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Defense: May 79 Sale
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Middle East Situation
May 79

RECORD OF A DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND KING HUSSEIN
OF JORDAN AT 10 DOWNING STREET ON 20 SEPTEMBER 1979 AT 1800 HOURS

Present:

Prime Minister	King Hussein of Jordan
Mr. J.C. Moberly	Sherif Abdul Hamid Sharaf
Mr. Michael Alexander	Sherif Zeid bin Shaker
	H.E. Ibrahim Izziddin

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The Middle East Situation

King Hussein said that he thought there was a growing understanding of the need to take another look at the situation in the Middle East. The Camp David process had reached the limits of its possibilities. Mr. Strauss would get no further. Egypt had already exceeded all the limits of what might have been expected. The prestige of the United States had suffered greatly. What was required was a different approach. It would need to involve other nations and the Palestinians themselves. In this way a means of extricating the United States from its present position might be found. The Jordanian Government was in direct touch with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO).

The Prime Minister asked whether there were any signs that the PLO were prepared to place less reliance on terrorism and more on negotiation. She was one of those who recoiled somewhat from the idea that the PLO should be accepted as the sole representative of the Palestinians. Were there no spokesmen who were not terrorists? King Hussein said that he had been trying to distance the PLO from some Arab states and also to make them more representative of the Palestinians as a whole. He had recently been pleasantly surprised by the attitude being adopted by the PLO. Their approach was more mature than in the past. They had raised specific issues with him, particularly in relation to the future relationship between a West Bank controlled by the Palestinians and Jordan. King Hussein said that he was unwilling to take the lead in the discussion of future options. He was for Palestinian self-determination. Whatever the Palestinians decided the Jordanian Government would accept. He was

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was very ready to pursue the dialogue with the Palestinians and had told them he awaited their proposals about the future. Mr. Arafat had said the previous day that he intended to resume discussion of this subject as soon as King Hussein returned from the General Assembly. The Prime Minister asked whether King Hussein would accept a loose federal relationship between the West Bank and Jordan. King Hussein said that the relationship would certainly pose problems for Jordan but that his people felt very close to the Palestinians. They had a duty to them, as members of one family, to aid them in seeking the recovery of their land. Sherif Abdul Hamid Sharaf said that the Jordanian Government was willing to consider any relationship with whatever entity resulted from the free choice of the Palestinian people. The King was prepared to give this message to everyone.

The Prime Minister asked how progress could be made in the immediate future. King Hussein said that he was trying to formulate the new Arab position. He hoped that a cross-section of Arab representatives would soon be able to discuss together how far Resolution 242 was still valid; what changes should be made in it; and what principles a new settlement should incorporate. He thought this work could be done reasonably quickly. He intended to bring forward in New York the outline of a new Resolution or at least the principles on which it might be based. He did not wish to push ahead too rapidly. Indeed, he had been urging on the PLO for some time the need to go slowly in order to avoid a confrontation with the United States and a possible veto on a Resolution incorporating moderate Arab views. The Prime Minister agreed about the need not to make matters too difficult for the United States.

The Prime Minister asked whether the PLO still had difficulty in recognising publicly the right of Israel to exist. King Hussein said that there had to be a balanced approach to the problem. On the one side the Israelis had to recognise the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination and agree to withdraw from the occupied territories; on the other side, the Palestinians would have to recognise the right of Israel to exist. Sherif Abdul Hamid Sharaf said that King Hussein had been focussing on moderating the position of the PLO. The Palestinians had for many years asserted their rights to all the territory of Israel. The acceptance of an Israeli

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state, eg through an amended Resolution 242, presented major psychological and political difficulties for them. However, they were moving in that direction. So was Arab opinion in general as could be seen by the contrast between the present position and that at the time of the rejectionist Arab summit a year ago.

Sherif Abdul Hamid Sharaf went on to say that there was, however, another side to the question where European Governments, and in particular the United Kingdom, could help. The necessity for Israel to accept the right of the Palestinians to self-determination had not been sufficiently stressed. If Western Governments did not try now to break the deadlock there was a risk that the opportunity would be lost. The present powerlessness of the United States increased the significance of Europe's position. The United Kingdom had been lagging behind some of its partners. If the United Kingdom were to push in the direction of a more explicit recognition of Palestinian rights and of the need for Israel to move, this would be of great assistance. If Israel came to realise that the position of her principal supporters in Western Europe and North America was shifting, this would make an enormous difference.

The Prime Minister said that she had told Mr. Begin during his visit to London that political autonomy on the West Bank was meaningless unless it meant autonomy over the territory as well. However, it was very hard for the Israelis, after generations of suspicion, to adjust to a new situation. It was difficult for them to believe that the Arabs genuinely accepted their right to exist. But a stable solution to the problems of the Middle East was of the greatest importance both for the West and for Israel itself. Jordan's doubts about the Camp David process appeared to have been justified and another approach might have to be found. If there were to be mutual assurances about self-determination for the Palestinians and Israel's right to exist they would have to be given simultaneously.

The Prime Minister asked King Hussein about the American position and his Government's contacts with the United States. King Hussein said that, as a result of Camp David, the United States was no longer able to play its proper role in the Middle East.

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Their political and material commitment to Israel was too great to enable them to be neutral. It would be a service to them to find a new approach. Sherif Abdul Hamid Sharaf said that the Jordanian Government had been promised by President Johnson that the United States would throw its weight behind the implementation of Resolution 242 but nothing had happened. They were now therefore less interested in formulations than in intentions. What was needed were binding commitments. Recent contacts between the United States and Jordan had been difficult and unsatisfactory. There had been a good deal of confusion.

The Prime Minister asked whether the Jordanian Government had given any thought to the details of the self-determination process. What question would be put to the Palestinians; would the process be in one or more stages? Many Western Governments would, for instance, be happier if they knew that the results of self-determination would be a federal relationship between the Palestinian West Bank and Jordan. King Hussein said that this would be a question for negotiation. The Jordanians had written a paper on the subject. They had discussed this with the United States before Camp David. They had come to the conclusion that there were dangers in being too specific. The King did not dissent when the Prime Minister said that she had the impression the Jordanian Government were thinking in terms of a two-stage process ie agreement on withdrawal and self-determination followed by a decision about the nature of the Palestinian administration. Sherif Abdul Hamid Sharaf said that agreement on the basic issue would create a new climate. But he said that if Jordan were to be asked to take responsibility for the Palestinians, Jordan would need to be strengthened. He did not see any difficulty, however, in principle about developing a programme to absorb the Arab labour at present being employed on Israeli construction projects.

Sherif Abdul Hamid Sharaf concluded the discussion of the Middle East problem by reiterating that Jordan hoped for the help of the United Kingdom in pushing for an alternative approach to the problem. This approach should have concern for the Palestinians at its heart. The PLO had agreed not to force the issue. They were willing to accept co-existence with Israel but now they wanted to know what to do next. A special effort was needed.

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Tanks

The Prime Minister referred to the discussion which Sherif Zeid bin Shaker would be having at the Ministry of Defence the following day about the sale of British tanks to Jordan. She said she was anxious to see the negotiation successfully completed. HMG were prepared to supply the tanks at cost price. The Prime Minister said she was advised that an agreement could be concluded. It was her wish that it should be concluded. She wished to see the historic ties between the United Kingdom and Jordan in this field restored. She intended to ask later the next day about the progress that had been made. Sherif Zeid bin Shaker said that he hoped it would prove possible to complete the negotiations at his meeting.

He said that his Government were also looking for political agreement on the despatch of a number of British training missions to Jordan. He envisaged the training teams spending six months to a year in Jordan. The details could be worked out after the decision of principle had been taken. The Prime Minister said she favoured the idea and would take an interest in the progress of the discussions about it.

The discussion ended at 1910.

Handwritten signature

20 September 1979

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

20 September 1979

Dear Paul,

King Hussein's Call on the Prime Minister

King Hussein of Jordan called on the Prime Minister at 1800 this evening as planned. I enclose a copy of the record of the discussion.

I am sending a copy of this letter and its enclosure to Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

Richard Alexander

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Paul Lever, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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