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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

**PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE**
SERIAL No. T 144/82

15 July, 1982.

Your Majesty.

When we met in March, I promised that we would examine in detail Your Majesty's requests for further military assistance. Your Majesty's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs subsequently sent to our Ambassador in Muscat a summary of these requests. I am sorry it has taken me a little time to reply, but I am sure Your Majesty will understand the reasons for the delay.

The first request was for the continued provision of British officers and non commissioned officers for duty with Oman's Armed Forces. I can confirm that we agree to an increase in numbers of British Loan Service Personnel until Omani replacements are available. We hope to be able to meet the current bid for an increase of 82 posts in 1982/83. Beyond that, subject to the practical difficulties of finding the right officers to fill some Loan Service posts, we will endeavour to be as helpful as possible, particularly where new skills are required (for example, in operating mine countermeasures vessels, armoured personnel carriers or air defence systems).

/On the question

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On the question of charges for Loan Service Personnel, we were pleased to be able to inform you in March that these would be reduced by the proposed move to secondment terms. In current prices, the savings to Oman would be up to £0.5M for this financial year, (depending on when the change in terms of service occurred), rising to £1-1.5M a year thereafter. In addition, selective reductions in training charges have already been made, and there could be more where the provision of training is connected to the sale of British equipment.

Your Majesty also explained that the continued provision of training in the United Kingdom would be of increasing importance to Oman. As I am sure Your Majesty will appreciate, there is only a limited number of places available for overseas students on our courses, many of which are heavily over-subscribed. We cannot therefore guarantee places. I can nonetheless confirm that Oman will be given preferential treatment.

On the question of the position of British Loan Service Personnel in time of either internal or regional conflict, I can assure Your Majesty that we are fully committed to the security of Oman. While we would wish to be consulted before British personnel were used in circumstances which could prove embarrassing to either of our two Governments, we recognise that the urgency of a military response in the event of a direct threat to Oman might not allow time for consultation. In these circumstances, we would be content that British personnel should play their full part in Oman's defence. It is well understood between us that British Loan Service Personnel can only follow orders which are consistent with UK military law.

/We would wish

We would wish to be consulted by you, as provided in our existing confidential Exchange of Letters, before British personnel were committed to operations outside the frontiers of Oman. We recognise that Oman may assume certain obligations under Gulf Co-operation Council agreements. In the event of an emergency requiring Oman to act in accordance with these obligations, we would consider sympathetically requests you might put to us for the use of British Loan Service Personnel in a manner consistent with their role in support of Your Majesty's Armed Forces.

We also discussed at our meeting the provision of SAS and bomb disposal personnel. I can confirm that, subject to other commitments, we could deploy up to one SAS squadron to assist Oman in an emergency. We would also be willing to establish an exercise planning team of six to eight SAS soldiers permanently in Oman. As well as planning SAS exercises, this team would be available for joint training with the Sultan's Armed Forces. The team's activities would be subject to agreement with the British Government.

Subject to other commitments, we could also make available bomb disposal personnel to operate in Oman. We could in addition make available to Oman, and train Omanis in the use of, a range of equipment which we have developed to deal with most improvised explosive devices.

/Finally,

Finally, Your Majesty asked about the supply in time of war of spare parts and ammunition for British equipment used by Oman's Armed Forces. Subject to our own overriding national requirements, I can assure Your Majesty that we would do our best to ensure the continued supply and delivery of such items if an emergency arose in Oman.

With every good wish,

Yours sincerely

Nagant Nasser

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O.

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