD MANAGED TO AVOID ACCEPTING THE SAUDI PROPOSAL.
4. TURNING TO THE GENERAL SITUATION IN THE LOWER GULF, QABOOS SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THAT THIS WAS NOW LESS TENSE THAN WHEN WE HAD LAST DISCUSSED IT MY TELEGRAM NUMBER 203). THE MOST ENCOURAGING THING WAS THAT THE SAUDIS AND IRANIANS WERE NOW TALKING TO EACH OTHER. HE HAD FIRST HEARD OF THESE CONTACTS THROUGH KING HUSSEIN BUT THEY HAD SUBSEQUENTLY BEEN CONFIRMED TO HIM BY A SPECIAL EMISSARY FROM KING FAHAD. THE IRANIANS HAD INVITED PRINCE SAUD TO VISIT TEHRAN BUT HE WAS HESITANT AND QABOOS BELIEVED THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR ANY MEETING BETWEEN SAUD AND A SENIOR IRANIAN TO TAKE PLACE ON NEUTRAL GROUND (SEE ALSO PARA 3 OF DOHA TELEGRAM NUMBER 129 TO FCO).

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5. QABOOS WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT THE IRANIANS HAD SUGGESTED TO THE SAUDIS THAT THEY (THE SAUDIS) COULD HELP TO END THE WAR BY BRINGING ABOUT THE RESIGNATION OF SADDAM HUSSEIN: THE SAUDIS HAD REPLIED THAT THIS WAS FOR THE IRAQI PEOPLE THEMSELVES TO DO. QABOOS REGARDED THIS REPLY AS VERY SIGNIFICANT IN THAT THE SAUDIS SEEMED TO BE HINTING TO THE IRANIANS THAT THEY WERE NOT 100 PER CENT BEHIND SADDAM. QABOOS ADDED THAT ALL THE GCC GOVERNMENTS, IN THEIR HEART OF HEARTS, REGARDED IRAQ AS A POTENTIALLY GREATER THREAT TO THEIR STABILITY THAN IRAN. AS FAR AS THE GULF ARABS WERE CONCERNED, IRAN WAS A FOREIGN COUNTRY SPEAKING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE. SO HER POTENTIAL FOR UNDERMINING THEIR REGIMES (WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF BAHRAIN) WAS LIMITED. IRAQ, ON THE OTHER HAND, WAS AN ARAB COUNTRY WITH A LONG HISTORY OF SUBVERSIVE MEDDLING IN THE OTHER GULF STATES.

6. IN CONCLUSION THE SULTAN SAID THAT HE WISHED TO RETURN TO THE QUESTION OF BRITISH/OMAN RELATIONS. HE HAD NO REGRETS ABOUT ENTERING INTO THE DEFENCE ARRANGEMENT WITH THE AMERICANS, WHICH HE BELIEVED HAD CONTRIBUTED TOWARDS THE STABILITY OF THE AREA. BUT HE DID NOT WISH TO BE WHOLLY DEPENDENT ON THE UNITED STATES. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OMAN AND BRITAIN WAS MUCH DEEPER AND OF MUCH LONGER STANDING. HOWEVER HARD THEY TRIED, THE AMERICANS WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO TAKE OVER THE BRITISH POSITION IN OMAN. HE THEREFORE WISHED TO REPEAT HIS GRATITUDE TO THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT FOR AGREEING TO THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE NIMROD AND ALL OUR OTHER HELP. I SAID THAT I WAS DEEPLY GRATEFUL FOR THE SULTAN'S KIND WORDS. THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT ALSO GREATLY VALUED THE RELATIONSHIP AND I ASSURED HIM THAT WE WOULD CONTINUE TO ASSIST OMAN WHENEVER WE COULD.

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