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FM JEDDA 020830Z JAN

TO PRIORITY FCO TELNO 5 OF 2 JAN
INFO ROUTINE WASHINGTON MOSCOW UKDEL NATO UKMIS NEWYORK UKREP
BRUSSELS KUWAIT DOHA BAHRAIN ABU DHABI DUBAI MUSCAT TEL AVIV
AMMAN ISLAMABAD ANKARA CAIRO DEPT OF ENERGY AND MODUK.

SAVING SANAA AND ADEN (ACTIONED JEDDA)

MIPT

SAUDI ARABIA FOREIGN POLICY.

1. YOU WILL FIND THAT THE SAUDIS AGREE WITH WESTERN VIEWS ON THE DANGER POSED BY THE SOVIET INTERVENTION IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE CHAOS IN IRAN; AND ON THE NEED FOR THE WEST, AND PARTICULARLY THE US, TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.
2. WHAT THAT SOMETHING IS THEY ARE LIKELY TO FIND IT MORE DIFFICULT TO SAY. THEY WILL WANT THE ASSURANCES OF SUPPORT, AND SPECIFICALLY MILITARY SUPPORT. BUT THEIR FEAR OF FALLING OUT WITH THE RADICAL ARAB REGIMES WILL MAKE THEM RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT BASES OR ANY PRESENCE OF FOREIGN MILITARY FORCES IN THE KINGDOM. THEY MAY WELL BE MORE ENTHUSIASTIC THATN THEY HAVE BEEN ON THE ARRANGEMENTS CONTEMPLATED BY THE AMERICANS IN SOMALIA, KENYA AND EVEN OMAN. BUT THEY WILL BE UNWILLING TO SAY SO PUBLICALLY.
3. THEY WILL POINT OUT THAT THE SOVIET ACTION IN AFGHANISTAN IS AN OPPORTUNITY AS WELL AS A DANGER. THEY WILL ARGUE THAT EVEN LEFT-WING REGIMES LIKE SYRIA AND IRAQ WILL HAVE BEEN MADE DEEPLY UNEASY BY IT; AND THAT THEIR DOUBTS COULD BE EXPLOITED IF THEY WERE OFFERRED SOMETHING BY THE WEST IN THE AREA WHICH CONCERNS THEM MOST: PALESTINE. SUCH COUNTRIES NEED FOR SUPPORT OVER PALESTINE IS THE CHIEF REASON WHY THEY TURN TO THE SOVIET BLOC, NOT ANY INNATE SYMPATHY WITH SOVIET POLICIES OR IDEOLOGY. AT THE SAME TIME THE SAUDIS WILL SUGGEST THAT THEY THEMSELVES WOULD FIND IT EASIER TO COOPERATE WITH WESTERN COUNTER-MOVES IF THEY COULD DEMONSTRATE THAT THEY WERE GETTING SOMETHING IN RETURN. RECOGNISING THAT IT IS DIFFICULT FOR PRESIDENT CARTER TO GIVE THEM ANYTHING SIGNIFICANT IN AN ELECTION YEAR, THEY WILL EMPHASISE THAT IT IS FOR EUROPE TO SHOULDER THAT PARTICULAR BURDEN.

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4. THEY WILL ASK FOR MORE UNDERSTANDING BY THE WEST, AND BY BRITAIN IN PARTICULAR, OF SAUDI POLICIES ON OIL PRICES AND PRODUCTION WHICH THEY CONSIDER (RIGHTLY, IN MY VIEW) TO BE HELPFUL TO THE WEST AND TO THE WORLD ECONOMY. IF ASSURED OF HMG'S SATISFACTION WITH THOSE POLICIES, THEY MAY WELL ARGUE THAT THAT SATISFACTION IS NOT REFLECTED IN THE BBC AND THE BRITISH PRESS AND ASK OUR BE USED TO ARRANGE A BETTER IMAGE FOR SAUDI ARABIA. IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO DISMISS THIS ARGUMENT WITH THE USUAL PLEA THAT THE PRESS IS INDEPENDENT. RICH ARABS HAVE NOW JOINED THE CATEGORY OF MOTHERS-IN-LAW AND COUNCIL HOUSE TENENTS WITH COAL IN THE BATH. COULD WE OFFER TO HELP THEM WITH IMAGE BUILDING?

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SAVING TO SANAA AND ADEN (ACTIONED JEDDA)

SAUDI ARABIA INTERNAL

1. DESPITE PRINCE SULTAN'S STATEMENT TO ME ON DECEMBER 16 THAT THE PUNISHMENT OF THE MECCA DISSIDENTS WOULD PROBABLY BE CARRIED OUT 'WITHIN THE COMING WEEK' THERE HAS BEEN NO FURTHER WORD OF THE PUNISHMENT OR EVEN OF TRIALS. NOR HAS THERE BEEN ANY NEWS, PUBLIC OR PRIVATE, OF THE INVESTIGATION WHICH IS PRESUMABLY GOING ON. UNTIL THERE IS, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO REACH FIRM CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF THE AFFAIR OR ABOUT THE GOVERNEMENT'S LIKELY REACTIONS. BUT IN VIEW OF THE POSSIBLE CHANGE IN YOUR TRAVEL PLANS YOU MAY WISH TO HAVE SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS.

2. IT SEEMS PRETTY CLEAR THAT:-

A. THE LEADERS OF THE ATTACK WERE RELIGIOUS FANATICS OF THE FUNDAMENTALIST SCHOOL, EAGER TO HALT THE DECLINE OF ISLAMIC OBSERVANCE AND THE PROCESS (HOWEVER SLOW IT MAY SEEM TO US) OF SOCIAL CHANGE. THEIR CHIEF TARGETS WERE SUCH THINGS AS CORRUPTION DRINKING, GAMBLING, TELEVISION AND THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN:

B. THESE ARE NOT POLITICAL AIMS IN THE WESTERN SENSE. BUT THE LINE BETWEEN POLITICS AND RELIGION IS BLURRED. THE DISSIDENTS' PROGRAMME, IF THEY HAD BEEN SUCCESSFUL, WOULD HAVE HAD IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL POLICY IN THE FIELDS, FOR EXAMPLE, OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS, EDUCATION AND PERHAPS FOREIGN RELATIONS, AND WOULD HAVE PROBABLY INVOLVED THE REDUCTION OR EVEN THE ABOLITION OF THE ROYAL FAMILY'S POWERS:

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C. THE ATTACK NEVER CAME NEAR SUCCESS. IT WAS MOUNTED BY A FEW HUNDRED MEN WITH NO ORGANISED SUPPORT ELSEWHERE IN THE KINGDOM. IT WAS IN FACT SUICIDAL:

D. NEVERTHELESS, THE SECURITY FORCES TOOK A FORTNIGHT TO FINISH IT OFF. EVEN IF WE MAKE ALL ALLOWANCES FOR THE SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, THEIR PERFORMANCE WAS VERY POOR INDEED:

E. THE LEADERS AND MOST OF THE RANK AND FILE WERE SAUDIS, WITH STRONG TRIBAL ELEMENTS. THERE WERE A FEW DOZEN FOREIGNERS (KUWAITIS, EGYPTIANS, YEMENIS, PAKISTANIS) SOME OF WHOM MAY HAVE COME FROM ORGANISATIONS ABROAD LIKE THE MOSLEM BROTHERHOOD OR THE EGYPTIAN 'TAKFIR WA HIJRA'. BUT THERE SEEMS NO ORGANISED SUBVERSION BY FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS.

F. THERE WAS NO LINK WITH KHOMEINI. THE DEMONSTRATIONS BY THE SHI'ITES OF THE EASTERN PROVINCE, WHOSE MOOD HAD BEEN MADE MORE MILITANT BY KHOMEINI'S SUCCESS, WERE NOT CONNECTED WITH THE MECCA AFFAIR. THEIR TIMING WAS THE RESULT OF THE COINCIDENCE OF THE SHI'ITE RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL.

3. THESE POINTS ARE ALL FAIRLY REASSURING. NOW THAT THE INITIAL SHOCK HAS WORN OFF, THERE IS LITTLE SIGN OF PUBLIC ANXIETY AND NO TENSION IN THE ATMOSPHERE. IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT IN A COUNTRY WHERE GOVERNMENT POLICY ON RELIGIOUS MATTERS IS SOMEWHAT TO THE RIGHT OF PUBLIC OPINION THERE IS SERIOUS DANGER FROM RELIGIOUS FANATICS (AND INDEED THE AFFAIR HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN WISE TO RESIST THE PRESSURE, MOSTLY FROM FOREIGNERS, TO RELAX THE RULES OF WAHABI PURITANISM). BUT THERE ARE SOME WORRYING FACTORS:-

A. THE SECURITY FORCES HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO BE DISORGANISED AND INCOMPETENT:

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B. PUBLIC DISORDER IS INFECTIOUS. BY MODERN STANDARDS SAUDI ARABIA HAS HAD A LONG PERIOD OF REMARKABLE STABILITY. SO THE MECCA AFFAIR IS IN A WAY A BREAKTHROUGH. WHERE ONE GROUP HAS SET A PRECEDENT OTHERS MAY THINK OF TRYING THEIR HAND. THERE IS UNDOUBTEDLY IN THE KINGDOM DISCONTENT OF A MORE ORTHODOX, PLITICAL KIND, SOME OF WHOSE TARGETS COINCIDE WITH THOSE OF THE RELIGIOUS FANATICS (CORRUPTION AND THE ROYAL FAMILY, FOR EXAMPLE):

C. IT IS BEING SAID QUITE COMMONLY THAT SOME OF THE DISSIDENTS' COMPLAINTS WOULD HAVE ATTRACTED SYMPATHY IF THEIR CASE HAD NOT BEEN RUINED BY THE HEINOUSNESS OF USING VIOLENCE IN THE HOLY PLACE. PRINCE FAHD IS REPORTED TO HAVE ADMITTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WERE HELPED BY THE DISSIDENTS' OWN FOLLY.

4. WHAT WILL THE GOVERNEMTN DO NOW? THIS IS A CONSERVATIVE REGIME, SLOW TO MAKE DECISIONS. I DO NOT EXPECT ANY DRAMATIC CHANGES. CONTROL OF THE SECURITY FORCES IS ALREADY IN THE HANDS OF SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY AND THAT IS UNLIKELY TO CHANGE. THERE ARE SIGNS THAT THERE WILL BE IMPROVED OPPORTUNITIES TO AIR GRIEVANCES. BUT IF THE GRIEVANCES ARE CONSIDERED NOT CAPABLE OR NOT DESERVING OF REMEDY, THEN THE AGGRIEVED WILL BE MORE CLOSELY WATCHED THAN IN THE PAST. NOTHING SUGGESTS THAT FOREIGN POLICY OR THE RAPID MARCH OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRIALISATION ARE TO BE MODIFIED (INDEED PRINCE FAHD HAS CATEGORICALLY STATED THE OPPOSITE - MYTELNO 718): AND RECENT DECISIONS OVER OIL PRICES AND PRODUCTION INDICATE THAT CONCESSIONS ARE NOT (NOT) BEING MADE TO THOSE WHOME THE OIL MINISTER, YAMANI, CALLED THE YOUNG TURKS.

5. YOUR VISIT WILL PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASK THE CROWN PRINCE (WHO IS STILL THE CHIEF POLICY MAKER) ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S ASSESSMENT OF THE NATURE, THE SIZE AND THE IMMINENCE OF THE THREAT TO STABILITY AND THEIR PLANS TO COMBAT IT.

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6. MED PLEASE CONSIDER WHETHER THIS SHOULD BE REPEATED TO TEHRAN.

7. PLEASE SEE MIFT.

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