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FM BDS WASHINGTON
TO FLASH MODUK RE

TELNO U/N

OF 140044Z AUGUST 90

AND TO FLASH FCO LONDON

SECRET

Prime Minister

I think we need
to react x a bit

Cautiously

COB

Yes

SIC EAD/ZMC/ZOK

FOR DG MKTG, PS/HDES, DG SAP, FROM: HDES

SUBJECT: ARMS SALES TO SAUDI ARABIA.

I VISITED HRH PRINCE BANDAR AT THE SAUDI EMBASSY, WASHINGTON EARLIER TODAY. BANDAR WAS IN EXCELLENT FORM AND HIGHLY COMPLIMENTARY AND APPRECIATIVE OF THE PRIME MINISTERS CENTRAL ROLE IN PRESIDENT BUSH'S DECISION MAKING PROCESS IN ASPEN AND IN WASHINGTON, AND SUBSEQUENTLY IN MUSTERING SUPPORT. BANDAR OPENED WITH THE ISSUE OF TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT WHICH IS BEING ADDRESSED ELSEWHERE. AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED IRAQ INCURSION AND ANNEXATION OF KUWAIT HAS HAD A PROFOUND EFFECT ON SAUDI DEFENCE THINKING. BANDAR ENVISAGES THE NEED TO BUILD UP DEFENCE FORCES TO 600,000 (HALF RESERVISTS) WITH THE EQUIPMENT, CONSTRUCTION, TRAINING AND SUPPORT THAT THAT IMPLIES. WE CANNOT EXPECT ALWAYS TO LOOK TO OUR FRIENDS TIMES LIKE THESE, HE SAID. THE PROCUREMENT BEING CONTEMPLATED INCLUDES 2000 TANKS, 500-600 HELICOPTERS, FRIGATES AND A MUCH ENHANCED AIR STRIKE CAPABILITY. A FIXED PROPORTION OF SAUDI INCOME WOULD NEED TO BE ALLOCATED FOR THAT PURPOSE. THE IMPORTANCE OF GROUND FORCES IN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES HAD BEEN POINTEDLY RE-AFFIRMED. CLEARLY, TIME AND REFLECTION WILL TEMPER SAUDI ASPIRATIONS, HOWEVER EVEN PARTIAL REALISATION WILL CARRY SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS FOR US. THE SAUDIS WOULD WELCOME (QUOTE) A BATTALION OF BRITISH GROUND AND SPECIAL FORCES AND TO ASSIST WITH BEHIND THE LINE ACTIVITIES (UNQUOTE). BRITISH CAPABILITY HERE IS SEEN TO BE THE BEST. BANDAR IS RESPONSIBLE FOR BRINGING TWO MILLION, REPEAT TWO MILLION NBC SUITS FROM THE UK, US WHEREVER THEY CAN BE FOUND. THE BRITISH HAVE THE BEST, HE SAID (EXCLAM). THEY ARE NEEDED TO INSTIL CONFIDENCE IN THE CIVIL POPULATION. I WOULD BE GRATEFUL IF DG MKTG COULD FOLLOW UP THIS LAST POINT AND ALSO ENSURE THAT THIS SIGNAL IS APPROPRIATELY COPIES. BANDAR WAS ABOUT TO GIVE BRITISH AND EUROPEAN INTERVIEWS WHEN I LEFT AND INVITED ME BACK TO WASHINGTON BEFORE I RETURN TO THE UK THOUGH IT LOOKS DIFFICULT

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HD/NENAD
HD/NAD
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MR W D REEVES CABINET OFFICE
MR D J GOWAN CABINET OFFICE
MR BARRASS, CABINET OFFICE
(BY TUBE H29)
PS/NUMBER 10 DOWNING ST
SIR P CRADOCK
(NO 10 DOWNING ST)
CABINET OFFICE DIO
(BY TUBE H29)
SIR ROBIN BUTLER, CAB OFFICE
AUS (C) MODUK
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10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

15 August 1990

The Prime Minister has seen the unnumbered telegram of 14 August from BDS Washington on arms sales to Saudi Arabia. She has noted that the Saudis would welcome "a battalion of British ground and special forces and to assist with behind the lines activities". She has commented that we need to treat that rather cautiously.

DOMINIC MORRIS

Miss Jane Binstead,
Ministry of Defence.

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