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GRS 590
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FM MUSCAT 281045Z JUN
TO PRIORITY FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 203 OF 28 JUNE 84
INFO ALL GULF POSTS, TEHRAN, WASHINGTON, UKDEL NATO, UKMIS NEW
YORK, MOD

SITUATION IN THE GULF

1. I HAD A LONG TALK WITH THE SULTAN LAST NIGHT ABOUT THE SITUATION IN THE GULF.
2. MUCH OF OUR DISCUSSION WAS ON STANDARD LINES, BUT I WAS STRUCK BY THE STRENGTH OF QABOOS' DETERMINATION (MY TELEGRAM NUMBER 201) NOT TO RISK BECOMING INVOLVED IN THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR THROUGH CLOSER MILITARY COOPERATION WITH THE GCC. HE SAID THAT THE OTHER STATES IN THE GCC HAD NOTHING TO OFFER OMAN IN THE DEFENCE FIELD: OMAN WAS CAPABLE OF DEFENDING HERSELF AGAINST IRAN WITHOUT THEIR HELP. BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, IRAN WAS A POWERFUL NEIGHBOUR WITH WHOM OMAN HAD TO LIVE. AT THE MOMENT, THE IRANIANS WERE NOT DOING ANYTHING TO THREATEN OMAN AND SO OMAN WOULD NOT DO ANYTHING WHICH THE IRANIANS COULD REGARD AS PROVOCATIVE. (THE SULTAN WI HINTED THAT HE HAD HAD SOME SORT OF ASSURANCE FROM THE IRANIANS THAT, IF OMAN STAYED OUT OF THE CONFLICT, SHE WOULD LEFT ALONE.)
3. QABOOS SAID THAT IT WOULD SUIT THE IRAQIS VERY WELL TO DRAG OTHER GCC STATES INTO THE WAR AND HE THOUGHT THAT THE IRAQIS WERE PUSHING THE SAUDIS TO URGE GREATER GCC MILITARY COOPERATION. EVEN KING HUSSAIN, DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO OMAN, HAD BEEN URGING THE SULTAN TO RALLY TO THE SUPPORT OF IRAQ. BUT QABOOS WAS CONVINCED THAT HIS PEOPLE DID NOT WISH TO BE DRAGGED INTO A WAR WITH IRAN ON BEHALF OF IRAQ AND SO HE WAS DETERMINED TO STAY OUT. THE SULTAN THEN WENT OVER THE STORY OF THE QUOTE KING FAHAD LINE UNQUOTE (PARAGRAPH 3 OF MY TELEGRAM UNDER REFERENCE) AND REPEATED THAT OMAN HAD REFUSED TO AGREE TO ITS EXTENSION INTO THE STRAIGHTS OF HORMUZ.
4. QABOOS WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT SAUDI ACTIVITIES. THE GCC, AS AN INSTITUTION, HAD ALWAYS CARRIED WITH IT THE RISK THAT IT WOULD SERVE AS A VEHICLE FOR SAUDI DOMINATION OF THE OTHER GULF STATES. THIS WAS NOW BEGINNING TO HAPPEN: THE SAUDIS WERE USING THE THREAT OF WAR AS A MEANS OF EXTENDING THEIR OWN INFLUENCE, PARTICULARLY IN THE MILITARY FIELD. THE SAUDIS HAD VETOED A PROPOSAL THAT A JORDANIAN BATTALION SHOULD BE STATIONED IN BAHRAIN AND NOW THEY WERE TRYING TO POSITION SAUDI F.15 AIRCRAFT IN THE UAE. THE SULTAN SPECULATED THAT THE AMERICANS MIGHT BE

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BEHIND THIS. DURING HIS RECENT VISIT, VICE-PRESIDENT BUSH HAD ASSURED THE SULTAN THAT THE US INTENDED TO AVOID ANY PROVOCATEVE ACTION IN THE GULF. BUT THERE HAD BEEN ONE OR TWO ODD INCIDENTS, SUCH AS THE US NAVY'S UNSOLICITED CONVOYING OF TANKERS. QABOOS WAS NOW BEGINNING TO WONDER WHETHER THE AMERICANS WERE ALSO QUIETLY URGING ON THE SAUDIS. I SAID THAT OUR IMPRESSION WAS THAT THE US GOVERNMENT WERE WELL AWARE OF THE DANGERS OF PROVOCITIVE ACTION IN THE GULF AND WISHED TO AVOID ANY FURTHER EXTENSIONS OF THE CONFLICT. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN THE SAUDIS HAD ASKED FOR STINGERS, THE US ADMINISTRATION, IN VIEW OF THEIR CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH SAUDI ARABIA, HAD FOUND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO REFUSE, BUT THEY SEEMED TO HAVE FOUND THE REQUEST EMBARRASSING. THE SULTAN COMMENTED THAT THIS MIGHT BE TRUE OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT, BUT WAS IT ALSO TRUE OF THE US MILITARY?

5. BEFORE TURNING TO ANOTHER SUBJECT QABOOS SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE ME AGAIN NEXT WEEK TO RESUME THE DISCUSSION.

SLATER

(Repetition to TRIPOLI
referred for departmental decision;
repeated as requested to other posts.)

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