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cc Mr. Jackling

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MR. COLES

Prime Minister.

IRAN/IRAQ

One of the many troubles in dealing with Arabs is that they are never satisfied. Having expressed their pleasure at our reception of the Arab League Delegation and the subsequent passage on the Middle East in the Brussels communique, they are now bringing pressure to bear on us to take an initiative in the Security Council on the Iran/Iraq war. Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait are leading the field: the Iraqis have joined in, and I feel that it is only a matter of time before the Saudis and others enter the act - the Foreign Secretary's forthcoming visit to the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia will provide the opportunity.

It is ironical that it was the Arabs, led by Iraq, who blocked the Security Council from meeting for several days following the Iraqi invasion of Iran in September 1980. Now that Iraq is feeling the weight of military pressure, the Arabs have had a change of heart about the Council - provided that someone else takes the initiative.

Admittedly, the Gulf Arabs have every reason to feel apprehensive. First, they face the reality of having to shore up Iraq with money in order to enable her to continue to fight the war. Secondly, they face the spectre of an Iraqi defeat leading to the establishment in Baghdad of an Iraqi Shi'a regime. This would cause major convulsions all down the Gulf.

Obviously, it would be in our interests for the war to end with neither side having defeated the other. The trouble is that there is absolutely nothing that we or anyone else can do to influence Iran. They know that they are in no danger of defeat and will carry on the war for as long as it suits them. They are impervious to outside pressure.

Hence, if we were to take an initiative, it would be to please the Arabs, not in any hope of achieving results. Against this background, I am against our exposing ourselves too much. The French may well do so since they have come out more or less openly on the Iraqi side. If they or others in the Security Council decided to take an initiative, we could probably go along, provided that the wording of

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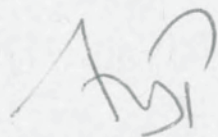
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any resolution was right. But we still have important interests in Iran and we should not lose sight of the fact that any initiative in the Security Council will be seen by the Iranians as a hostile act. Choosing sides between Arabs and Persians, traditionally deadly enemies, has been a tricky business for centuries.

My advice, therefore, is that we should continue to avoid making this choice. We should keep a reasonably low profile, while maintaining an attitude of friendly concern in our talks with the Arabs. Not very heroic perhaps, but the best course for British interests.

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A.D. PARSONS  
30 March 1983

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