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Telegram from the American Embassy in Muscat to the Secretary of State, 'Discussion with Zawawi on Iraqi access to facilities for attack on Iran'

Citation:

"Telegram from the American Embassy in Muscat to the Secretary of State, 'Discussion with Zawawi on Iraqi access to facilities for attack on Iran'", October 1, 1980, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/208196>

Summary:

Buck reports on a conversation with Zawawi on Oman's decision to support Iraq against Iran in the Iran-Iraq War.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

827

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DATE 10/31/83

WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

PAGE 001

WHSR COMMENT:

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MESSAGE ANNOTATIONS:

NO MESSAGE ANNOTATIONS

MESSAGE:

FLASH

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E.O. 12865; RDS-1 9/28/10 (BUCK, STEPHEN W.) OR-M

TAGS: TZ, TR, US, MU

SUBJECT: ~~(S)~~ DISCUSSION WITH ZAWANI ON IRAQI ACCESS TO FACILITIES FOR ATTACK ON IRAN

REF: (A) STATE 288518, (B) MUSCAT 2811

1. ~~(S)~~ ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY: WE WENT ROUND AND ROUND AND IT TOOK A WHILE TO SINK IN BUT BY END OF EARLY AM DISCUSSION SEPT. 28 ZAWANI WAS CONSIDERABLY SOBERED BY EXCELLENT MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY. CHARGE WARNED THAT NO AMOUNT OF DISCUSSION WOULD HELP IF IRAQI PLANES KEPT POURING IN AND URGED DELAY IN ARRIVAL OF IRAQI EQUIPMENT WHILE OMANI GAVE URGENT RECONSIDERATION TO ITS DECISION. ZAWANI WILL IMMEDIATELY CONVEY SECRETARY'S MESSAGE TO THE SULTAN AND BE BACK TO US LATER TODAY (SEPT. 28). HE REITERATED THAT OMAN HAD DECIDED TO SUPPORT IRAQ ACCESS TO FACILITIES FOR AN ATTACK ON IRAN BUT LEFT THE IMPRESYION THAT THERE WAS ROOM FOR RECONSIDERATION AND FELT THAT A SPECIAL, VERY XCRET VISIT BY A HIGH LEVEL ENVOY TO DISCUSS THE MATTER DIRECTLY WITH THE SULTAN MIGHT HELP. END SUMMARY.

3. ON RECEIPT REF A, CHARGE CALLED MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS ZAWANI AT 1 AM AND SAW HIM AT HIS HOME AT 1:30 AM. FOLLOWING ACCOUNT OF ANIMATED BUT FRIENDLY 1-1/2 HOUR DISCUSSION.

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Authority MR-NLJC-2011-0018

NARA (B) Date 9/26/2017

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE GUIDELINES, JULY 21, 1997

BY B NARA, DATE 7/29/2016

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MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

4. CHARGE DELIVERED COPY OF MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY AND BECAUSE ZAWAWI COULD NOT FIND HIS GLASSES READ IT TO HIM VERY CAREFULLY ALOUD. IN RESPONSE, ZAWAWI MORE OR LESS REITERATED PREVIOUS POINTS (REF 3). HE SAID THAT OMAN HAD HAD TO PUT UP WITH "GREAT INDIGNITIES" FROM IRAN, THAT NOW WAS THE TIME TO FINISH KHOMENI ONCE AND FOR ALL AND THAT OMAN AS AN ARAB STATE SHOULD SUPPORT IRAQ. AS A RESULT OF ITS GRANTING OF ACCESS TO FACILITIES TO THE UNITED STATES, OMAN HAD FOUND ITSELF ISOLATED IN THE ARAB WORLD. CONVERSATIONS WITH IRAQIS IN THE PAST THREE DAYS HAD BEEN EXTREMELY PRODUCTIVE. OMAN HAD DECIDED TO DO ITS ARAB DUTY, ZAWAWI SAID WITH CONSIDERABLE FEELING, AND THIS WOULD BE IN THE INTERESTS OF THE REGION AND ULTIMATELY THE WEST.

5. ZAWAWI DISAGREED WITH THE ARGUMENT THAT OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR IRAQ AGAINST IRAN WOULD WIDEN THE CONFLICT. RATHER, HE CONTENDED, IT WOULD BRING IT TO A MORE SPEEDY AND POSITIVE END. AT THIS POINT I NOTED SECRETARY'S POINT THAT WHATEVER ITS CURRENT CONDITION, IRAN WOULD REMAIN A POWER TO RECKON WITH IN THE GULF AND FURTHER OUR INTELLIGENCE INDICATED THAT THE IRANIAN AIR FORCE STILL HAD LONG RANGE ATTACK CAPABILITY. FAR FROM BEING DECISIVE, I ARGUED, OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR IRAQ WOULD SIMPLY MAKE MATTERS WORSE, ESPECIALLY FOR OMAN. IT WOULD ALSO POSE GREAT DANGERS FOR REGIONAL SECURITY IN CONNECTION WITH THE VITAL NATURE OF THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ. ZAWAWI FELL BACK ON POINT THAT SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE ABOUT IRAN AND THAT OMAN HAD SURRELRED AT THE HANDS OF IRAN. TO THIS I REPLIED THAT ONE COULD HARDLY EQUATE RADIO BROADCASTS FROM TEHRAN AND VERBAL AND POSSIBLY OTHER SUPPORT FOR THE PFLO WITH OMAN'S HELPING MOUNT A MILITARY ATTACK AGAINST IRAN.

6. DEFENSIVELY, ZAWAWI SAID THAT OMAN'S SUPPORT WOULD BE DONE DISCREETLY. I REPLIED THAT I DOUBTED THAT SUCH ACTIVITY COULD BE UNDERTAKEN DISCREETLY. IRAN PROBABLY STILL HAD ELINT CAPABILITIES AND, IN ANY EVENT, WORD OF THE ARRIVAL OF A FEW IRAQI HELICOPTERS AND TRANSPORTS WAS ALREADY ALL OVER TOWN. ZAWAWI SEEMED TAKEN ABACK BY THIS ASSERTION. HE SAID RATHER YHAMELY THAT IF OUR HOSTAGE OPERATION, COULD USE MASIRAH, IRAQ COULD ALSO MOUNT AN OPERATION. I REPLIED THAT I FOUND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT THE IRANIANS DID NOT KNOW ABOUT OUR USE OF MASIRAH. THEY SIMPLY CHOSE TO IGNORE IT. OBVIOUSLY THEY COULD NOT IGNORE A MILITARY ATTACK ON THEIR COUNTRY MOUNTED FROM OMAN.

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MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

7. ARAB CONSULTATIONS. ZAWAWI REITERATED POINT THAT OMAN WAS SIMPLY SUPPORTING ITS FELLOW ARAB STATES AND THE ARAB CAUSE IN THE REGION. I ASKED WITH WHOM OUTSIDE OF IRAQ OMAN HAD HAD CONSULTATIONS. ZAWAWI INDICATED NO ONE. ASKED SPECIFICALLY ABOUT THE F UJITS, HE SAID "THEY ARE WEAK AND WILL DO NOTHING." IF THE SAUDIS WERE WEAK AND DO NOTHING, I ASKED, WOULDN'T THIS MEAN THAT OMAI WOULD FIND ITSELF ALIEN WITH IRAQ? ZAWAWI HAD NO REAL ANSWER TO THIS OTHER THAN TO SAY THAT OMAN HAD MADE A DECISION AND FELT IT WAS A GOOD ONE.

8. HORMUZ. APPEALS ABOUT HORMUZ AND THE IMPORTANCE OF OMANI NEUTRALITY IN RELATION TO IT HAD LITTLE EFFECT WITH ZAWAWI. HE SAID THAT OMAN HAD LONG AGO RAISED ITS CONCERN ABOUT THE SECURITY OF THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ BUT HAD RECEIVED VIRTUALLY NOTHING IN REPLY.

9. MEDIATION EFFORTS. I SAID IT WOULD BE A TRAGEDY IF OMAN ENTERED THE CONFLICT JUST AT A TIME WHEN THERE SEEMED SOME HOPE FOR MEDIATORY EFFORTS, SPECIFICALLY BY THE PRESIDENT OF PAKISTAN, WHO WAS ABOUT TO ARRIVE IN TEHRAN. ZAWAWI SAID HIS UNDERSTANDING WAS THE ZIA WAS ALREADY THERE BUT HE DOUBTED THAT HIS EFFORTS WOULD HAVE MUCH OF AN EFFECT.

10. NO AUTOMATIC U.S. SUPPORT. ZAWAWI SAID "THE MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY IS VERY CLEAR (ON THIS POINT) BUT IF NEED BE WE WILL DO OUR DUTY WITHOUT YOUR HELP." HOWEVER, BY THE END OF THE CONVERSATION THE MESSAGE SEEMED TO HAVE SUNK IN A BIT MORE AND HE SEEMED SOMEWHAT CHASTENED.

11. ENDING OMANI ISOLATION. THE MORE WE WENT AROUND ON THE SUBJECT THE MORE IT BECAME CLEAR TO ME THAT OMAN'S PRIMARY REASON FOR SUPPORTING IRAQ IS BECAUSE IT SEES THIS ACTION AS A WAY OF ENDING ITS ISOLATION IN THE ARAB WORLD AND GETTING ON WHAT IT FEELS IS THE WINNING SIDE. (IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE IRAQIS HAVE DONE QUITE A JOB ON THE OMANIS IN CONVINCING THEM THAT BY GRANTING IRAQ ACCESS TO FACILITIES, IRAQ WILL IN TURN BRING OMAN BACK INTO THE ARAB FOLD.)

12. AT ONE POINT IN CONVERSATION ZAWAWI ASKED IF BRITISH HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH OUR DEMARCHE. I REPLIED THAT ONLY US/UK CONTACT I KNEW ON SUBJECT WAS UK CHARGE TUNNELL'S

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MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

12. FRIENDLY COMPARING NOTES WITH ME AFTER HE SAADMINISTER SEPT. 27. US POSITION WOULD HAVE BEEN WHAT IT WAS WHETHER UK EXISTED OR NOT. FROM WHAT I COULD UNDERSTAND, HOWEVER, BRITISH WOULD VERY MUCH SHARE OUR CONCERN ABOUT EXPANSION OF CONFLICT THROUGH OMANI INVOLVEMENT.

13. ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS WHEN ZAWAMI DID NOT REALLY HAVE AN ANSWER TO THE COGENT POINTS OF THE SECRETARY'S MESSAGE, HE REVERTED TO THE ARGUMENT THAT THE DECISION WAS ALREADY BEEN MADE. I ASKED WHETHER THIS MEANT THERE WAS NOT AT LEAST TIME FOR MORE DISCUSSION IN LIGHT OF THE SECRETARY'S MESSAGE, ADDING THAT THE AMBASSADOR WOULD ARRIVE LATE IN THE DAY AND WOULD NO DOUBT WANT TO TALK WITH HIM. HAVING FOUND HIS GLASSES, ZAWAMI READ THE SECRETARY'S MESSAGE IN ITS ENTIRETY AND THEN SAID WITH A SOBER TONE TO HIS VOICE, "IT IS VERY, VERY CLEAR." HE SAID HE WOULD EITHER PERSONALLY TAKE THE MESSAGE TO SULTAN QABOOS IN SALALAH OR HAVE IT DELIVERED IMMEDIATELY AND GET BACK TO ME LATER IN THE DAY. ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS WHEN PRESSED WITH SOME OF THE ARGUMENTS IN THE SECRETARY'S MESSAGE HE FELL BACK TO SAYING "THERE ARE SOME THINGS I SIMPLY CAN'T SAY AND WHICH CAN ONLY BE DISCUSSED WITH HIS MAJESTY." HE INDICATED THAT IT MIGHT HELP MATTERS IF A SPECIAL ENVOY CAME FROM WASHINGTON TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION FURTHER DIRECTLY WITH SULTAN QABOOS. SPECIAL ENVOY SHOULD BE - "SOMEONE LIKE BRZEZINSKI, OR SOMEONE ELSE FROM THE NSC, THE SECRETARY OR UNDERSECRETARY WENDSON." VISIT WOULD HAVE TO BE HANDLED IN GREATED SECRECY. I SAID I COULD NOT TELL WHO MIGHT BE AVAILABLE GIVEN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES BUT WOULD PASS THE IDEA ON IMMEDIATELY.

14. COMMENT: FUNDAMENTAL RATIONALE FOR OMAN'S GRANTING ACCESS TO IRAQ IS THAT CITED PARA 11 ABOVE. BELIEVE REFERENCE TO KNOWLEDGE OF THE IRAQI PLANS HERE BEING ALL OVER TOWN HAD AN EFFECT ON ZAWAMI AND THAT HE WILL PERIODICALLY CONSIDER THE ARGUMENT THAT UNLESS THE OMANIS QUICKLY LIMIT THE NUMBER OF IRAQI PLANS ARRIVING, THEY WILL HAVE LOCKED THEMSELVES IN. BY 3 AM THE SECRETARY'S MESSAGE HAD BEGUN TO SINK IN, BUT IT MAY REQUIRE A SPECIAL ENVOY DISCUSSING THE MATTER DIRECTLY WITH THE SULTAN TO TURN THE OMANI/IRAQI OPERATION OFF. WHILE THIS MAY BE OUT OF THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY, WORD FROM THE SAUDI'S THAT OFFERING SAFE HAVEN FOR AIRCRAFT IS ONE THING AND OFFERING A BASE FOR OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS IS QUITE ANOTHER WOULD HELP.

15. QJCS VISIT. ON DEPARTING I ASKED ZAWAMI WHETHER, GIVEN HIS PREVIOUSLY VOICED CONCERN ABOUT LINKAGE OF THE US TO ANY

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MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

OMANI/IRAQI OPERATION, THIS MIGHT HAVE ANY EFFECT ON OMANI RECEPTIVITY TO FORTHCOMING OCT 2/3 VISIT OF CHAIRMAN JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF. WITHOUT HESITATION ZAWAWI SAID NO. NOW THAT HE WOULD BE IN TOWN, HE WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO INVITING THE CHAIRMAN TO HIS HOME FOR DRINKS.

16. DESPITE DIFFERING VIEWS, MEETING WAS VERY CORDIAL THROUGHOUT AND ZAWAWI ON ESCORTING ME TO MY CAR SAID HE HOPED TO BE IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH ME THROUGHOUT THE DAY.

17. FINAL COMMENT: DESIRE FOR SECRET ENVOY BUT ACCEPTANCE OF CERTAIN TO BE PUBLICIZED OJCS VISIT SEEMS CONTRADICTIONARY. FAR FROM THINKING THINGS THROUGH CLEARLY, OMANIS HAVE BEEN SEDUCED BY A WHIRLWIND COURTSHIP FROM THE IRAQIS. THE SECRETARY'S MESSAGE HAD AN EXCELLENT, SOBERING EFFECT AND CONTINUED DIALOGUE SHOULD HELP. OUR REAL RISK IS THAT WHILE OUR DISCUSSIONS CONTINUE THE IRAQIS WILL KEEP POURING IN EQUIPMENT, THE OMANIS WILL LACK THE COURAGE TO SAY NO AND THE OPERATION WILL BEGIN.
BUCK

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