

IRAN/IRAQ

ADVANCE COPIES

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Desk by 021430²
ADVANCE COPY

PS
PS/SIR I GILMOUR
PS/MR HURD
PS/PUS
SIR E YOUDE
SIR J GRAHAM
MR J C MOBERLY
MR BRAITHWAITE
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CONFIDENTIAL

DESKBY 021430Z FCO, WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK

FM MUSCAT 020703Z OCT 80

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 279 OF 2 OCTOBER

INFO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK, PRIORITY JEDDA,
BAGHDAD, AMMAN, MODUK, ROUTINE BAHRAIN, KUWAIT, ABU DHABI,
DUBAI, DOHA

MR TUNNELL'S TELNO 276 (NOT TO AMMAN): IRAN/IRAQ: OMANI INVOLVEMENT

1. FOLLOWING MY RETURN FROM LEAVE, I SAW IN SUCCESSION ON 1 OCTOBER QAIS ZAWAWI (AT MY REQUEST) AND AVM BENNETT (AT HIS).
2. ZAWAWI CONFIRMED THAT THE IRAQI OPERATION WAS OFF. IT HAD BEEN VIABLE ONLY BETWEEN 26 AND 28 SEPTEMBER (AND PERHAPS THE SULTAN HAD REALISED ALL ALONG THAT HIS CHEQUE WAS UNLIKELY TO BE CASHED). THE ONLY REMAINING IRAQI AIRCRAFT ON OMANI SOIL (THE TWO HELICOPTERS) WOULD BE LEAVING WITHIN 24 TO 48 HOURS AND THE DANGER OF IRANIAN RETALIATION HAD (SIC) THEREFORE BEEN AVERTED. (ACCORDING TO BENNETT, THE TWO AIRCRAFT ARE ONLY AWAITING "CLEARANCE" FOR THEIR RETURN JOURNEY).

3. I SAID THAT YOUR PERSONAL MESSAGE TO THE SULTAN WHICH I HAD BROUGHT BACK WITH ME (AND WHICH ZAWAWI UNDERTOOK TO CONVEY

ONLY AWAITING "CLEARANCE" FOR THEIR RETURN JOURNEY).

3. I SAID THAT YOUR PERSONAL MESSAGE TO THE SULTAN WHICH I HAD BROUGHT BACK WITH ME (AND WHICH ZAWAWI UNDERTOOK TO CONVEY TO HM IN SALALAH) HAD OF COURSE BEEN WRITTEN IN DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES. NEVERTHELESS I THOUGHT THAT ITS THEME - YOUR CONCERN TO AVOID WIDENING THE CONFLICT, TOGETHER WITH BRITAIN'S CONTINUING SYMPATHY AND SUPPORT FOR THE SULTAN - REMAINED RELEVANT.

4. HAVING READ THE MESSAGE, ZAWAWI ENQUIRED ARCHLY WHETHER WE WOULD LIKE IT PUBLICISED. I REPLIED WITH AN EMPHATIC NEGATIVE, STRESSING THAT WE DID NOT WISH TO EMBARRASS THE OMANIS NOR TO CREATE THE IMPRESSION IN BAGHDAD THAT WE WERE TRYING TO FRUSTRATE ARAB CAUSES. ZAWAWI THOUGHT THAT A BONUS OF THE EPISODE HAD BEEN THAT THE IRAQIS (WHO HAD NATURALLY BELIEVED THAT THE BRITISH, THROUGH THEIR LSP IN THE OMANI FORCES, WOULD BRING PRESSURE TO BEAR AGAINST THE PROPOSED OPERATION) HAD BEEN IMPRESSED BY OMAN'S INDEPENDENCE AS WELL AS BY HER WILLINGNESS TO HELP (CF. PARA 2 OF TUR). THE OMANIS MIGHT WELL NEED THIS CREDIT IN BAGHDAD LATER.

5. I SAID THAT SO FAR AS LSP WERE CONCERNED IT HAD BEEN MY INTENTION (ON INSTRUCTIONS), AFTER CONSULTATION WITH HIM, TO MAKE CLEAR TO THE SERVICE COMMANDERS THAT IN THE EVENT OF HOSTILITIES INVOLVING THE SULTANATE THEY WERE TO PLAY THEIR FULL PART IN DEFENDING OMANI SOIL. ZAWAWI SAID HE HAD NO DOUBT OF THIS NOR ANY OBJECTION TO MY SPEAKING TO THE SERVICE COMMANDERS IN THIS SENSE.

6. IN TRYING TO PUT AS GOOD A FACE AS POSSIBLE ON THE SULTAN'S DECISION TO ACCEDE TO THE IRAQI REQUEST FOR FACILITIES, ZAWAWI INADVERTENTLY REVEALED THAT HE HAD KNOWN OF THE DECISION SOME 12 HOURS IN ADVANCE (PRESUMABLY AFTER THE JORDANIAN APPROACH - SEE PARA 7 BELOW) AND ADMITTE ITHAT HE MUST TAKE HIS SHARE OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR NOT HAVING CONTESTED IT. IN CLAIMING THAT THE SULTANATE HAD BEEN IN GOOD COMPANY (THOUGH HE AGREED WITH ME THAT THIS MIGHT HAVE BEEN POOR CONSOLATION) HE PRESSED ME FOR INFORMATION ON THE ATTITUDES OF OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS TO THE CONFLICT. I DREW ON YOUR TELNO 202 TO ABU DHABI AND AMMAN TELNO 368 TO YOU, AS WELL AS OTHER RECENT REPORTS, IN EXPRESSING THE VIEW THAT BY AND LARGE ARAB GOVERNMENTS HAD BEEN VERY CIRCUMSPECT. ZAWAWI SAID THAT THE OMANIS HAD MADE A STATEMENT OF THEIR NEUTRALITY (THIS WAS REPORTED ON THE LOCAL RADIO ON 30 SEPTEMBER, TOGETHER WITH A DENIAL OF ANY IRAQI MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE SULTANATE WHICH WAS APPARENTLY IN

BEEN VERY CIRCUMSPECT. ZAWAMI SAID THAT THE OMANIS HAD MADE A STATEMENT OF THEIR NEUTRALITY (THIS WAS REPORTED ON THE LOCAL RADIO ON 30 SEPTEMBER, TOGETHER WITH A DENIAL OF ANY IRAQI MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE SULTANATE WHICH WAS APPARENTLY IN RESPONSE TO AN ENQUIRY FROM THE BBC, BUT NEITHER MFA NOR MINISTRY OF INFORMATION CAN PRODUCE A TEXT). HE ALSO REFERRED TO A BBC REPORT THAT KING KHALID HAD MADE AN UNCOMPROMISINGLY PRO-IRAQ STATEMENT (WHICH THE SAUDI AMBASSADOR HAD DENIED TO HIM) AND TO CONTRADICTORY STATEMENTS MADE ON QATAR'S BEHALF BY SHAIKH SUHAIM (PRO-IRAQ) AND ISSA KAWARI (NEUTRAL), THOUGH ZAWAMI AGREED WITH ME THAT THE FORMER WAS HARDLY TO BE TAKEN AS REPRESENTING THE EMIR.

7. THE OBJECT OF COMMANDER SULTAN OF OMAN'S AIR FORCE IN SEEING ME WAS CLEARLY TO PUT THE BEST POSSIBLE CONSTRUCTION ON HIS OWN ROLE IN THE AFFAIR (BUT TO BE FAIR GENERAL WATTS, WHO HOLDS NO PARTICULAR BRIEF FOR BENNETT, TOLD ME HE THOUGHT CSOAF HAD DONE A GOOD JOB ON THIS OCCASION). HE SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN SUMMONED ON 24 SEPTEMBER TO SEE THE SULTAN IN SALALAH THE NEXT DAY. LEAVING SALALAH ON 25 SEPTEMBER WAS AHMAD LOZI, A CLOSE CONFIDANT OF KING HUSSAIN. QABOOS TOLD BENNETT THAT HE HAD RECEIVED A MESSAGE FROM HUSSAIN ASKING HIM TO ACCEDE TO THE IRAQI REQUEST. BENNETT CLAIMS TO HAVE COUNSELLED CAUTION, TO HAVE REALISED AT AN EARLY STAGE THAT THIS WOULD BE UNAVAILING AND THEREFORE TO HAVE GONE ALONG WITH THE IRAQI PLAN WHILE TAKING CARE TO POINT OUT THE PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES IN ITS WAY. THE IRAQI EMISSARIES HAD ARRIVED IN SALALAH ON 26 SEPTEMBER, 12 HOURS AFTER LOZI'S DEPARTURE, WHEN QABOOS TOLD THEM OF HIS POSITIVE DECISION. THEREAFTER BENNETT HAD TAKEN THEM ROUND THE COURSE (EG TO MUSANDAM) AS A RESULT OF WHICH THEY HAD REACHED THE INDEPENDENT CONCLUSION THAT THE PROPOSED OPERATION WAS A NON-STARTER. BENNETT HAD RETURNED TO SALALAH ON 28 SEPTEMBER TO TELL THE SULTAN THIS AND TO SEEK PERMISSION TO "STAND DOWN". QABOOS HAD AGREED APPARENTLY WITHOUT DEMUR, WHILE EXPRESSING SOME CONCERN ABOUT KING HUSSAIN'S REACTION. ZAWAMI WAS THEREUPON SENT POST-HASTE TO JORDAN TO EXPLAIN MATTERS (AN ITEM WHICH HE DID NOT REVEAL TO ME).

8. I ASKED BENNETT

A) WHY HE HAD NOT SEEN FIT TO REPORT THE SULTAN'S DECISION TO HMG AT ONCE, ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF HIS OPPOSITION TO IT, DELICATE THOUGH I REALISED HIS POSITION WOULD BE. HE CLAIMED THAT HE HAD ACTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH GENERAL GUIDELINES GIVEN HIM BY CGS, AND THAT AS EVENTS HAD DEVELOPED IT HAD NOT PROVED NECESSARY (CP. GENERAL THE O'MORCHOE'S ACTION WITH MY

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SEMI COLON

B) WHETHER THE SULTAN MIGHT HAVE CALCULATED THAT THE OPERATION WAS A NON-STARTER ANYWAY. HE REPLIED THAT THIS WAS AN INTERPRETATION WHICH WE SHOULD FOSTER
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C) IF THE IRAQIS HAD ANY REASON TO FEEL THAT "THE BRITISH" HAD SABOTAGED THEIR PLAN. HE REPLIED THAT THEY WOULD HAVE NO JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS, AND THAT THEY HAD NOT SAID SO AT THE TIME, THOUGH THIS DID NOT MEAN THAT THEY WOULD NOT SAY SO ON RETURN TO BAGHDAD.

9. I HAVE ALSO SPOKEN ON THE LINES OF PARA 5 ABOVE TO ALL THREE SERVICE COMMANDERS (WHO, AS IT HAPPENED, WERE FOREGATHERED AT MY HOUSE LAST NIGHT AT A FAREWELL PARTY FOR CSON ARRANGED BEFORE MY RETURN.

10. IT IS CLEAR FROM OTHER CONVERSATIONS I HAVE HAD IN THE PAST TWO DAYS THAT QABOOS' DECISION TO GO ALONG WITH THE IRAQIS HAS AROUSED A STORM OF CRITICISM WITHIN THE "ESTABLISHMENT" (SALEM CHAZALI WAS QUOTED TO ME AS HAVING DESCRIBED IT AS "THE WORST DECISION HIS MAJESTY HAS EVER MADE".) AS USUAL, HOWEVER THE "ESTABLISHMENT" FAILED - IF IT EVER TRIED - TO DISSUADE HIM. BUT THEIR CONFIDENCE (AND OURS) IN HIM MUST HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY UNDERMINED (QABOOS REMARKED TO CSON IN A DIFFERENT BUT NOT UNRELATED CONTEXT A COUPLE OF DAYS AGO THAT ONE HAD TO TAKE RISKS AND HE FOUND IT RATHER EXCITING TO DO SO EXCLAMATION MARK). THE AFFAIR REINFORCES THE DOUBTS ABOUT THE SULTAN'S JUDGMENT EXPRESSED IN MY DESPATCH OF 5 JULY. I THEREFORE ENDORSE MR TUNNELL'S COMMENT IN PARA 4 OF TUR THAT WE HAVE SOME HARD THINKING TO DO ON HOW TO HANDLE THE REGIME.

11. WE MAY ALSO NEED TO RECONSIDER THE POSITION OF SERVICE COMMANDERS IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES. IF THE OPERATION HAD GONE AHEAD WITH THE CONSEQUENCES WE ENVISAGED, BENNETT'S SILENCE WOULD HAVE LOST US TWO VALUABLE DAYS IN WHICH TO REACT (I.E. BETWEEN THE TIME BENNETT KNEW WHAT WAS AFOOT ON 25 SEPTEMBER AND THE TIME ZAWAMI SPOKE TO TUNNELL ON 27 SEPTEMBER).

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