

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister

(2)

S/S

JORDAN/SYRIA

1. There have been substantial troop movements on the border before and during the Arab Summit now in its final stages in Amman. One and possibly two Syrian divisions have been moved to the border. But on present evidence I agree with HM Ambassador, Damascus, (Damascus telegram No 351) that we should not be unduly alarmed.

attached.

2. The following points are in addition to those in the Damascus telegram.

- (i) The Jordanians have told us that they expect Syrian-sponsored infiltration into Jordan in the near future.
- (ii) The Americans have told us that two groups of al-Fatah have already been infiltrated into Jordan from Syria and picked up.
- (iii) The US assessment on 26 July described the location of the Syrian 9 Division (believed to be joining another division on the border) as 'of critical concern'. They also envisaged the possibility of Israel taking the opportunity to attack Syria.
- (iv) Press reports are just coming in (pm 27 November) of a speech by King Hussein at the Summit in which he said that it was 'shameful that an Arab country should stab Iraq in the back' (an apparent reference to Syria); but the King went on to reaffirm support of the PLO.

Prime Minister

27 November 1980

R O Miles
Near East & North Africa Dept
W75 233 6048

copy to:

PS
PS/LPS
PS/Mr Hurd
PS/PUS
Sir J Graham
MED
PUSD
News Dept

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

GR 548

CONFIDENTIAL

FM DAMASCUS 271000Z NOV 80

TO PRIORITY F C O

TELNO 351 27-11-80

INFO PRIORITY AMMAN, TEL AVIV, MOJUK DI4, ROUTINE BAGHDAD,
JEDDA, BEIRUT, MOSCOW

SAVING TO WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK, TRIPOLI, ALGIERS,
UKREP BRUSSELS

MYTELNO 346: SYRIA/JORDAN

1. AS REPORTED SEPARATELY, A MILITARY BUILDUP ON THE SOUTHERN BORDER FACING JORDAN HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR SOME DAYS. IT IS CLEAR FROM THE POSITIONING OF THE UNITS AND FROM OTHER UNUSUAL FEATURES, SUCH AS THE DIGGING-IN AND CAMOUFLAGE OF TANKS AND THE PAINTING OF HEADLIGHTS, THAT THIS IS MORE THAN A ROUTINE MOVE TO REPLACE THE SYRIAN DIVISION NORMALLY STATIONED IN THIS AREA, WHICH HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED TO LEBANON. MOST OF THE UNITS ARE TO THE EAST OF DERA'A, SOME DISTANCE FROM THE ISRAELI BORDER AND OSTENTATIIOUSLY LINED PARALLEL TO THE JORDANIAN BORDER.

2. THE PRESIDENT'S COUNSELLOR FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS WAS OTHERWISE EVASIVE ON THESE MOVES WHEN I QUESTIONED HIM ON 25 NOVEMBER, BUT HE POINTEDLY DREW MY ATTENTION TO THE ABSENCE OF ANY ATTEMPT TO CONCEAL THEM. THE HEAD OF WEST EUROPEAN DEPARTMENT AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY GAVE ME A CATEGORICAL ASSURANCE ON 26 NOVEMBER THAT THE SYRIANS WERE NOT CONTEMPLATING ANY MILITARY ACTION AGAINST JORDAN, DESCRIBING THE MOVES AS PART OF A "WAR OF NERVES" AND A RESPONSE TO JORDANIAN MILITARY DEPLOYMENTS NEAR THE SYRIAN BORDER (IE PRESUMABLY THE MOVE FROM 21 TO 23 NOVEMBER OF THE JORDANIAN 60 ARMoured BRIGADE REFERRED TO IN AMMAN TELNO U2G OF 23 NOVEMBER).

3. THE SYRIAN PRESS HAS BEEN MAKING BELUCIOSE NOISES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AMMAN SUMMIT, CLAIMING SYRIAN READINESS TO REACT VIOLENTLY TO PLOTTING AND WE HAVE HEARD THAT KHADDAM MADE SOME THREATS DURING THE PREPARATORY MEETINGS. THE OPENNESS WITH WHICH THE MOVES HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT DURING DAYLIGHT NEVERTHELESS LENDS WEIGHT TO MY ASSESSMENT THAT THEY ARE PRIMARILY PRESENTATIONAL RATHER THAN OPERATIONAL, AND DESIGNED TO PUT PRESSURE ON THOSE MEETING IN AMMAN NOT TO FORGET SYRIA IN THEIR DISCUSSIONS. MY AMERICAN COLLEAGUE SHARES THIS ASSESSMENT, ALTHOUGH HE HAS POINTED OUT TO WASHINGTON THAT THERE IS A ONE IN TEN CHANCE THAT THE SYRIANS MAY BE CONSIDERING

CONFIDENTIAL

/ SOME OFFENSIVE

Duty Clerk

No 10

FLASH

CONFIDENTIAL

SOME OFFENSIVE ACTION, SUCH AS ARTILLERY BOMBARDMENT OR A QUICK SKIRMISH AGAINST REAL OR PRESUMED MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD TRAINING CAMPS.

4. LOGIC IS A POOR GUIDE IN THE MIDDLEEAST. BUT IT SEEMS TO ME INCONCEIVABLE THAT THE SYRIANS WOULD MOUNT OVERT MILITARY ACTION AGAINST JORDAN, FOR WHICH THEY ARE ILL-PREPARED AND AT A TIME WHEN THEIR SAUDI PAYMASTERS ARE IN CONFERENCE THERE. THERE IS ALSO A PARADOXICAL RESTRAINT IMPOSED BY THE SYRIAN-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP TREATY. WE HAVE HEARD THAT KUZNETSOV IS DUE HERE ON 1 DECEMBER FOR THE EXCHANGE OF INSTRUMENTS OF RATIFICATION. IN SPITE THE REPORTED DETERIORATION IN JORDANIN-SOVIET RELATIONS (AMMAN TELEGRAM NO 482 TO YOU), IT SEEMS MOST UNLIKELY THAT THE SYRIANS WOULD MOUNT AN OPERATION AT THIS POINT WHICH WOULD CAUSE GRAVE EMBARRASSMENT TO THEIR SOVIET PARTNERS.

5. THERE IS CERTAINLY AN ELEMENT OF SPECIAL PLEADING IN JUWEIJATI'S CLAIM (PARA 2 ABOVE) THAT THESE MOVES ARE IN RESPONSE TO JORDANIAN MILITARY REINFORCEMENTS NEAR THE BORDER. I CONCLUDE NEVERTHELESS THAT WE SHOULD NOT BE UNDULY ALARMED BY THEM, AND THAT THEY PREIMARILY REFLECT SYRIAN NEUROSIS ABOUT JORDANIAN (AND IRAQI) INTENTIONS.

F C O PLEASE PASS SAVING TO WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK, TRIPOLI, ALGIERS, UKREP BRUSSELS.

WRIGHT.

[REPEATED AS REQUESTED]
[THIS TELEGRAM WAS NOT ADVANCED]

MIDDLE EAST STANDARD
NEWAD MAED
MED ES & SD
NAD ERD
UND ECON D
EESD CONS D
ECD CONS EM UNIT
WED CABINET OFFICE
RID

ADDITIONAL DISTRIBUTION
ARAB/ISRAEL DISPUTE