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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

12 July 1984

The Prime Minister's Message to Sultan Qaboos of Oman

Thank you for your letter of 11 July enclosing a revised text of the Prime Minister's message to Sultan Qaboos.

The Prime Minister agrees the additions made to the draft. She has, however, asked for some further changes to be made. I have thus deleted paragraph 2, which is really only padding; also the passage on the risk that deployment of British or other non-Arab forces could be regarded by the Iranians as a provocation, since this sits rather uneasily with our agreement to deploy a Nimrod.

I enclose a retyped version of the message which should now be despatched and delivered as soon as possible.

Charles Powell

Len Appleyard, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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PRIME MINISTER'S  
PERSONAL MESSAGE  
SERIAL No. *T123/84*

MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO SULTAN QABOOS OF OMAN

Your Majesty,

Thank you for letting me have your views on the present state of the Gulf War in your conversation with our Ambassador on 27 June. He has subsequently passed on a request from your Government that in the light of the present situation the United Kingdom should consider temporarily deploying an airborne early warning aircraft to Oman. My colleagues have subsequently been able to discuss these issues both with General Creasey and with Mr. Yousef al-Alawi. I should like, if I may, to cover both your messages in this reply.

In the message passed to British officials by Major General Ali Majid al Ma'amari, you asked us to try to persuade Shaikh Zaid not to accept Saudi Arabia's offer to position fighter aircraft in the United Arab Emirates. In the subsequent message passed to the Ambassador by General Creasey you expressed concern at possible American pressure on Saudi Arabia to involve Oman more actively in preparing to counter Iranian incursions. You also suggested that it would be to Oman's advantage to demonstrate independence of American assistance through the availability if needed of help from elsewhere.

I should like to assure you that I have studied both messages very carefully and sympathetically. My own conclusion is that stationing Saudi aircraft in the United Arab Emirates is more likely to diminish than to increase the threat of attack on the Emirates or on Oman. Since the shooting down of an Iranian F4 by the Royal Saudi Air Force on 5 June, Iranian aircraft appeared, at least for a while, to be more circumspect in their movements. Most of the attacks which have been made on ships since then, including one on a British ship (about which we have made a strong protest to the Iranians), took place further out in the Gulf than earlier Iranian attacks in an area where there was less chance of interception by the Saudis. To extend Saudi air cover to the Emirates would surely help to put the Iranians still more on the

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defensive. We have also noted that the tone of Iranian public statements in recent weeks has been more restrained, and that they have declared themselves willing to stop all attacks on shipping provided that Iraq exercises similar restraint.

I can see that it could be argued that if the UAE's air defences were strengthened, the Iranians might decide to concentrate their attacks on Oman. But surely against this the Iranians would have to calculate that gratuitously to attack a country like Oman, which has been neutral in the conflict, would rouse opinion in the Gulf and in the world at large against them.

The Nimrod early warning aircraft to which you referred will not in fact enter service with the RAF for some considerable time. But in response to your request I want us to do everything we can to help at this time. We have therefore agreed with General Creasey to deploy to Oman next week one aircraft of the maritime reconnaissance version of the Nimrod for joint exercises lasting one week.

I found your views on the possible motivation of the various participants in this question profoundly interesting. We ourselves have had extensive contact with American officials, both diplomatic and military, and have gained the clear impression from them that United States policy is exactly as Vice-President Bush has described it to you. That is to say, they wish to ensure that the Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, have the means to defend themselves so that the need for any direct US involvement is reduced. They are also being careful to avoid any provocative action of their own in the Gulf area. Recent inaccurate press reports about the movements of American warships stationed at Bahrain have caused the Americans as much concern as they have caused us. While no country can ever answer unreservedly for the policies and attitudes of another, I do not believe our confidence in American motives and intentions is misplaced.

As regards the other members of the Gulf Security Council, I understand and respect your concern that closer military cooperation

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with them should not lead to Omani involvement in the conflict. In general, however, I welcome progress by the members of the Council towards greater cooperation in their own defence, since this again should reduce the risk of external military involvement in the Gulf and hence the danger of escalation. I understand that the meeting of the GCC Foreign Ministers on 12/14 June made some useful progress towards cooperation between the air defence systems of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain. In my view, the arguments in favour of greater cooperation at this difficult time, in the common interest, are very persuasive. I hope that my discussions on this subject with His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Zaid al-Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, when he visits London next week, will help to substantiate the point.

With my best wishes and greetings for the Eid.

Margaret Thatcher.