

GR 607

SECRET UK COMMS ONLY

FM MUSCAT 272200Z SEPT 83

TO FLASH FCO

TELNO 269 OF 27 SEPT 83

AND TO FLASH MODUK (FOR COSSEC DIA AND DMOT) CINC FLEET

WASHINGTON UKMIS NEW YORK BAGHDAD ABU DHABI DUBAI

AND IMMEDIATE KUWAIT BAHRAIN DOHA JEDDA

AMMAN

MY TELNO 268 OF 27 SEPT AND TELECOM S OF S/TUNNELL.

IRAN/IRAQ.

1. I SAW QAIS ZAWAMI AGAIN AT MY REQUEST ON THE EVENING OF 27 SEPTEMBER. HE WAS ACCOMPANIED BY ALI MAJID, THE SULTAN'S EQUERRY.

2. I SAID THAT THE REACTION OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WAS ONE OF HORROR THAT THE OMANIS SHOULD CONTEMPLATE PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED OPERATION. THE SECRETARY OF STATE HAD PERSONALLY REQUESTED ME TO URGE THE UTMOST RESTRAINT. THE ACTION CONTEMPLATED COULD NOT ONLY ENDANGER THE ADMIRABLE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS WHICH OMAN HAD BEEN MAKING OVER THE PAST YEARS BUT COULD ALSO ADD TO THE DANGERS OF PASSAGE OF SHIPPING THROUGH THE STRAITS OF HORMUZ. I ADDED THAT THE SECRETARY OF STATE HAD DEMONSTRATED OVER RECENT MONTHS HIS SUPPORT FOR THE LEGIMATE RIGHTS OF THE ARABS IN THE REGION AND HIS PARTICULAR ATTACHMENT TO OMAN. HE WAS SPEAKING AS A PERSONAL FRIEND OF OMAN WHICH WE SAW AS PERHAPS OUR MOST RELIABLE AND SENSIBLE ALLY IN THE AREA. I WENT ON TO SAY THAT, ALTHOUGH WE SYMPATHISED WITH OMANI/IRAQI DESIRES TO BRING ABOUT A MORE AMENABLE REGIME IN IRAN, WE COULD NOT GO ALONG WITH THE MEANS ENVISAGED TO BRING THIS ABOUT. I HINTED THAT THE OMAN APPRECIATION OF IRAN'S ABILITY TO STRIKE BACK AGAINST THOSE WHO HELPED IRAQ TO REGAIN THE ISLANDS MIGHT BE MORE OPTIMISTIC THAT THE FACTS SUGGESTED AND THAT THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON, WHERE THE SECRETARY OF STATE NOW WAS MIGHT SUGGEST GREATER IRANIAN MILITARY STRENGTH THAN THE OMANIS SUPPOSED. FINALLY I URGED THAT THE OMANIS SHOULD DELAY ANY DECISION UNTIL WE AND THE US HAD TIME TO PRESENT TO THE OMANIS A MORE CONSIDERED APPRECIATION OF THE SITUATION. AT MY URGING ZAWAMI UNDERTOOK TO PASS THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S MESSAGE URGENTLY TO THE SULTAN IN SALALAH.

3. ZAWAWI'S RESPONSE WAS THAT HE WAS SURPRISED AT THE STRENGTH OF BRITISH OPPOSITION TO THE OPERATION. HE ACCEPTED THAT THE SECRETARY OF STATE WAS A GOOD FRIEND OF OMAN AND WAS GENUINELY CONCERNED WITH THE COUNTRY'S WELL-BEING SEMI COLON BUT WE WERE ALWAYS URGING THE OMANIS TO COOPERATE MORE CLOSELY WITH THEIR BROTHER ARABS, AND WHEN, AS IN THIS CASE, THEY DECIDED TO DO SO, ALL THEY GOT WAS CRITICISM.

4. I SAID THAT, IN GENERAL TERMS, WE WERE TALKING ABOUT PEACEFUL CO-OPERATION WITH NEIGHBOURS. WOULD IT NOT BE BETTER FOR THE OMANIS IN THIS CASE TO ACT LIKE THEIR NEIGHBOURS, GIVE VOCAL SUPPORT TO THE IRAQIS AND STAY OUT OF THE CONFLICT? ZAWAWI DISMISSED THE EXAMPLE OF THE GULF STATES WHICH WERE TOO DISORGANISED AND HAD TO MANY INTERNAL PROBLEMS TO ACT IN A POSITIVE MANNER. WHEN TAXED WITH THE SAUDI EXAMPLE, HE REPLIED THAT THE SAUDIS HAD ALSO AGREED TO PROVIDE "FACILITIES". I SAID THAT I FOUND THIS SUGGESTION UNBELIEVABLE (ALTHOUGH SOMEONE MUST AT LEAST BE REFUELLING THE HELICOPTERS.)

5. I HOPE I WAS ABLE TO BUDGE ZAWAWI TO SOME EXTENT ON THE QUESTION OF THE POTENTIAL APPRECIATION WHICH A SUCCESSOR IRANIAN REGIME MIGHT SHOW TO OMAN. BUT MY FEELING IS THAT THE OMANIS HAVE THE PAN-ARAB BIT BEYWEEN THE TEETH AND WILL TAKE SOME SHAKING. ZAWAWI WENT SO FAR AS TO SUGGEST THAT OMANI ASSISTANCE IN THIS OPERATION IS TO SOME EXTENT DESIGNED TO BRING ROUND THE IRAQIS TO THE VIEW THAT THEY SHOULD FOLLOW THE OMANIS IN BACKING CAMP DAVID.

6. MORE OMINOUSLY ZAWAWI SUGGESTED IN STRICT CONFIDENCE THAT THE IRAQIS IN THEIR GRATITUDE MIGHT CEDE THE ISLAND TO OMAN INSTEAD OF THE STATES OF THE UAE SHOULD THE OPERATION BE SUCCESSFUL. I SAID THAT I COULD SEE NO POSSIBLE BENEFIT TO OMAN FROM SUCH A SOLUTION, WHICH WOULD SET THEM AGAINST NOT ONLY IRAN BUT THEIR CLOSEST NEIGHBOURS ALSO.

7. THIS WAS A FREE-RANGING CONVERSATION WITH NO HOLDS BARRED. I CAN ONLY HOPE THAT ZAWAWI AND/OR MAJID REPEATS THE FULL FLAVOUR TO THE SULTAN IN SALALAH. IN ANY EVENT I BELIEVE THE DANGER IS THAT, AS USUAL, THE SULTAN HAS MADE UP HIS MIND IN ADVANCE OF CONSULTATIONS WITH HIS ALLIES AND THAT, TO BACK DOWN NOW WOULD INVOLVE UNACCEPTABLE LOSS OF FACE WITH THE IRAQIS. WE CAN, I IMAGINE, ENVISAGE A DEMARCHE BY THE AMERICANS TODAY, BUT I STILL CONSIDER THAT OUR BEST BET TO CALL OFF A POTENTIALLY DISASTROUS AND NAIVE ADVENTURE IS TO ENLIST KING HUSSEIN'S SUPPORT IF POSSIBLE.

8. SINCE I HAVE BEEN URGED TO KEEP THE ABOVE CONFIDENTIAL BETWEEN OURSELVES AND THE US, I HAVE NOT APPROACHED THE SERVICE COMMANDERS. IF TIME PERMITS HOWEVER (AND I STILL HAVE NO CLEAR IDEA OF THE TIME-SCALE ENVISAGED FOR THE OPERATION) I CONSIDER THAT I SHOULD BE AUTHORISED TO MENTION OUR MISGIVINGS TO THEM.

GRATEFUL FOR INSTRUCTIONS.

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