

61

Confidential Filing

Visit of the Algerian Foreign Minister,
Mr Mahmoud Benyahia.

ALGERIA

May 1970

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
27-5-80							
30-5-80							
2-6-80							
<p>PREM 19/138</p>							

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

2 June 1980

*cc Martin Set
Iran SA P77
Mid E. SA*

Dear Paul,

MEETING WITH THE ALGERIAN MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. Mohammed Benyahia, called on the Prime Minister this afternoon. He was accompanied by the Algerian Ambassador, Mr. Abdelkrim Benmahmoud and Mr. Saadeddine Benouniche H.M. Ambassador at Algiers and Mr. Moberley were also present.

After an exchange of courtesies, in which both the Prime Minister and M. Benyahia said that they would like to see relations between the United Kingdom and Algeria deepened and extended, on the political as well as the economic level, the Prime Minister raised the question of the American hostages in Iran. She said that it was regrettable that because of the hostage problem Britain's relations with Iran were not as close as she would have wished. Traditionally relations between the two countries had been good. Moreover the general uncertainty in the region gave added importance to those relations. The Iranian people's choice of Government was no concern of ours. But we could not ignore the taking of hostages. M. Benyahia said that Algeria had excellent relations with Iran. There was a relationship of mutual trust. Nonetheless, he understood what the Prime Minister had said about the hostages. The Algerian Government felt the same way. They were trying to develop ideas for solving the problem.

The Algerian Government started from the belief that the maintenance of stability in Iran and of the unity of the country was essential. Both were essential if the advance of the Soviet Union was to be barred. If the country split into a number of minor and insignificant states, these would inevitably, over a period of years, fall under Soviet influence. If the Soviet Union penetrated into Iran in this way, the balance of power in the world as a whole would be upset. For this reason the maintenance of stability in Iran was central to the future of the world.

The revolution in Iran was anti-American and anti-Russian, but not anti-Western. However, European solidarity with the United States risked making the revolution anti-Western. This would be bad. Against this background, the Algerian Government was trying to keep a clear head. The hostage problem was, of course, complicated by the fact that we were now in the middle of a U.S.

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CONFIDENTIAL

578

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

election campaign. However, M. Benyahia was confident that it would be solved before the end of the year. Once the Majles had organised itself and a Prime Minister had been appointed, it would tackle the problem. During the two months which it would take for the Majles to sort itself out, there was no chance of progress. This was the more so since the hostage problem had become mixed up with the internal political problems of the country. In the meantime, it would be an error for the West to pile on the pressure. The less said about the hostages, the better the chances of their being released.

Turning to Afghanistan, M. Benyahia said that his Government were concerned both because of the precedent which the Soviet invasion of a small neighbouring country represented and because of the aggravation of international tension which had resulted. They wanted to see the Soviet troops withdrawn. The structure proposed by the recent Islamic Conference could not lead to a solution. The Pakistan and Iranian Governments were too deeply involved to act as intermediaries. The Algerians were working with the Yugoslavs with a view to setting up a meeting of non-aligned countries at Foreign Minister level. They hoped that it would be possible to work out a procedure which would be accepted by representatives of all the major "tendencies". A structure approved by the non-aligned movement as a whole might prove acceptable to the super powers. This did not mean that other approaches need be discarded. The Prime Minister said that what mattered was that the end result should be a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Failing this, no-one was safe. M. Benyahia said that he agreed with the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister said that she was concerned about the lack of progress towards a solution of the Arab/Israel dispute. European Governments were anxious to help and were conscious that there might be a vacuum between now and the time of the U.S. Presidential elections in November. She was concerned about the lack of precision in much of the thinking about the problem, e.g. in the references to the desirability of "self determination". No-one had worked out what this phrase meant. She wondered, therefore, whether there was a possibility of talking with the various parties involved in order to be clearer about where the future of the region lay. The rights of both the Israelis and Palestinians had to be recognised by each. The problem was to ensure that the reciprocal acts of recognition happened simultaneously. It might help towards this if the phrase "self determination" could be filled out.

M. Benyahia said he was very happy to hear the Prime Minister's words. He agreed that the concept of self determination needed to be defined. He thought it very desirable that the Europeans should attempt to discover what the Arabs wanted before formulating a definite proposal. The Algerian Government had been concerned lest Europe should come out with a proposal which would be seen as contrary to the interests of the Palestinians. This would only

/ precipitate

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CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

precipitate a crisis between Europe and the Arabs. M. Benyahia made it clear that the view of the Palestinians would be decisive in determining the reaction of the Arab states generally.

M. Benyahia asked the Prime Minister whether it would be possible to pursue the search for a solution without talking to the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. The Algerian Government did not think so. The Prime Minister said that the British Government would not recognise the P.L.O. as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. Nonetheless, they did recognise the natural political ambitions of the Palestinians. Continued trouble in the area was against the interests of the Palestinians, of Israel, of the adjacent Arab states, of the oil states, and of the West. Therefore HM Government would keep pressing for a solution to the problem. No progress would be made until the Palestinian people and Israeli people recognised each other's rights, and until it had been established more clearly what exactly the Palestinians wanted. Great practical problems, e.g. about the status of the West Bank, remained to be solved. M. Benyahia repeated that if these problems were to be resolved and their solution achieved, the P.L.O. would have to be dealt with. No-one else could speak for them. The Prime Minister repeated that she would not be prepared to see the P.L.O. recognised as the sole representative of the Palestinians. Given the P.L.O.'s terrorist connections, past and present, there would be serious political difficulties in doing so. She wanted to work towards a position where legitimate political arguments rather than violence were listened to. M. Benyahia said that the Prime Minister was speaking to a former terrorist. He did not dissent the principle the Prime Minister was advancing. But on occasions force was the only way to make progress.

The Prime Minister ended the discussion saying that she would like to have continued it, but that she had to go into the Chamber of the House of Commons to hear a Statement by the Lord Privy Seal.

Yours ever

Richard Alexander

Paul Lever, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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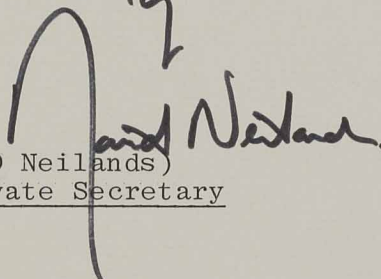
algeria
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

30 May 1980

Dear Mr Alexander

I enclose briefing for the Prime Minister's meeting with M. Mohamed Benyahia, Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs, on Monday 2 June at 3 pm.

Yours sincerely

(J D Neilands)
Private Secretary

Michael Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
London

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH M MOHAMED BENYAHIA, ALGERIAN
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, 3pm 2 JUNE

Points to Make

Bilateral

1. Welcome first official visit. Pleased we have no problems between us. Look forward to developing relations. Visit of HM The Queen indicates our esteem for Algeria.

Afghanistan

2. We note the call by the Islamic conference for Soviet withdrawal. This is the key to a political settlement. Government in Afghanistan must be chosen without outside pressure. How do Algerians see problem?

Iran

3. Does continued detention of hostages pose threat to Middle East security? How can we reasonably influence Iranian leaders? What is Algeria's attitude to the judgement of the International Court of Justice? Attitude to sanctions?

Western Sahara [if raised]

4. Our policy is one of neutrality. We recognise neither Moroccan nor Polisario claims to the territory. Although concerned about stability in North West Africa, and anxious for a peaceful solution, we do not see a role for Europe in this conflict. Dispute should be settled by the OAU or Arab League.

Essential Facts

BILATERAL RELATIONS

1. Our relations with Algeria have been thin and both we and the Algerians would like to develop them. Mr Parkinson, Minister of State for Trade, paid a very successful visit to Algeria in February, shortly after the Secretary of State's planned visit had to be cancelled because of his tour of Afghanistan's neighbours. HM The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh are to visit Algiers in October as part of a tour including Morocco and Tunisia. (M Benyahia is to bring President Chadli's formal invitation with him.)

2. The Algerian Ambassador has said that he thought the Algerian Government would welcome the establishment of a Joint Committee. We would not be averse to such a Committee, provided it offered specific returns, especially in trade.

AFGHANISTAN

3. This Islamic Conference renewed its condemnation of the Russian invasion and called for immediate withdrawal of Russian troops. The Steadfastness Front, of which Algeria is a member, created difficulties but went along with this. The Conference also established an Islamic Committee (Pakistan, Iran and the Conference Secretary-General) to seek a solution through consultations and perhaps a UN conference. The problem of lack of unity among the freedom fighters remains.

IRAN

4. No progress on the hostages. The International Court of Justice judgement (24 May) call for immediate release of hostages and (with three dissenting opinions) for Iran to make reparations to USA. The Algerians are said to be worried about the effect of sanctions on the crisis. We have heard an unofficial suggestion that they might take the lead in an initiative of the Non-Aligned.

WESTERN SAHARA

5. The former Spanish colony of Western Sahara is occupied by Morocco who claim it as Moroccan territory. The Polisario

Front, backed by Algeria and Libya, have formed a government in exile, the Sahara Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and have mounted an increasingly successful war against Moroccan occupying troops. Efforts at mediation, notably by the OAU, have proved fruitless.

6. Britain, in line with the Nine, has not accepted Moroccan claims nor recognised the Polisario Front. We aim to avoid involvement, maintain good relations with both Algeria and Morocco, encourage a peaceful solution; and to maintain support for self-determination.

7. Morocco wishes to negotiate the issue with Algeria and will not talk to the Polisario. Algeria sees nothing to be gained by bilateral negotiations and publicly supports a settlement of the dispute by self-determination. The Algerians have been the Polisario's main international advocates and have provided them with arms, supplies and a safe base. They allow the Libyans to supply considerable quantities of arms and equipment to the Polisario across Algerian territory.

Personality Note

MOHAMED SEDDIK BENYAHIA

Born 1932. Took degree in law at Algiers University. Travelled widely in South East Asia and was for a time FLN diplomatic representative in Djakarta (1956). Visited London in 1957-8. Was a member of the FLN delegation at Evian (May 1961) and Lugrin (July 1961). Remained as Chef de Cabinet to Prime Minister and had a prime responsibility for overt and covert negotiations with the French which resulted in Evian agreement of March 1962. Appointed as Ambassador to Moscow in 1963. Agrément was given for his appointment as Ambassador in London in June 1965 but he never took up his post. Minister of Information and Culture 1966-70; Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research 1970-77; Minister of Finance from 1977-79. He became a member of the Bureau Politique in January 1979 and replaced Bouteflika as Foreign Minister in March 1979.

Skilled and experienced. Has a high reputation among young and intelligent Algerians. An intellectual and an authority on Marxism, but not doctrinaire. Has more political weight than his diffident manner would imply.

Not very communicative, but personally courteous and friendly. Frail, suffers from chronic amoebic dysentery. Has several English friends and likes England.

VISIT OF M MAHMOUD BENYAHIA

FOREIGN MINISTER OF ALGERIA AS A GUEST OF HMG

1 - 4 JUNE, 1980

The Foreign Minister will be accompanied by 5 officials.
An interpreter is being provided (Mrs M Dennis, MOD.)

Sunday 1 June

afternoon/
evening

Arrive London Heathrow Airport.

XX Sir David Muirhead, Special Representative
of the Secretary of State and Mr R S Faber,
HM Ambassador to Algiers, will meet.

Depart for Intercontinental Hotel.

Monday 2 June

1130

Depart Hotel for Foreign and Commonwealth
Office

1200

Talks with the Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs, The Rt Hon The Lord
Carrington KCMG MC.

1300 for
1315

Luncheon given by Her Majesty's Government
hosted by the Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs, The Rt Hon The
Lord Carrington, 1 Carlton Gardens.

1450

Depart for 10 Downing Street.

1500

Talks with the Prime Minister, The Rt Hon
Margaret Thatcher MP

XX If arrival after 2000 hours
Mr Hurd will meet.

/1620

1620 Return to Foreign and Commonwealth Office

1630 Call on Minister of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs, The Hon Douglas Hurd
CBE MP

Tuesday 3 June

Return to Hotel.

1030 Depart Hotel for Department of Trade and
Industry, 1 Victoria Street

1100 Talks with the Secretary of State for Trade
The Rt Hon John Nott MP and with the Minister
for Trade, Mr Cecil Parkinson

1215 Depart for Dorchester Hotel

1230 Lunch hosted by M Mahmoud Benyahia, Dorchester
Hotel, Pavilion Room.

1500 Depart for Foreign and Commonwealth Office

1530 Further talks with Secretary of State for
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, The Rt Hon
The Lord Carrington

Return to Hotel

1730. Depart Hotel for Churchill Hotel, 30 Portman
Square

1800 Reception for Arab Ambassadors. Host:
M Mahmoud Benyahia, Regent Suite

Return to Hotel

Wednesday 4 June

am Depart Hotel for London Heathrow Airport

/Special

Special Representative of the Secretary of
State and Mr R S Faber will bid farewell.

Visits Section
Protocol & Conference Department
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

30 May 1980

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30 MAY 1980

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JS

BF 30/5/80

27 May 1980

VISIT OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF ALGERIA

✓ The Prime Minister has seen your letter to me of 20 May about the visit to Britain of Mr. Mahmoud Benyahia. She has agreed to receive Mr. Benyahia at 1500 hours on Monday 2 June for thirty minutes. It would be helpful if a brief could reach me by close of play on Friday 30 May. ✓

ma

Paul Lever, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

KRR



Prime Minister

D

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

You could see him in the
afternoon of 2 June for
30 minutes. Agree?

Yes out
20 May 1980

1 line 2/5

Dear Michael,

Visit of the Foreign Minister of Algeria

The Secretary of State has invited the Algerian Foreign Minister, Mr Mahmoud Benyahia, to visit Britain. Mr Benyahia has accepted. The dates are likely to be 2-4 June. There has been some difficulty about agreeing the precise timing because the Secretary of State may be at the European Foreign Ministers' meeting on 3 June, but it is likely that he will have two sessions of talks with Mr Benyahia on the mornings of 2 and 4 June; calls on other Ministers are being arranged.

Algeria is an influential member of the non-aligned group and plays a substantial role both in the Arab world and in Africa. It is the second largest market in the Middle East. Our own relations with Algeria are insufficiently close. Algerian policy, hitherto less than helpful, is in a period of reconsideration now that President Chadli has become established following the death of President Boumedienne in 1978. Our trade has not developed as it should; business has been deterred by the difficulties of the Algerian market, some real and some imagined. There is a need for Government to put Algeria on the map.

Mr Parkinson paid a successful visit to Algeria in February with this in mind. Unfortunately, the Secretary of State's planned visit there had to be postponed. Mr Benyahia's visit should be something of a breakthrough, and will be important in setting the scene for the Queen's visit to Algeria in October.

There is no doubt that the impact of Mr Benyahia's visit both here and in Algeria will be greatly increased if he calls on the Prime Minister, and the Secretary of State hopes that the Prime Minister will agree to this. A call on the afternoon of 2 June or any time on 3 June would fit in well with the programme.

Mr Benyahia is a member of the top leadership in Algeria and is the main decision-maker in foreign policy. He is intelligent, though somewhat rigid in his views. He is likely to be sensitive to the importance he judges the British attach to Algeria and to his visit in particular.

Yours truly

Paul

(P Lever)
Private Secretary

M O'D B Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street

20 MAY 1980



