



SECRET

21.

B.06951

PRIME MINISTER

c Sir Robert Armstrong

Consequences of an Escalation of the Iran/Iraq War
(OD(EM) (84) 1)

BACKGROUND

1. The Sub-Committee last considered the Iran/Iraq war on 21 December 1983 (OD(EM)(83) 9th Meeting). The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary was invited, in consultation with the Secretary of State for Defence, to continue to explore the possibility of further diplomatic action to reduce the risk of escalation in the Iran/Iraq war, and to consider possible responses to requests for military assistance from the Gulf States in the event of an escalation in the war. In his minute of 6 January to the Secretary of State for Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary reported the outcome of recent mediation efforts, which were not encouraging, and noted that the Iranians had been somewhat more active in the Gulf area, but that there had been no further signs of escalation in the war. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary further invited the Secretary of State for Defence to consider various responses which might be made to requests from the Gulf States. In particular, he invited immediate agreement to the Omani request that our mine counter-measures force should be brought to a greater state of readiness; this was given by colleagues on the Sub-Committee.

FLAG A.

2. The joint memorandum by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary (OD(EM)(84) 1) presents the results of further consideration of possible assistance to the Gulf States. Actual deployment of British forces to the area would carry penalties to other operational

FLAG B.


SECRET

Para. C
tasks, and could expose the forces to risk. The preference is therefore to concentrate for as long as possible upon forms of assistance which improve indigenous military capabilities in the Gulf States. Possibilities are being explored by the Director of Military Assistance Overseas in his current tours of local states (the Defence Secretary's minute to you of 13 January refers), and are likely to include advice and training on air defence, mine counter-measures and counter-terrorism.

3. One request from a Gulf State requires an immediate decision. Shaikh Zaid of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has asked for a blanket assurance of British military assistance in the event of an Iranian attack, or for a precise indication of the areas in which we can provide assistance. A blanket assurance would be a stronger commitment than our already expressed willingness in principle to provide defensive assistance if asked, and would be impossible to provide in advance of an assessment as to the most appropriate deployment of our forces if a crisis occurred. It is therefore recommended that the reply to the Shaikh should reaffirm our willingness to help, seek clarification of his likely needs, and encourage him to take up our offer to help build up UAE's own capabilities. We might also indicate the forces we have available to react to an emergency in the Gulf. A suggested reply to Shaikh Zaid is at Annex B to the memorandum.

4. The memorandum also addresses the guidelines for our Loan Service Personnel (LSP) in the Gulf States. Only those in Oman are at present allowed to take part in defensive operations without the prior consent of the British Government. Given that a crisis might develop rapidly, and that our relations with Gulf States might be adversely affected if British LSP stood aside when these States were subjected to attack, it is suggested that revised



SECRET

guidelines be drawn up to allow British LSP in any of the Gulf States to continue to perform their functions even under external attack without prior consent when there is not time to obtain it.

5. The Secretary of State for Energy, the Chief of the Defence Staff and Sir Antony Acland have been invited to attend the meeting.

HANDLING

6. You should invite the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to introduce the discussion. The Defence Secretary might then be invited to comment. Points to establish in discussion are:

(a) Is it agreed that the deployment of British forces to the Gulf should be countenanced only as a last resort and if our interests are threatened?

(b) Is it also agreed that concentrating on developing the Gulf States' own capabilities is the right approach at this stage?

(c) Is the draft reply to Shaikh Zaid satisfactory?

(d) Is the revision of the guidelines to our Loan Service Personnel agreed?

CONCLUSION

7. Subject to the points made in discussion, you could guide the Sub-Committee to approve the recommendations in OD(EM)(84) 1.

David Goodall

A D S Goodall

25 January 1984