

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telephone Conversation with Sultan Qaboos of Oman

PARTICIPANTS: The President
Sultan Qaboos
Notetaker: Sandra Charles

DATE, TIME, AND AND PLACE: August 3, 1989, 11:31 - 11:42 EST
The Oval Office

The President asked the Sultan how he was.

Sultan Qaboos responded that he was fine.

The President said that he had not talked to the Sultan in a long time and that he was delighted this call had worked out.

Sultan Qaboos then said how shocked they were to hear of LTC Higgins' murder.

The President replied that this was one reason for his call. This tragedy had shaken our nation to the very core. LTC Higgins was a man wearing a uniform and a UN representative. He relayed what Sheikh Mohammed of Bahrain had said yesterday when he met with him: that made it the world's business. Everybody had expressed universal concern over this brutality.

Sultan Qaboos stated that he was really shocked, and that this was not good for international relations.

The President said that we presumed LTC Higgins was dead, but we didn't know for sure and we didn't know when he died, if he died. We were appealing to everybody -- Prime Minister Thatcher, the Pope, and others -- for the return of his body. He asked if there was any possible channel the Sultan could use to encourage, directly or indirectly, the hostage holders to send his body back, saying we did not want to leave any stone unturned.

Sultan Qaboos replied they would do their best, and he would get on the phone and get his men to do their utmost. At the moment, he was in Istanbul and was going to have dinner with the President, but he would telephone his country immediately.

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The President continued saying we had another one hanging over our head -- another American hostage -- Cicippio. We had received a brutal tape, and they had suggested postponing the execution or murder for four hours. The President stated it was terrible to parade these men like this and we didn't know what they would do. We had reports the Iranians were trying to be helpful in seeing there were no more killing of American hostages. The President said he knew Oman had some contacts with Iran and that the Foreign Minister was quite forward-looking in his dealings with them.

Sultan Qaboos replied that he would talk to his people immediately about what Iran was doing.

The President expressed his appreciation, saying he had always been comfortable talking frankly with the Sultan. Rafsanjani might turn out to be more reasonable, but he had some radicals in the government like Montashemi-Pur who might make things difficult. There might be a ray of hope, and we didn't want to mishandle our affairs if there might be a change in Iran.

Sultan Qaboos agreed on these points, saying as Rafsanjani came into power, things may be more hopeful.

The President was pleased they thought alike on that. He told the Sultan he was concerned that he may have problems explaining that to many from our side. Our problem would come if they killed another hostage which would change the whole equation of what he must do. Unfortunately, he said that would change the way we would conduct ourselves if it looked like every 24 hours they would kill a hostage. He thought Syria understood that, and Iran understood or was aware that this was our position. He said we were trying to be moderate, reasonable, and restrained.

Sultan Qaboos sympathized, saying the President couldn't be expected to watch his people be killed. He also had an international responsibility to consider. He had to do what he had to do if things didn't improve. The Sultan believed everybody would understand and support his actions.

The President said that was good to hear, but we would continue to use every diplomatic means we could. He concluded, saying that it was nice talking to the Sultan, if he ever had anything to pass on to please call, and then asked about his health.

Sultan Qaboos said he was fine and told him about his current trip, which had started in May in Kuwait. He was in Turkey now, and going to Egypt next week. He hoped to see King Fahd before he went home.

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The President said the Sultan would probably see King Fahd before he comes to the U.S. and asked him to say hello to the King and President Mubarak. He added that he knew they appreciated the Sultan's friendship. He then recalled his visit to Oman, saying Barbara and he still remembered fondly the quiet little visit with the music and luncheon at the Sultan's palace in the south.

The Sultan appreciated his sentiments.

The President ended, saying a visit from the Sultan to our country would be most welcome.

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