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OF 200721Z OCTOBER 90  
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SIC AAA/A2P/I9M

OUR TELECON HMA/GORE-BOOTH OF 18 OCTOBER: PROPOSED MEETING WITH  
KING FAHD: PRESENT SAUDI THINKING

SUMMARY

1. KING FAHD TO DISCUSS TIMING FACTORS WITH US AMBASSADOR AND MYSELF. ASSISTANT DEFENCE MINISTERS GIVES A RATIONALE FOR GROWING SAUDI IMPATIENCE. RISK OF DIMINISHING APPETITE FOR A FIGHT, AND CONCERN THAT TIME TURNING AGAINST ALLIANCE.

DETAIL

2. KING FAHD'S SECRETARY HAS NOW CONFIRMED THE KING WOULD LIKE TO SEE US AMBASSADOR AND MYSELF IN NEXT FEW DAYS TO GIVE US PRESENT THINKING OF HIMSELF AND HIS SENIOR BROTHERS ON OUTLOOK AND TIMING FACTORS. MOHAMED SULIMAN ALSO CONFIRMED THAT PRINCE SULTAN'S GROWING CONCERN AT EROSION EFFECT OF LETTING PRESENT MILITARY STAND OFF DRAG ON WAS SHARED BY KING FAHD (SEE ACCOUNT OF MY TALK ON 14 OCTOBER WITH SULTAN IN MY TELS NOS 1039 AND 1040). SULIMAN STRESSED THAT IT WAS NOT (NOT) YET SAUDI POLICY TO GO FOR AN ULTIMATUM OR SET A FIRM TIME LIMIT BEFORE ADOPTION OF MILITARY OPTION. BUT THESE IDEAS WERE BEING EXPLORED. I AGREED IT WAS IMPORTANT WE HAD A CLEAR IDEA OF THE KING'S OWN THINKING. THIS WOULD BE PARTICULARLY HELPFUL IN PREPARING FOR THE VISIT THE DEFENCE SECRETARY MIGHT MAKE AT SULTAN'S INVITATION IN 3 WEEKS TIME.

3. WE KNOW FROM SULTAN THAT FOR THE SAUDI LEADERSHIP THE FUSE IS SHORTENING. THIS WAS CONFIRMED BY PRINCE FAHD ABUDLLAH (ASSISTANT DEFENCE MINISTER) WHO DINED WITH HDES AND MYSELF IN JEDDA ON 17 OCTOBER. FAHD ABDULLAH, ONE OF THE MORE THOUGHTFUL OF THOSE HANDLING MILITARY POLICY, STRESSED THE FOLLOWING



CONSIDERATIONS AS MILITATING AGAINST WAITING MORE THAN A FEW WEEKS LONGER:

A) US AND BRITISH TROOPS COULD NOT BE KEPT KEYED UP INDEFINITELY, ESPECIALLY IN THE HARD SAUDI ENVIRONMENT (HE DISCOUNTED THE FRENCH CONTRIBUTION AS NON PLAYERS):

B) THE SAME WENT FOR SAUDI FORCES IN THE FRONT LINE, AND THE OTHER ARAB TROOPS. FAHD MADE THE POINT THAT IT WOULD BE ESSENTIAL, AT LEAST PRESENTATIONALLY, FOR SAUDI, KUWAITI AND OTHER ISLAMIC FORCES TO BE SEEN IN THE VANGUARD OF ANY LAND FORCES ENGAGEMENT, DESPITE THE LOSSES THEY MIGHT TAKE. THAT WAS WHY THE SAUDIS ETC NOW FORMED THE INFANTRY SCREEN IN FRONT OF THE AMERICANS (AND OURSELVES) IN THE NE BORDER SECTION. IT SHOULD NOT BE DIFFICULT TO ENGINEER OR PROVOKE A CASUS BELLI.

C) SADDAM HAD TO BE TOPPLED, OR AT LEAST NEUTRALISED AND HIS ARSENAL DISMANTLED. UNILATERAL WITHDRAWAL FOLLOWED BY NEGOTIATIONS COULD PLAY TO HIS ADVANTAGE AS THE ARAB AND INTERNATIONAL FRONT UNWOUND. FAHD ARGUED IT WOULD ALSO PRESENT MAJOR PROBLEMS FOR PROTECTING KUWAIT. MILITARY ACTION WAS MOST LIKELY TO ENSURE THE KNOCK WHICH WOULD ACHIEVE SADDAM'S OVERTHROW. SADDAM MIGHT NOW TRY PARTIAL WITHDRAWAL, WHICH WOULD ALSO ERODE INTERNATIONAL RESOLVE.

D) THE CONFLICT WOULD BE BRIEF. LOW MORALE AMONG IRAQI TROOPS, ESPECIALLY IN KUWAIT: VULNERABILITY TO AIR ATTACK INSIDE IRAQ (WHICH HE SAW AS ESSENTIAL) ON LINES OF COMMUNICATION AND SUPPLY POINTS: AND RELUCTANCE TO COMMIT THE RGC BACK INTO KUWAIT WOULD COMBINE TO PRODUCE A QUICK KILL. (FAHD ABDULLAH SOUNDED OVER SANGUINE HERE, AS I SUSPECT THE KING AND SULTAN MAY BE)

E) IT WAS NO LONGER SEEN AS NECESSARY TO HAVE FORMAL UNSC AUTHORITY FOR AN OFFENSIVE (IE NO BLUE FLAG). IT SHOULD AT LEAST BE POSSIBLE TO OBTAIN ACQUIESCENCE AMONG ALL PERMANENT MEMBERS, (THIS MARKS A SHIFT FROM THE PREFERENCE FOR ARTICLE 42 ACTION WHICH FAHD ABDULLAH PUT TO ME 6 WEEKS AGO, AND WHICH WE HAVE ALSO HEARD FROM KING FAHD).

F) SANCTIONS WERE NOT GOING TO PRODUCE RESULTS SOON ENOUGH TO OFFSET THE PRESSURES ON ALLIED RESOLVE.

G) COMMITMENT WITHIN THE ARAB COMMUNITY COULD BE INCREASINGLY SAPPED BY EVENTS ON PALESTINIAN FRONT. FAHD ABDULLAH DID NOT



HOWEVER APPEAR TO SEE THIS AS A PROBLEM FOR SAUDI MORALE (THOUGH OTHERS HERE DO, BY PROVOKING ANTIPATHY TOWARDS THE PRESENCE OF US FORCES HERE, AND BY EXTENSION TO OURSELVES AND OTHER NON-MUSLIMS). INDEED HE WENT SO FAR AS TO INDICATE THAT ISRAELI INTERVENTION COULD EVEN BE AN ASSET TO SAUDI ARABIA: ISRAELI CONTROL OF NORTHERN JORDAN, WITH THE SOUTHERN TRIBES THROWING IN THEIR LOT WITH SAUDI ARABIA, COULD BE PREFERABLE TO A PALESTINIAN JORDAN OF WHICH KING HUSSEIN HAD NOW LOST CONTROL (PRINCE TURKI AL FAISAL HAS ALSO COME OUT WITH THIS LINE: SUPERFICIAL YET REFLECTING GROWING FRUSTRATION OVER KING HUSSEIN).

4. THESE ARGUMENTS, SHARED NO DOUBT BY THE LEADING AL SAUD, HELP TO EXPLAIN THE FRESH SENSE OF IMPATIENCE HERE. I HAVE A FEELING THAT ON THIS ISSUE THE AL SAUD AND THEIR CLOSE ADVISERS MAY NOT BE FULLY IN STEP WITH WIDER PUBLIC SENTIMENT, WHERE WE ARE DETECTING A LOSS OF STOMACH FOR A FIGHT, WITH SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT THE COSTS AND TALK OF NEGOTIATION. BUT PERHAPS THE LEADERSHIP SENSE THIS MOOD TOO, WHICH ADDS TO THEIR SENSE OF URGENCY.

5. THE QUESTION OF A TIME LIMIT, WHETHER EXPLICIT OR, BETTER, PRIVATELY AGREED, IS NOW IN THE FRONT OF SAUDI THINKING. IN THEIR IMPATIENCE UNSC ASPECTS MAY BE STARTING TO BE DISCOUNTED. IT WILL BE IMPORTANT FOR US TO MOVE IN CONCERT WITH THE AMERICANS IN THESE NEXT STAGES, AND FOR THE KING TO PERCEIVE THIS. WE MUST ALSO KEEP THE SAUDIS IN THE PICTURE OVER OUR NEXT SECURITY COUNCIL ACTIONS. WHILE FAHD ABDULLAH DID NOT SUGGEST ANY SPECIFIC TIME LIMITS, SOME OF HIS ARGUMENTS DO HAVE A LOCAL VALIDITY.

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