

I have no intention of offering a view here on the conduct of the war with Iran, or on what the United States or anyone else should do about the Strait of Hormuz. Strategic and operational questions are outside BAFF's remit, and not for this website.

But as an individual member, I make an exception for one extraordinary aspect of the present situation.

President Trump has reportedly threatened to "bomb the shit out of" Oman if it gets in the way of American efforts over the Strait of Hormuz. It is not even the first such remark: in May he said that Oman would have to "behave" or the United States would have to "blow them up".

Speaking personally, I find that appalling.

My reaction is undoubtedly coloured by history. Oman has a special place in the memories of quite a few British veterans. British servicemen fought alongside the Sultan's forces in the Dhofar campaign, and the extraordinarily close military relationship has continued to the present day. Some BAFF members and supporters will have served in Oman in one capacity or another. British military and contract involvements over the years have extended to almost every conceivable specialism, from commanding frigates in the Dhofar war, to the provision of piping instruction.

But that relationship is much more important than a mere matter of nostalgia. In 2019 Britain and Oman signed a Joint Defence Agreement, which built on a relationship extending more than 200 years. The UK maintains its Joint Logistics Support Base at Duqm and the two countries have a joint training area. Only last month the Prime Minister welcomed Sultan Haitham to Downing Street, thanked Oman for its mediation between the United States and Iran, and described Oman's support in efforts to restore freedom of navigation through Hormuz as vital.

Nor is Oman some hostile state as far as Washington is concerned. In 1980 Oman broke ranks with the other Gulf states in being the first to provide US forces with access to sovereign military facilities and posts, which it continues to provide to this day.

Almost nothing surprises any longer, but it still beggars belief that the Commander-in-Chief threatens to bomb a country hosting his own forces. The fact that there are also UK forces present is, presumably, well below the White House radar.

None of this means that Britain, America or British veterans have to agree with everything Oman does. There are no permanent friends in international relations, as the saying goes, only permanent interests. Oman has interests of its own and has long maintained relations with Iran as well as with Britain and the United States. Indeed, its ability to talk to people on different sides is one reason it has repeatedly proved useful as an intermediary.

But threatening to bomb such a country is another matter.

Those threats to 'bomb the sh*t' out of Oman

The only consolation is that, although I've never served in Oman or taken part in one of the SAIF SAREEA exercises, I have fond memories of socialising with a couple of Omani G2 types, who like me were on a course at the old School of Service Intelligence years ago. I managed to impress them with my knowledge that His late Majesty Sultan Qaboos had, after Sandhurst, served for a time with a Scottish regiment in BAOR (1st Cameronians.)

My takeaway from that encounter, and from Brits I know who've served in Oman in various eras, is that the Omanis are sophisticated people with – fortunately – a sense of humour.

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The above post expresses an entirely personal view, not a BAFF position on American foreign policy. Other members may disagree, and are welcome to say so. One purpose of this OPINION section of the BAFF blog is to provide space for members to express informed personal views on matters of interest to the Armed Forces community, without every such contribution becoming an official BAFF position.