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Prime Minister (2)
Re Foreign Secretary

personal account of
his Middle East
visit. CAB
4/6.

PM/029/90

PRIME MINISTER

Visit to Jordan and Saudi Arabia:

30 May - 3 June

1. The two Kings, though very different, share a melancholy approach to life, in contrast to President Mubarak's chirpiness. But even allowing for this, their analysis, endorsed by their Ministers and leading citizens, was deeply worrying. They see the peace process grinding to a halt, with no prospect of an Israeli government willing to talk to valid Palestinians, and the Americans failing to grasp the full danger. King Fahd was more complimentary about Bush and Baker than King Hussein or indeed Prince Saud, but even from him the main message was that Europe should urgently make a proposal on Arab/Israel which would guide the Americans. Both stressed the need to support Arafat and prevent the PLO slipping back into rejection of the peace process, though the Jordanian Ministers were scathing in private about the way he missed his chances. The danger if the peace process stays stalled used, of course, to be a communist advance. Now, and perhaps more lethally, the danger comes from fundamentalism. Perhaps the most vulnerable dominoes are the Palestinian leadership in the Occupied Territories, Algeria and Jordan itself. Certainly the warning signs are present in all three.

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2. King Hussein, of course, has his own problems. He was more robust about his experiment in democracy than his Ministers, but like them preoccupied with Palestinians, running costs and the debt. He wants to turn his army into a professional force so that he can screen out the unreliable soldier who is now conscripted. He cannot do this until he can provide adequate pay, but as things stand he cannot even pay for fuel for his fighters. He and his Ministers were reasonably sanguine about the financial undertakings given in private at the Baghdad Summit by the Saudis and the other Gulf states, but having now listened to the Saudis on the same theme, I am less so. I did my best to urge his case in Jeddah, but we shall hear more of this. I had several open talks with Field Marshal Shaker and the Foreign Minister, Qasem. They hunt together, being able, loyal and sceptical East Bankers, fighting a series of rearguard actions against democracy, Palestinians and Saddam Hussain.

3. King Fahd and his Ministers went out of their way to be welcoming, and I do not doubt that Al Yamamah plus much hard work by yourself, Geoffrey Howe and others have put us on a high plateau of trust with the Saudis. This is a tremendous asset which we must do our utmost to maintain, both in the defence and commercial fields, and by taking seriously Saudi worries about the region. The King will pass through London on his way for treatment on his knees in the US. He moves with difficulty and his health must be in question, though he spoke vigorously for 70 minutes without stopping. The Foreign Minister, Prince Saud, is exceptional, and I hope you would see Prince Naif, Interior Minister for fourteen years and one of the King's full brothers (with whom I signed our first

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Middle East drugs agreement), if we can get him to accept David Waddington's invitation for the autumn. Offset for Al Yamamah seems to be developing quite well, and there are no major bilateral problems.

4. Back, alas, to Palestine. The Israelis made quick, shrewd use of the terrorist attempt on their coast last week. The resulting American veto, the criticism of the US at the Baghdad Summit, the continuing political impasse in Israel have all built up the tension, so that King Fahd compared the Middle East to a man about to strike a match. I will discuss this week with Jim Baker and the Europeans the best way of getting round this corner. We may need to be more active at the UN.

5. A postscript in advance of your visit to the USSR. King Fahd is sending a million copies of the Koran to the Muslims in the Soviet republics, and money to repair mosques. Jedda is the headquarters of the World Islamic Conference of 46 countries. The question in their minds is whether the Soviet Muslims will be given freedom or be driven to seize it. Although the Saudis support the fundamentalists in Afghanistan, I do not think they want that pattern repeated across Central Asia.

DH.

(DOUGLAS HURD)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
4 June 1990

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