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From the Principal Private Secretary

10 October 1980

Iran/Iraq: Military Aid to the Gulf States

The Prime Minister met the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary in the Grand Hotel at Brighton this afternoon to consider what response should be given to the approach which we had had from the UAE seeking from us offers of support and assurances of military protection in the context of the Iran/Iraq conflict. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that in deciding what answer to give to the Gulf Rulers who had asked for help we should bear in mind that the French had already made it clear that they were ready to provide military support for the Gulf States. The UAE claimed that they would prefer to look to the United Kingdom, as old friends, for assistance. If our response was negative, our relations with them would suffer and our trade with them was likely to be damaged. If, on the other hand, France was more forthcoming, she would probably gain from our loss. Nonetheless, it would not be wise to give the UAE a blanket assurance of help, for this could lead us into an open-ended military commitment which we might regret. Rather, our response should be to tell them that we would like to consult with them, as the terms of our Treaty of Friendship with them required us to do in times of crisis and need. The purpose of these consultations would be to establish what facilities the UAE already had and what military help they required so that we could assess what we might be able to do.

The Defence Secretary said that he was very anxious to avoid an open-ended commitment which might suck in more and more British troops. The fact was that we could not provide more than a fairly limited amount of military assistance.

The Prime Minister said that they were agreed that we should respond positively to the approaches which the Gulf States had made to us. But we should not go further at this stage than the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary had proposed. Lord Carrington, in consultation with Mr. Pym, should arrange for the UAE to be told that we were ready to send someone out to the Gulf to assess what help they needed so that we had a basis for contingency planning. We should offer consultations only to those States that had approached us for support, and we should seek to keep our response confidential. The

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Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should consider further the question of telling our quadripartite partners what we had decided to do.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Brian Norbury (Ministry of Defence).

G. A. WHITMORE

G.G.H. Walden, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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