

COVERING SECRET

3 (4)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

9 March 1982

Prime Minister



Dear John,

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A.S.C. 3

I enclose a copy of Douglas Hurd's report of 3 March to Lord Carrington, describing his recent visit to Bahrain, North Yemen, Oman and Qatar. You may wish to show this personal account to the Prime Minister.

Yours ever

John Holmes

(J E Holmes)  
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq  
10 Downing St

mf


COVERING SECRET

Secretary of State

Mr. Hurd  
file

Secretary of State

cc: Lord Privy Seal  
 Mr Luce  
 Lord Trefgarne  
 PUS  
 Mr Wright  
 Mr Moberly  
 Mr. Myers

Splendid  


BAHRAIN: 22 AND 26 FEBRUARY

The Ruler, Shaikh Issa, was, as always, benign and full of generalities. He received me with his brother Khalifa, the Prime Minister, and his son Hamad, the Crown Prince and Minister of Defence. After the attempted coup last December internal security is at the top of their minds. Ian Henderson (intelligence chief for 15 years) does not believe the Iranian-trained revolutionaries will try again in Bahrain. He admires in general the political skills of the ruling family but is less sure that either the Prime Minister or the Crown Prince are up to the top job. In this I think he is right. The two men are not on good terms. The Saudis are pressing for harsh measures against those being charged for the December plot, and against the Shias in Bahrain in general (more than half the population). This would probably be a mistake. Henderson is also worried about left-wing subversion inspired from Damascus. But in general I would guess that the ruling family still have a fair run ahead of them. The Foreign Minister, Mohammed bin Mubarak, is an exceptionally articulate and moderate Arab, and we should I think pay him marked attention - he could one day prove a useful interlocutor.

NORTH YEMEN: 23-26 FEBRUARY

2. On a second visit this country is even more amazing - scenery, architecture, squalor. We drove into the streets of Sana'a at 4 am through packs of baying dogs and half a dozen checkpoints manned by sleepy teenagers with loaded Kalashnikovs. The old quarter, street after street of tall highly-decorated stone fortresses, is unique in the Middle East. This time we flew to the southern city of Taiz, sprawling over the foothills of a splendid mountain, and drove back through sensational wild country.

3. More amazing, but not really more important. Despite the endless and complicated to-ing and fro-ing of internal restlessness the political and military situation is much the same as two years ago. And the seemingly absurd contradictions remain. Large tracts of mountain are still controlled by the National Democratic Front, backed by Libya and the PDRY. The President still wavers between a policy of bashing and conciliating. The Russians still supply arms to enable the Government to check these friends of Russia. The PLO (this is new) have a team of

/officers

officers trying to patch up local ceasefires. The YAR is still in theory negotiating on unity with the PDRY, while in fact bitterly opposed to it. With probably a million Yemenis sending home the inflated incomes they can still earn in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, the shops are even fuller of consumer goods (video cassettes on sale in the villages) while the Government has no funds to pay the teachers' salaries. Three-quarters of the people still chew qat all afternoon, with profound and fairly disastrous effects on the whole economy.

4. The President was touring the Gulf for funds to pay for the second Five-Year Plan. Everyone else was most friendly and welcoming. The Prime Minister was particularly good news - perky and articulate. I think we should ask him here.

5. But I do not think we need spend too many sleepless nights over the Yemen. I would be inclined to drop the idea of a naval base or other ambitious triangular schemes. I doubt if they will work. Nor is there cause for panic. The Yemenis have shown themselves capable of balancing the Saudis, the Russians, the Chinese, etc etc, with much skill, getting something from each. I suspect this will continue indefinitely. It is a substantial country with a lot of people by Middle East standards, and we should keep our end up with practical aid schemes on the present lines, emphasising agriculture. The experimental farm I visited, run by half a dozen British experts, was very impressive and represents just the kind of help which can benefit the people directly. The Yemenis are grateful for the modest amount we do for them.

6.

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OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

OMAN: 27 FEBRUARY - 1 MARCH

7. Within hours a visiting British Minister becomes immersed in the inner political life of Oman, which makes this a different country from any other in the Middle East - more like Iraq or Egypt in the 1930s. This is fun but hazardous. My separate talks with the Sultan, Zawawi, Creasey, and Yusuf Alawi (effectively the new Foreign Minister) covered the same problems, but each had his own angle. It was characteristic that while Creasey was describing in his saltiest style his plans for the future of the armed forces, a telegram was brought into the room to me describing Landon's exactly opposite views expressed to John Moberly in London.

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S E C R E T

8. We seem to have reached roughly the following stage on defence. The Sultan and his advisers are looking for the right balance between the Americans, the Gulf countries and ourselves. They believe that after a bad start Weinberger's visit went well, and that Weinberger himself understands the need for discretion in building up the agreed American facilities and planning the occasional exercise. There is no need now for trilateral talks, though the Sultan said there might be very quiet and restricted discussions later on, perhaps in London. Meanwhile he has accepted Creasey's ideas for a request (to be put to us during the State Visit) that we define more exactly than I did in December what we would do for Oman in peace and war. The suggestions as outlined by Creasey are skilfully tailored to what we would obviously do anyway, and I hope we need not make heavy weather of them. The Americans are likely to say an eager 'yes' to the corresponding request to them.

9. The Gulf countries may produce quite large sums for Oman's defence budget after the Gulf summit in November if the recent GCC mission's recommendations are accepted. These helpful recommendations are not linked to any weakening in the Sultan's pro-Western stance. Privately they advised him to replace his British commanders, but he told them this would not do.

10. Intrigue is endemic to Oman, and to the Sultan's way of doing business. He has shown courage in getting rid of the corrupt Chief of Police. It is too early to assess Zawawi's move out of foreign affairs. It is true that he told me some time ago that he wanted to give up this part of his work. The test of his present standing is whether he will still be consulted on defence and security matters. My guess is that he will. The new man at Foreign Affairs, Yusuf Alawi, is young, rather silent, dignified; I like him. Creasey loves a scrap, and keeps several going at any one time. He has won more than he has lost, and is enormously enjoying both his present Indian Army lifestyle, and the discomfiture of what he regards as the corrupt old gang (Landon, Zawawi) who but for him would (he thinks) have sold the Sultan out to the Americans.

11. Qaboos too was in excellent form, much better than in December. His eyes sparkled at the thought of the State Visit.

12. We scrambled over the rocks and mud of the university site, did what we could with Zawawi on the big power station, and on Sunday had a picnic lunch by a mud village near Nizwa destroyed by the RAF in the late fifties.

QATAR: 1-2 MARCH

13. All very friendly, and no real problems. All the Gulf states are bearing a heavy financial burden supporting Iraq against Iran. The Ruler cross-examined me rigorously about the war (why don't we stop it?) and the low price of gas (why don't we stop the

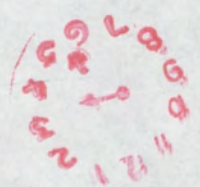
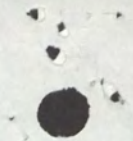
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Soviet pipeline?) I asked him to London in November, and discussed defence sales and cooperation with his two sons. The Qataris are evidently worried by the declining price of oil. We share this market with the French and are not doing too badly. The most likeable of the Gulf States west of Hormuz.

*Douglas Hurd.*

Douglas Hurd

3 March 1982



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