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TELEGRAM NUMBER 373 OF 10 JULY

ANGLO-SAUDI RELATIONS

1. I AM CONCERNED THAT A HEAVY PROGRAMME OVER THE SUMMER COUPLED WITH THE ONSET OF RAMADAN ON 14 JULY, WILL MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR ME TO GO TO SAUDI ARABIA IF A VISIT APPEARS OPPORTUNE TO CLEAR UP THE PRESENT MISUNDERSTANDING AND RESTORE NORMAL RELATIONS. YOU SHOULD PASS THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE TO PRINCE SAUD FROM ME. YOU SHOULD MAKE IT CLEAR, ORALLY, THAT MY OFFER TO TRAVEL IS ON THE FIRM UNDERSTANDING THAT THE COOL PERIOD IN OUR RELATIONS WOULD END WITH MY VISIT, AND THAT NO FURTHER ACT OF ATONEMENT BY THE UK WOULD BE REQUIRED. THE FIRST SECRETARY COULD ALSO TELL PRINCE TURKI OF MY MESSAGE AND SUBJECT TO YOUR VIEWS, WE PROPOSE TO INFORM MUSTAFABBIN HALIM HERE.

2. MESSAGE BEGINS:

' YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS

YOU WILL BE AWARE FROM MY MESSAGE TO YOU IN APRIL, AND FROM MRS THATCHER'S LETTER TO HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE CROWN PRINCE, THAT HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT HAVE VIEWED WITH CONCERN AND REGRET THE DEPLORABLE EFFECT WHICH THE RECENT TELEVISION FILM HAS HAD ON RELATIONS BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. I HAVE STRESSED THE HIGH VALUE WE PLACE ON OUR RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA, AND OUR REGRET AT THIS INCIDENT IN THE SPEECH WHICH I MADE ON 22 MAY AT THE MIDDLE EAST ASSOCIATION WHICH I AM SURE YOUR CHARGE D'AFFAIRES WILL HAVE REPORTED TO YOU. IT IS MY STRONG WISH TO HEAL THIS RIFT IN OUR RELATIONS, WHICH IS DAMAGING TO THE INTERESTS OF BOTH OUR COUNTRIES AND WHICH WEAKENS THE FORCES OF STABILITY AT A TIME WHEN OUTSIDE THREATS TO THE INDEPENDENCE AND INTEGRITY OF ARAB COUNTRIES ARE PARTICULARLY SEVERE. I HAD CONSIDERED WHETHER A PERSONAL MEETING WITH YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS WOULD HELP TO RESOLVE OUR DIFFERENCES AND GIVE US THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMPARE VIEWS ON THE PROBLEMS WHICH CONFRONT US. I WOULD HOPE TO SEE YOU EITHER IN NEW YORK OR IN LONDON ON YOUR WAY TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUT

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YOU MAY FEEL THAT A MEETING IN SAUDI ARABIA AT AN EARLIER DATE WOULD BE HELPFUL, PARTICULARLY IF THIS GAVE ME AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEE HIS MAJESTY THE KING. IF THIS IS YOUR VIEW, AND THAT OF HIS MAJESTY AND HIS GOVERNMENT, I SHOULD BE VERY WILLING TO VISIT YOU TO SET THE SEAL ON A RECONCILIATION BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES AND TO RESTORE OUR RELATIONS TO THEIR PREVIOUS FRIENDLY STATE, WITH DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS CONDUCTED, ONCE AGAIN, AT THE LEVEL OF AMBASSADOR.

I KNOW THAT YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS WILL BE VERY BUSY AND I APPRECIATE THAT RAMADAN IS ABOUT TO BEGIN AND THAT THIS WILL BE FOLLOWED BY THE EID. FOR MY PART, I HAVE A BUSY SUMMER PROGRAMME WHICH WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A VISIT TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND TO THE COUNTRIES OF THE MAGHREB ACCOMPANYING HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN ON A STATE VISIT - BUT, IF YOU BELIEVE THIS WOULD BE A POSITIVE STEP, I HOPE THAT IT WILL BE POSSIBLE FOR YOUR OFFICE TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE TIMES FOR A MEETING WITH OUR CHARGE. MR GRAY HAS DETAILS OF MY TIMETABLE FOR THE COMING MONTHS, AND I HOPE THAT IT MAY BE POSSIBLE TO ARRANGE A MEETING.

PLEASE ACCEPT, YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS, THE ASSURANCES OF MY HIGHEST CONSIDERATION AND SINCERE GOOD WISHES.

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3. IF YOU ARE ASKED ABOUT DATES WHICH WOULD SUIT ME, YOU SHOULD SAY THAT I WOULD ENVISAGE A BRIEF VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA (24 OR 36 HOURS) BY RAF PLANE, THAT THE PERIOD 8-18 AUGUST (UNFORTUNATELY THE EID WILL RULE OUT SEVERAL OF THESE DATES) IS IN PRACTICE THE ONLY PERIOD IN WHICH I CAN FIT THE VISIT IN - UNLESS THE SAUDIS CAN CONTEMPLATE GETTING IT SET UP BETWEEN NOW AND 22 JULY WHICH, GIVEN THE ONSET OF RAMADAN AND THE NEED FOR A PROPER PREPARATION TO ENSURE THAT IT REALLY DOES MARK THE END OF THE AFFAIR, SEEMS HIGHLY UNLIKELY.

4. YOUR TEL NO 512 ARRIVED AFTER I HAD APPROVED THE ABOVE MESSAGE, BUT DOES NOT ALTER THE DECISION TO GO AHEAD WITH IT. A SEPARATE TELEGRAM COVERING YOUR POINTS WILL ISSUE SHORTLY.

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TELNO 525 OF 15 JUL

YRTELNO 373: ANGLO/SAUDI RELATIONS

SUMMARY

1. I DELIVERED THE MESSAGE AND ORAL GLOSS IN TUR TO SAUD PERSONALLY ON 14 JULY. HE WAS PLEASED WITH THE MESSAGE AND ACCEPTED THE GLOSS. HE WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET YOU, BUT DID NOT THINK REPROACHMENT COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED AT ONE MEETING. THERE SHOULD BE A PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION WHICH HE WAS HAPPY SHOULD BE DISCREET AND PRIVATE, WITHOUT MEDIA COVERAGE. THE BEST DATES FOR HIM WOULD BE 15, 16 OR 17 AUGUST. I RECOMMEND THAT THIS PROPOSAL BE ACCEPTED, BUT HOPE AN EARLIER DATE CAN BE AGREED.

DETAILS

2. PRINCE SAUD SAW ME AT 2145 LOCAL TIME FOR 45 MINUTES, ACCOMPANIED BY KABBANI, HEAD OF WESTER DEPARTMENT. HE WAS GOOD HUMOURED AND RELAXED (VERY UNLIKE OUR LAST MEETING ON 3 APRIL). HE BEGAN BY ASKING AFTER THE AMBASSADOR AND HOPING THAT HE WAS KEEPING UP HIS ARABIC. AFTER READING YOUR MESSAGE SAUD WENT AGAIN OVER THE FAMILIAR ALLEGATION OF A MEDIA CAMPAIGN IN THE UK. THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT DID MUCH IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WEST WHICH SAUDI PUBLIC OPINION DID NOT SUPPORT: THE WEST, AND ESPECIALLY INFLUENTIAL COUNTRIES LIKE THE UK, SHOULD BE PREPARED TO DO THE SAME ON OCCASIONS EG BY GUIDING THE MEDIA. I CONTESTED THE POINT ABOUT A CAMPAIGN, USING THE ARGUMENTS IN THE INFORMATION PACKAGE PAPER. I THEN SAID THAT THE PROPOSALS IN THE PACKAGE SHOWED THAT HMG WERE NEVERTHELESS PREPARED TO HELP THE SAUDIS PUT THEIR CASE ACROSS WITHIN THE LIMITS OF WHAT WAS POLITICALLY AND SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE IN THE UK. WE COULD NOT CENSOR BUT WE COULD PRESENT INFORMATION - AND I CONFIRMED THAT IF THE PROPOSED JOINT COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL RELATIONS WERE SET UP HMG WOULD USE THE MANY LEGITIMATE AVENUES OPEN TO IT TO PURSUE AGREED POINTS ARISING FROM THE COMMITTEE'S WORK (PARA 4 OR YRTELNO 376).

3. PRINCE SAUD SAID THAT THIS WAS THE SORT OF POINT HE WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS WITH YOU. HE WELCOMED YOUR MESSAGE: THE PROPOSAL THAT YOU AND HE SHOULD MEET WAS VERY MUCH IN LINE WITH THE IDEAS IN PRINCE FAHD'S LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER. IT WAS NECESSARY TO CONSIDER AT A HIGH LEVEL HOW TO BRING ABOUT THE REAPPROACHMENT WHICH BOTH SIDES SO OBVIOUSLY DESIRED AND WHICH HE HOPED WOULD LEAD TO EVEN CLOSER RELATIONS THAN THOSE WE HAD ENJOYED IN THE PAST. HE WOULD BE HAPPY TO TRY TO FIT HIS TIMETABLE TO YOURS. WHAT DATES HAD YOU IN MIND?

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4. I SAID THAT I WOULD LIKE FIRST TO DWELL ON THE NATURE OF THE MEETING YOU PROPOSED. I SAID THAT IN YOUR VIEW A MEETING WITH SAUDI WOULD AIM TO SET THE SEAL ON A PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION WHICH HAD BEGUN WITH YOUR SPEECH ON 22 MAY AND CONTINUED WITH THE PRESENTATION OF THE PACKAGE ON 2 JULY. ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THOSE TWO ACTIONS HAD FOUND FAVOUR IN SAUDI EYES, A HIGH LEVEL MEETING WOULD BE A PUBLIC SYMBOL THAT RELATIONS WERE NOW BACK TO NORMAL.

5. SAUD SAID THAT YOUR SPEECH ON 22 MAY HAD BEEN VERY WELL RECEIVED IN RIYADH, NOTABLY BY THE KING. AS FOR THE PACKAGE HE HAD NOT YET STUDIED IT IN DETAIL BUT AT FIRST SIGHT IT SEEMED TO CONTAIN USEFUL SUGGESTIONS FOR MUTUAL COOPERATION IN THE INFORMATION FIELD. EVEN SO HE DID NOT THINK IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE TO GO STRAIGHT TO A PUBLIC RECONCILIATION. FOR INSTANCE, IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO DECIDE EXACTLY WHAT FORM SUCH A RAPPROCHEMENT WOULD TAKE. I SUGGESTED THAT SUCH POINTS COULD BE SETTLED BY OFFICIALS, OR PERHAPS (EMPHASISING THAT THIS WAS A PERSONAL IDEA) EVEN BY A MEETING OF DEPUTY MINISTERS. SAUD SAID THAT SUCH CONTACTS WOULD HAVE TO BE AD REFERENDUM: THIS WOULD DELAY THE PROCESS AND POSSIBLY LEAD TO MISUNDERSTANDINGS. ON THE OTHER HAND, YOU AND HE FACE TO FACE COULD DISCUSS BOTH PAST AND FUTURE FRANKLY, AGREE WHAT COULD AND COULD NOT BE DONE, AND SETTLE ON THE SPOT THE SHAPE AND CONTENTS OF A PUBLIC RECONCILIATION.

6. I THEN ASKED IF I MIGHT SPEAK FRANKLY. HE AGREED. I SAID THAT YOUR POSITION WAS DIFFICULT. THE PUBLIC STEPS YOU HAD ALREADY TAKEN TO RESTORE RELATIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA, NOTABLY YOUR SPEECHES IN PARLIAMENT AND AT THE MEA, HAD BEEN VICIOUSLY CRITICISED IN SOME QUARTER IN THE UK (AND, I MENTIONED IN PASSING, SAUD WOULD HAVE NOTED THAT YOUR RECENT STATEMENTS ON ARAB/ISRAEL MATTERS AD BEEN BITTERLY ATTACKED BY BEGIN AND SHAMIR - YES, SAUD SAID, ADDING THAT HE HAD WATCHED YOUR ISRAELI TV INTERVIEW IN AMMAN, AND HAD BEEN VERY IMPRESSED BY WHAT YOU HAD SAID). IT WAS THEREFORE ESSENTIAL THAT ANY PUBLISHED MEETING BETWEEN YOU AND SAUD SHOULD BE SEEN AS THE FINAL STEP IN THE PROCESS OF RAPPROCHEMENT AND NOT AS PART OF NEGOTIATION IN WHICH FURTHER CONCESSIONS COULD BE EXPECTED FROM OUR SIDE.

7. SAUD TOOK THE POINT, BUT SAID THAT IN THAT CASE A PRELIMINARY MEETING WAS ALL THE MORE ESSENTIAL, THOUGH IT WOULD HAVE TO BE DISCREET, PRIVATE, AND DEVOID OF MEDIA COVERAGE. HE WOULD BE HAPPY TO COME TO SUCH A MEETING. HE STUCK TO THIS LINE, POLITELY BUT FIRMLY, THROUGHOUT WHAT REMAINED OF OUR DISCUSSION.

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8. ON DATES, I GAVE HIM THE INFORMATION IN PARA 3 OF TUS M HE DOUBTED WHETHER ANYTHING COULD NOW BE SET UP BEFORE HE LEFT FOR NEW YORK ON 18 JULY FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION ON PALESTINE BEGINNING ON 22 JULY. HE WOULD BE FLYING NON-STOP TO AND FROM NEW YORK. HE ASKED WHETHER SOU WOULD BE ATTENDING THE SESSION. I SAID I HAD NO SPECIFIC INFORMATION BUT I THOUGHT NOT. IN THAT CASE, SAUDI SAID, THE BEST TIME FOR HIM WOULD BE 15, 16 OR 17 AUGUST IE THE EID, WHEN HE WOULD HAVE A LEGITIMATE EXCUSE TO BE AWAY FROM THE OFFICE, WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN. I SAID THAT I WOULD PUT TO YOU THE SUGGESTION OF A PRIVATE, UN-PUBLICISED MEETING AT THAT TIME, WITH A VIEW TO A PUBLIC RECONCILIATION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE THEREAFTER, THOUGH I WAS BOUND TO NOTE THAT THIS WAS NOT THE WAY YOU HAD ENVISAGED MATTERS PROCEEDING.

CONCLUSION

9. I THINK WE CAN DRAW SOME COMFORT FROM THIS DISCUSSION. SAUD'S THINKING CLEARLY MARCHES WITH YOURS ON MOST OF THE IMPORTANT POINTS: HE WANTS A SPEEDY SOLUTION: HE RECOGNISES THE NEED FOR A PUBLIC ACT OF RECONCILIATION: AND HE SEES THE ROLE OF A MEETING BETWEEN YOU TWO IN ACHIEVING ALL THIS. THE MAIN DIFFERENCE LIES IN HOW MANY SUCH MEETINGS THERE SHOULD BE. THERE IS A CERTAIN LOGIC IN SAUD'S ARGUMENTS ON THAT POINT: AND IN ANY CASE IT IS GOING TO BE VERY DIFFICULT TO RIDE HIM OFF THEM. ON THE OTHER HAND, I GAINED THE DISTICT IMPRESSION THAT SAUD SAW A PRELIMINARY MEETING AS PRIMARILY AN OCCASION TO AGREE HOW A LATER PUBLIC RECONCILIATION WOULD BE PRESENTED TO THE MEDIA: THOUGH NATURALLY IT WOULD ALSO BE NECESSARY FOR EACH SIDE TO UNDERSTAND CLEARLY WHAT IT COULD EXPECT FROM THE OTHER, WHAT WAS AND WHAT WAS NOT POSSIBLE IN THE TREATMENT OF MEDIA MATTERS IN EACH COUNTRY. IT IS ALSO VERY LIKELY THAT SAUD NEEDS A TWO STAGE PROCESS IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN HIS POSITION IN NEGOTIATIONS WITH HIS ELDERS, SOMETHING WHICH WILL CLEARLY HAVE TO BE FITTED IN AT SOME POINT AND WHICH WILL BE EASIER TO HANDLE IF HE CAN REFER TO DIRECT ASSURANCES FROM YOU, HOWEVER PRIVATE THEY MUST REMAIN. ON DISCRETION, THE SAUDIS CAN BE TRUSTED TO KEEP MINISTERIAL MOVEMENTS OUT OF THE MEDIA (THEY DO SO FREQUENTLY): AND WERE A MEETING TO TAKE PLACE IN THE UK, I SUPPOSE WE COULD GET SAUD IN AND OUT WITHOUT PUBLICITY. IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES I RECOMMEND, SIR, THAT YOU ACCEPT SAUD'S PROPOSAL FOR A PRIVATE PRELIMINARY MEETING. A MEETING AS SOON AS POSSIBLE WOULD HELP BUILD UP AND MAINTAIN MOMENTUM. BUT IF THAT IS NOT POSSIBLE (EG BY YOUR ATTENDING THE SPECIAL SESSION) THEN WE WILL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL 15, 16 OR 17 AUGUST.

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