

PREM 19/380

Confidential filing

Call on the Prime Minister by M. Hakeb Bourguiba, son of the Tunisian president.

TUNISIA

February 1980

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
	29.2.1980						
	4.3.80						
	21.3.80						
closed		PREM 19/380					

file

ds

Tunisia

21 March 1980

Call by M. Habib Bourguiba

The Prime Minister has seen and taken note of your letter of me of 18 March giving the background to our reaction to the Gafsa incident.

MICHAEL ALEXANDER

Roderic Lyne, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

GB

CONFIDENTIAL



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

18 March 1980

Dear Michael,

Prime Minister

I will recall A. Bourguiba's

②

complaint

Call by M Habib Bourguiba

Ans 19/3

Thank you for your letter of 4 March about M. Bourguiba's call.

We are surprised at M Bourguiba's allegation that HMG failed 'to do anything or to express public concern' about the Gafsa incident. The logistic help given by the US and French Governments was in response to a specific request from the Tunisian government and we received no such request. Moreover, very few governments made public statements of support for the Tunisians. The US volunteered no immediate comment and only made a substantive statement when Mr McHenry visited Tunisia some weeks after the attack. The French reaction was equally low-key and concentrated on rebutting some of Qadhafi's wilder allegations about a French invasion. We know of no other statements issued by European countries and the other Arab states carefully avoided taking sides.

There were good reasons why we did not stick our necks out. Apart from risks to our interests in Libya we were genuinely unsure for several days about what had actually happened in Gafsa and how far the Libyans were involved. Moreover, in the absence of any request from the Tunisians, we thought they might not welcome an orchestrated Western outcry which could undermine Tunisia's position in the Arab world.

We will certainly now consider M. Bourguiba's request for help. We have just given clearance to the sale of the Blowpipe missile to the Tunisians, which can be presented as a response to M. Bourguiba's appeal. The proposed visit by the Lord Privy Seal to Tunisia in May and the State Visit by The Queen in the autumn (which we have not yet discussed with the Tunisians) will, of course, provide admirable opportunities to express our support for the regime.

yours ever
Roderic Lyne

(R M J Lyne)
Private Secretary

Michael Alexander Esq
No 10 Downing St
London

CONFIDENTIAL



1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

19 MAR 1980

at last set



Tunisia

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

4 March 1980

Dear Paul,

Call by M. Habib Bourguiba

M. Habib Bourguiba called on the Prime Minister, as arranged, yesterday afternoon. He was accompanied by the Tunisian Ambassador. Mr Moberly was also present. The meeting was almost entirely taken up with an account of the incident at Gafsa and of the Tunisian Government's reaction thereto. M. Bourguiba left with me a copy of the note from which he spoke and I enclose a copy. Since he spoke from it virtually verbatim, I will keep this account of his remarks relatively brief.

M. Bourguiba began by describing the attack at Gafsa. He said it had been carried out by 48 Tunisians who had gone to Libya illegally in recent years. The plan had been for the group to trigger off trouble in Gafsa and then to call for rescue by Libyan forces. It was a remake of Kabul. It had failed because the populace had failed to react as Colonel Qadhafi had expected. M. Bourguiba said that the rapid reaction of the French Government and, later, of the American Government had been helpful. He contrasted this with the failure of HMG either to do anything or to express public concern. (The Prime Minister said she was grateful to M. Bourguiba for raising the point about Britain's lack of reaction so frankly. She undertook to enquire as to why we had made no statement).

The consequence of the Libyan failure had been that Colonel Qadhafi had become even madder than he had been previously. He was running amuck. One example of this had been his statement that he was willing to wage war against France in order to help his Tunisian brothers against the French invasion.

Colonel Qadhafi was being supported in his hostility to Tunisia by George Habash and, in a more modulated manner by Algeria.

Tunisia had sought to react to the Libyan attack by activity in the OAU, which last month had implicitly condemned Libyan action; in the Arab League, the reaction of whose Foreign Ministers at their recent meeting had been disappointing; and through M. Bourguiba's own mission, which was intended to keep Tunisia's friends and the Non-Aligned Movement informed about what had happened.

/As regards

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

As regards the future, it was clear that Tunisia had to take preventative measures. Faced with a hostile neighbour on one side and an equivocal one on the other Tunisia needed to "buy some clothes" to cover her nakedness. M. Bourguiba drew some comfort from the fact that Tunisians of all shades of opinion had rallied round the Government in the face of aggression. To maintain this unity, however, it would be necessary to secure the success of Tunisia's programme of economic development. The Tunisian Government were therefore looking for bilateral assistance from France and other countries who believed in the need to preserve the only show window in that part of the world for the Western approach to the problems of post-colonial development. If the Government in Tunis were toppled, many others, e.g. in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula would follow. Bilateral assistance could take the form of military and intelligence assistance, economic aid and joint ventures and promotion of investment. Multilateral action might also be possible. A "post-Kabul" club had been formed to assist Pakistan. Could not a similar "pre-Kabul" club be formed to assist Tunisia? If the United Kingdom were to associate itself with such an idea, it would help other Governments to overcome their inhibitions about joining.

The Prime Minister expressed her gratitude to M. Bourguiba for the clarity with which he had presented his case. She undertook to look into the points he had made. I am sending under separate cover a dossier about the Gafsa incident which M. Bourguiba left with me.

Yours ever

Michael Alexander

Paul Lever Esq
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

CONFIDENTIAL

11 12 11 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

19 MAR 1980

CONFIDENTIAL

Tunisia



Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London SW1A 2AH

Telephone 01-

M O'D B Alexander Esq
No. 10 Downing Street

Your reference

Our reference

Date 29 February 1980

Dear Alexander,

1. Paul Lever has asked if we could let you have as soon as possible the brief for M. Bourguiba's call on the Prime Minister at 4.00 pm on 3 March.
2. I am therefore sending this to you direct and not through our Private Office.

Yours sincerely,

Douglas Hardie

PP. J M Crosby
Near East and North Africa
Department

CONFIDENTIAL

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London SW1A 2AA



Telephone 01

29 FEB 1980

Your reference

Our reference

29 February 1980

Date

12 11 10
9 8 7
6 5 4
3 2 1

M. O. D. Alexander
15, 16 Downing Street

Dear Sir,

1. I am therefore sending this to you direct and not through
our private office.
2. I am therefore sending this to you direct and not through
our private office.
3. I am therefore sending this to you direct and not through
our private office.
4. I am therefore sending this to you direct and not through
our private office.

John [unclear]
George [unclear]
M. J. Crody
New East and North Africa
Department

CONFIDENTIAL

BRIEF FOR CALL ON PRIME MINISTER BY M. HABIB BOURGUIBA JUNIOR

Points to Make

Concerned about recent events in Tunisia. We deplore any
external intervention in Tunisia's affairs.

Tunisian Government now seem to have everything under control.

Do the Tunisians believe that there may be further attacks?

How is the Prime Minister? Will he be fit enough to carry on?

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Essential Facts

1. M. Habib Bourguiba Junior has asked if he could call on the Prime Minister to deliver a message from his father, President Bourguiba of Tunisia. A personality note on M. Bourguiba is attached. The message will no doubt relate to the present crisis in Tunisian-Libyan relations.
2. M. Bourguiba has already been received by President Carter and President Giscard d'Estaing.
3. Tunisia is going through a period of some uncertainty with the President now in his 80s, the Prime Minister, Mr Nourira, having recently suffered a stroke and the Libyans attempting to subvert the regime. In this situation we believe it is important that we should show our solidarity with the moderate and pro-Western regime of President Bourguiba.

The Gafsa Incident

4. There was an armed attack on the mining town of Gafsa on 27 January by a group of Tunisians, trained and armed by the Libyan regime. The attackers expected the people of Gafsa to rise against the Tunisian Government but this did not happen and the Tunisian Government quickly killed or captured the rebels. The Tunisians were, however, badly shaken by the incident. The French and Americans immediately provided logistic support at the request of the Tunisian Government.

5. The Libyans have denied involvement but there is no doubt that they were behind it. Efforts are being made by the

/ Arab League

CONFIDENTIAL

Arab League to patch up relations between Libya and Tunisia, but a propaganda war continues.

Tunisian Prime Minister's illness

6. On the night of Monday, 25/26 February, the 69 year old Tunisian Prime Minister, Hadi Nouira, was taken ill with a stroke and went to Paris for treatment. He is the nominated successor to President Bourguiba, whose own health is not very good (he is in his 80s) and if he were not able to return to his duties a dangerous vacuum could result. The President has assumed the duties of Head of Government, but the total burden could be too much for him. Qadhafi is trying to take advantage of Nouira's illness, saying that his collapse means the end of confrontation with the regime, and that he would be willing to restore relations with a 'Government from the Opposition'. He adds that in the absence of such a Government, the confrontation will escalate.

CONFIDENTIAL

PERSONALITY NOTE

BOURGUIBA, HABIB JUNIOR

Special Adviser to the President since December 1977.


Born 1927. Son of President Bourguiba. Educated in Tunisia and Paris. 1956 - 64 various diplomatic appointments, including Ambassador in Rome, Paris and Washington. 1964 - 70 State Secretary and later Minister for Foreign Affairs. After a period of illness and political disfavour, he returned to the limelight in 1976 and since then has been clearly one of the most influential members of the Government.

Speaks very good English. A direct and friendly manner.

Married with three children.

CONFIDENTIAL

210



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

29 February 1980

Dear Michael,

Possible call on the Prime Minister
by M Habib Bourguiba

M Habib Bourguiba Junior, son of the Tunisian President, has asked to see the Prime Minister to deliver a special message from his father on Monday 3 March. He is at present in Washington where President Carter will be receiving him and he has already been received by President Giscard in Paris.

Tunisia is going through a period of some uncertainty with the President now in his 80s, the Prime Minister, Mr Nour, having recently suffered a stroke and the Libyans attempting to subvert the regime. In this situation Lord Carrington believes it is important that we should show our solidarity with the moderate and pro-western regime of President Bourguiba. Moreover, Habib Bourguiba Junior will be an important figure in Tunisia's future and it would be useful, as well as courteous, to receive him at the highest level. I attach a brief personality note.

Yours ever

Paul

(P Lever)
Private Secretary

M O'D B Alexander Esq
10 Downing Street
London

PERSONALITY NOTE

BOURGUIBA, HABIB JUNIOR

Special Adviser to the President since December 1977.

Born 1927. Son of President Bourguiba. Educated in Tunisia and Paris. 1956 - 64 various diplomatic appointments including Ambassador in Rome, Paris and Washington. 1964 - 70 State Secretary and later Minister for Foreign Affairs. After a period of illness and political disfavour, he returned to the lime-light in 1976 and since then has been clearly one of the most influential members of the Government.

Speaks very good English. A direct and friendly manner. Married with three children.

29 FEB 1950

10 11 12 11 12
9 8 7 6 5 4
8 7 6 5 4

