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From the Private Secretary

9 October 1980

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Message from President Carter

I enclose the text of a message to the Prime Minister from President Carter about the situation in the Middle East. This will clearly require a relatively early response. We should perhaps aim to reply by the middle of next week.

I am sending copies of this letter and its enclosure to Brian Norbury (Ministry of Defence) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. O'D. ALEXANDER

Paul Lever, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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FM PRESIDENT CARTER
TO PRIME MINISTER THATCHER
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DEAR MARGARET:

IN ADDITION TO THE EVOLUTION OF EVENTS IN POLAND, ABOUT WHICH I COMMUNICATED TO YOU OCTOBER 7, DURING THESE DAYS WE SHARE A COMMON CONCERN OVER THE SITUATION IN THE PERSIAN GULF AREA, AND I WISH TO KEEP IN CLOSE TOUCH AND TO BE SURE THAT YOU ARE ADVISED OF OUR VIEWS AND ACTIONS.

IN MY VIEW THERE ARE FOUR OBJECTIVES WHICH WE SHOULD BE PURSUING. FIRST, WE SHOULD BE DOING WHAT WE CAN TO BRING THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR TO AN EARLY CONCLUSION AND TO BEGIN NEGOTIATIONS TOWARD A FAIR AND LASTING SOLUTION. ITS CONTINUATION SERVES NO ONE'S INTEREST.

SECOND, WE SHOULD BE WORKING TO DISCOURAGE ANY EXPANSION OR ESCALATION OF THE CONFLICT, APPROACHING THIS FROM OUR OWN POSITION OF STRICT IMPARTIALITY TOWARDS THE COMBATANTS.

THIRD, WE SHOULD BE MAKING THE NECESSARY CONTINGENCY PREPARATIONS TO ENABLE US TO ENSURE UNIMPEDED MOVEMENT OF SHIPPING IN THE GULF AND THE STRAITS OF HORMUZ.

FOURTH, WE SHOULD BE WILLING, IN APPROPRIATE CASES, TO RESPOND TO REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE FROM THOSE NON-BELLIGERENT FRIENDS IN THE AREA WHO MAY FEEL THREATENED BY THE CURRENT SITUATION.

I REMAIN DEEPLY CONCERNED THAT THE WAR IS CONTINUING. IN MY CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT ZIA OF PAKISTAN ON FRIDAY, I ENCOURAGED HIM TO CONTINUE THE TASK WITH WHICH HE HAS BEEN CHARGED BY THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE. WE SHOULD KEEP THE MATTER BEFORE THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL. AS WE FACE THE PROSPECT OF A PROTRACTED CONFLICT OF ATTRITION WITH AN OCCASIONAL FLARE-UP, WE SHOULD NOT RELAX OUR DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO FIND A FORMULA WHICH WILL END THE CONFLICT. IF THE SITUATION SETTLES INTO AN UNRESOLVED STALEMATE OR RESULTS IN A MAJOR IMBALANCE, THE THREAT TO REGIONAL STABILITY AND TO OUR VITAL INTERESTS WILL PERSIST.

OUR VARIOUS EFFORTS HAVE, WE BELIEVE, REDUCED THE IMMEDIATE DANGER OF EXPANSION AND ESCALATION. NEVERTHELESS

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THE TEMPTATION EXISTS ON THE PART OF JORDAN AND THE GULF STATES TO SHOW THEIR SOLIDARITY WITH IRAQ. WE BELIEVE THAT CONSPICUOUS ACTS OF SUPPORT FOR IRAQ COULD INCREASE THE RISK PARTICULARLY TO THE GULF STATES AND INCREASE THE POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER INTERRUPTION OF VITAL OIL SUPPLIES. YOUR OWN RECENT EFFORTS WITH THE OMANIS WERE MOST IMPORTANT. I HOPE THAT YOU AGREE WITH ME THAT WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO USE OUR INFLUENCE TO DISCOURAGE ESCALATION.

ON THE QUESTION OF THE UNIMPEDED MOVEMENT OF SHIPPING, LET ME THANK YOU FOR YOUR RAPID RESPONSE TO MY MESSAGE OF LAST WEEK. NOW THAT CONTACTS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED AND OUR THOUGHTS ON THE BASIC FRAMEWORK FOR A NAVAL COORDINATION EFFORT HAVE BEEN CONVEYED TO YOUR GOVERNMENT AND OTHER ALLIES, WE ARE INTRODUCING FOR CONSIDERATION A CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS BY OUR NAVIES SHOULD THE SITUATION REQUIRE IT.

WITH SOME 15 MILLION BARRELS OF OIL PER DAY PASSING THROUGH THOSE WATERS, WE MUST PRESS AHEAD WITH THIS PLANNING. AND ALTHOUGH THE ISSUE OF WAR INSURANCE HAS BECOME LESS ACUTE, WE WOULD ALSO WELCOME AN EXCHANGE WITH YOU ON THIS MATTER.

WITH RESPECT TO THE SECURITY OF NON-BELLIGERENTS, THE SAUDIS HAVE COME TO US WITH THEIR CONCERNS THAT EXPANSION OF THE WAR COULD LEAD TO AIR ATTACKS ON OIL FACILITIES IN THE KINGDOM. WE ARE, ACCORDINGLY, TAKING STEPS TO BOLSTER SAUDI AIR DEFENSE.

WE ARE SENDING TO SAUDI ARABIA U.S. AIRBORNE WARNING AND CONTROL AIRCRAFT, AND COMMAND, CONTROL AND COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT AS WELL AS GROUND-BASED AIR DEFENSE RADAR. THESE AIRCRAFT AND RADAR WILL SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE SAUDI SELF DEFENSE CAPABILITY BY PROVIDING EARLY WARNING. WE ARE CONSULTING FURTHER WITH SAUDI ARABIA ON WHAT ELSE THEY MIGHT NEED TO PROTECT SAUDI OIL FACILITIES FROM AIR ATTACK.

I HAVE TAKEN THESE STEPS IN RECOGNITION OF THE GREAT STAKE THE WEST HAS IN THE CONTINUED NORMAL FLOW OF SAUDI OIL= TO GIVE TANGIBLE EVIDENCE TO THE SAUDI MONARCHY THAT ITS FRIENDS WILL STAND BY IT IN ITS HOUR OF STRONGLY FELT NATIONAL NEED= AND TO AVOID FURTHER INSTABILITY IN THE REGION WHICH THE SOVIETS COULD EXPLOIT.

DEFENSIVE HELP OF THIS KIND TO OUR NON-BELLIGERENT FRIENDS DOES NOT REPRESENT A DEPARTURE FROM THE BASIC POSTURE OF NEUTRALITY AND NON-INVOLVEMENT IN THIS CONFLICT WHICH IT SEEMS IN OUR INTEREST TO PURSUE. GIVEN THE LONG-TERM INTERESTS WE ALL HAVE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE GULF, IT SEEMS TO ME THIS IS CLEARLY OUR WISEST POLICY.

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