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From the Private Secretary

21 August 1990

SUBJECT CLUSTER

Dear Simon,

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE
OMANI MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Prime Minister had a meeting this afternoon with Yusuf Alawi, the Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. He was accompanied by the Omani Ambassador.

Yusuf Alawi conveyed the Sultan's greetings and his appreciation of the strong stand taken by the Prime Minister on the Gulf crisis. The Prime Minister said we, for our part, very much appreciated the swift and positive response we had had from the Sultan on the question of stationing forces in Oman.

Yusuf Alawi continued that the Sultan had asked him to brief the Prime Minister on the visit which he (Alawi) had paid to Tehran the previous week, during which he had seen both President Rafsanjani and Foreign Minister Velayati. Both had confirmed that Iran supported and would implement the Security Council resolution imposing sanctions on Iraq. They were not over-impressed with Saddam Hussain's offer to accept Iran's terms for settling the dispute between the two countries. The most interesting development was Rafsanjani's determination to improve relations between Iran and the West. On this, Rafsanjani commented that the United States and Britain invariably raised the problem of hostages in Lebanon. He was personally committed to do what he could to secure their release. Indeed he had been asked to take a step in that direction as a mark of good faith and had done so. He had expected the United States to take some steps in return, by getting Israel to release Hizbollah prisoners held in South Lebanon. But nothing had happened. Rafsanjani had emphasised that he must have something to show for the release of American and British hostages. Yusuf Alawi said that he had told Rafsanjani frankly that the Israelis would insist on the return of the Israeli officer held prisoner in Lebanon. Rafsanjani had replied that he would be ready to do everything possible to achieve this. He believed that the time had come for the whole hostage matter to be settled, and removed as an obstacle to better relations between Iran and the West.

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Yusuf Alawi continued that Rafsanjani had also talked about his internal position, dismissing reports that he had to defer to left-wing extremists. He claimed to have the unfettered ability to take decisions. Rafsanjani had also spoken of Iran's willingness to provide military assistance to the smaller Gulf states: and to start mobilising Kurdish and Shia opposition to Saddam Hussain. He was co-ordinating closely on this last point with Syria and Turkey.

Yusuf Alawi said that the Sultan concluded from these exchanges that Rafsanjani was genuine in his wish to overcome the past and take a step forward in relations with the West. He hoped that we would feel able to respond. He was not being starry-eyed: he recognised the need to maintain a balance of power in the region between Iraq and Iran. But at the moment that pointed strongly towards strengthening ties with Iran. The Sultan would like to know whether Oman could be of any assistance to us over this.

The Prime Minister said she was very grateful for this account. The Sultan had always stressed the importance of keeping open channels to Iran. We had been trying to get back on a better footing with Iran even before the latest crisis over Kuwait, but had made disappointingly little progress. The Salman Rushdie affair did not make it any easier. But we were anxious to restore contacts and move towards renewing relations. Anything which Oman could do to help would be welcome. Yusuf Alawi said that Velayati had taken the line that, following the helpful statements by the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary on the Salman Rushdie affair, all that remained was to agree on restoration of diplomatic relations. The Prime Minister said that it was not quite so simple: there was the question of the hostages in Lebanon, the continuing threat to Rushdie's life, and the imprisonment of Roger Cooper. Yusuf Alawi said he was under the impression that the problem over Cooper had already been resolved: that was certainly the impression given by the Iranians. He thought it was better not to raise the Salman Rushdie affair: it would die away. A fatwa was only advisory. He had explained the position over hostages: if we were able to persuade the Israelis to co-operate in securing the release of prisoners held in South Lebanon, he believed the release of Western hostages could be achieved. The Prime Minister suggested that Yusuf Alawi go over the ground in greater detail with the Foreign Secretary the following day. But he could assure Rafsanjani of her interest in seeing contacts restored.

The Prime Minister continued that she was encouraged that Rafsanjani had said that Iran would uphold sanctions. It was vital that they should be implemented effectively. There was some evidence that other Arab countries were circumventing or intending to circumvent them. Saddam Hussain must not be allowed to get away with the invasion of Kuwait, and sanctions were the chosen instrument to prevent this. Yusuf Alawi said that the real aim must be to see Saddam Hussain removed from the scene altogether.

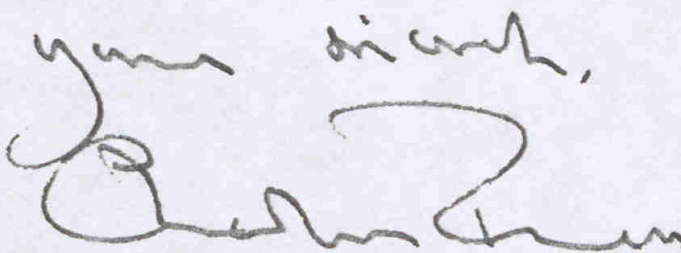
The Prime Minister said she had tried to convey to the Sultan her anxiety about the position taken by the Yemen. Yusuf Alawi said that the Yemen Foreign Minister had been in Salalah to see the Sultan yesterday. He had claimed that the Yemen supported sanctions and would not accept Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, but had wanted to leave themselves some margin of manoeuvre in order to be able to influence Iraq. The Sultan had made clear that they could not be on both sides of the fence.

Yusuf Alawi said that the Sultan was also worried about the possibility of subversion in some of the smaller Gulf states. The Prime Minister said that we were looking into the possibility of sending further military assistance to them.

Yusuf Alawi asked what the position would be if, against expectations, Saddam Hussain were to withdraw from Kuwait. The Prime Minister said there would have to be some sort of international force to protect Kuwait and prevent a repetition of the Iraq invasion, and perhaps guarantees for Kuwait and other Gulf states as well.

The Prime Minister referred to our disappointment over King Hussein's conduct during the present crisis. Yusuf Alawi said that the King had become increasingly unwilling to accept advice from anyone, including the Sultan. The Prime Minister said that, even so, we should not make it difficult for the King to return to the fold.

I am copying this letter to Jane Binstead (Ministry of Defence) and Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,


CHARLES POWELL

Simon Gass, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.