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Cc Middle East Pt 3
Situation

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RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND KING HUSSEIN OF JORDAN HELD AT 10 DOWNING STREET AT 1730 HOURS ON WEDNESDAY 28 MAY 1980

Present: Prime Minister King Hussein
Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Ambassador of Jordan
Mr. M.A. Pattison

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The Arab/Israel problem

The Prime Minister invited King Hussein's views on the Middle East situation after the expiry of the 26 May deadline. King Hussein said that all he had foreseen in his last discussion was evolving. The deadline would come and go with no solution. On the ground, the situation was worse than ever. Tensions in the occupied territory had heightened still further. The idea of self-government was even further off than before, and hopes and aspirations had collapsed. United States credibility had continued to disappear in the area. For the Arab and Muslim nations, their natural place was with the free world, but they were now in a state of confusion. It had been his hope that, if 26 May passed with no progress, even the United States would see a European initiative which they could support as serving their best interests. He had been invited to Washington in June and had accepted.

The Prime Minister reported that the Egyptian Vice-President had been in London the previous day. The Egyptians were upset by the Knesset move on Jerusalem. They were not proposing to continue with the autonomy talks. The Vice-President had understood that President Carter would attempt to persuade Mr. Begin to give an undertaking that there would be no change in status before the talks were concluded. He hoped that something might come of this in the next few days. If that failed, the Egyptians would try to find other initiatives to avoid leaving a vacuum. The Prime Minister had spoken of the possibility of European moves, but had explained her understanding that any move for a United Nations Security Council resolution would be vetoed by the United States. King Hussein had serious doubts about the possibility of President Carter obtaining an undertaking from Mr. Begin. But if that failed,

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this would simply demonstrate still further the current weakness of the United States. The Prime Minister asked what would happen if there was no movement on the diplomatic front. King Hussein said that the occupied territories could erupt with very little further provocation. This would lead to bloodshed and chaos on a scale which none of the parties concerned would wish to see. For example, towns were now under martial law for days on end. The tensions were not confined to the issue of settlements. Rumours and intelligence available to the Jordanians also suggested that the Israelis were planning further military action in Southern Lebanon beyond the current UN lines. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary suggested that neither Egypt or the United States had any viable alternative other than the pursuit of the autonomy talks. Neither might expect significant progress from them at present, but the run-up to the US election illiminated any other action. Israel might now feel that it had obtained all that it could from the talks. The Prime Minister commented that only the United States could pressurise Israel. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that there was no future in a UN resolution, if this would lead to a US veto, when only the US ultimately had the means to solve the problems. King Hussein did not want to see his country's friends embark on a course which could not produce results. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary commented that the US had not only lost face and credibility, but had antagonised the Arab world as a whole. It ran the risk of encouraging more of the Arab world to look to the USSR. In the period until the US Government could then become active after their election, there was a dangerous gap which mischief-makers might try to fill. Britain and other Western allies could only try to paper the cracks in the interim. Although there were occasionally suggestions that President Carter would attempt to take a firmer line with the Israelis after the US primaries, this seemed out of the question unless both US presidential candidates could share an approach. The US system did not encourage this.

The Prime Minister commented that there had been a similar position before the previous US election, when the problem had also required urgent attention. During King Hussein's last visit, they had discussed alternatives for the West Bank. She doubted whether enough had yet been done to sort out the various possibilities.

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She recognised the difficulty of preparing definite options, because much had to be left to evolve in the negotiations. But there was room for more work. On his last visit, King Hussein had spoken of the possibility of a loose federation with Jordan: it was after all Jordanian territory which had been annexed in 1967. King Hussein believed such an arrangement possible for the future. He and Mr. Arafat had several times discussed future arrangements. The ties between Jordan and Palestine were great. There would remain a problem of borders and Jordan had a need for and right to the same kind of border guarantees as the Israelis. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary commented that the Israelis would never accept an outside guarantor, but would need to be confident in their own security. This would require some kind of demilitarisation of the West Bank. The Prime Minister saw little prospect of genuine mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO; but if this were ruled out, there was no real hope for a solution. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that genuine recognition would be a long, slow process. Aims would have to be established and all would have to recognise that much time would be needed to achieve them. King Hussein said that every passing day added to the difficulties. For Jordan, there was no picture of the future. In the meantime, there were pressures in all directions. He had, for example, recently found that the PLO had been under intense pressure from Libya, and he had had to open doors to the more responsible element in the PLO to counter this. Jordan wanted Palestine to exist as a force for peace, but was given no prospect of moving in that direction. The Prime Minister said that Israel would argue that any Palestinian state would be a Marxist vehicle. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary commented that current Israeli policies only tended to make this more likely.

King Hussein said that Jordan had tried all avenues since 1957, but had found no room to manoeuvre. The basic ingredients were lacking. If Jordan were to decide to join the negotiations, there was a real risk of self-destruction, creating what Israel feared most, an extremist take-over in both Jordan and Palestine. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary recognised that King Hussein could not volunteer the federation idea: it had to evolve through

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the PLO, from discussion of self-determination. King Hussein said that, in speaking of self-determination, Jordan had always been confident that the result would move in the direction of some link with Jordan, and some promise of stability. When hope was absent, extremists thrived. The Prime Minister said that she had always stressed to the Israelis that the denial of legitimate rights bred terrorism. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary speculated that Mr. Weizman's recent resignation might be a sign of some new internal political development in Israel. It was possible to visualise a Perez/Weizman coalition being pushed in the right direction. But this kind of speculation was unacceptable in Israel.

The Prime Minister asked what could now be done. By the time King Hussein visited the US, President Carter would know whether he had made progress with Mr. Begin. King Hussein said that the Middle East were very much expecting a European initiative. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that a declaration might cover the political rights of the Palestinians, self-determination, Jerusalem, and the settlements issue. But the declaration was unlikely to have a lasting impact: there should be some other activity. The Ambassador said that a framework for action was necessary. The Prime Minister said that most countries in the area had recognised the PLO as the sole negotiator. This created great difficulties for some countries. Was there no-one else, less identified with terrorism, to whom they could talk? King Hussein said that the US and Israel knew that he could have got the Palestinians to agree that he could speak for them. Jordan had been ready to accept its responsibility. But Jordan could not bargain over basic rights in the territory. If Resolution 242 were implemented, Jordan could act as an intermediary for the PLO and for the Arab world. But they had no basis on which to act. Jordan had tried to secure worthwhile commitments from the US after Camp David, but the US could offer nothing, after all the time which had passed and all the attempts which had been made. The Prime Minister noted that the withdrawal provisions of Resolution 242 had not been implemented. After 13 years, there was some tendency to forget the pre-1967 structure of the area. But Resolution 242 recognised that the West Bank was not part of Israel, and by

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implication that it was Jordanian. Jerusalem and Palestine tended now to be seen as part of Israel. The US had given up much of its bargaining power, Egypt had got what it most wanted, and as a result the rest of the Arab world was alienated. The Israelis were in the territory, and apparently in no hurry to pursue changes. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary noted that the Western world were likely to be the greatest sufferers from the lack of movement. Mr. Begin had crossed the most difficult hurdle by opening discussions with the Egyptians. It now seemed that others were needed to follow this lead.

The Prime Minister said that a European statement might not contribute much to the situation but few other practical steps seemed to be open. King Hussein, apologising for the naivete of his question, asked whether Jordan and Britain were meant to be friends and partners or not. Why should Britain and the Europeans always follow in US footsteps? The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary acknowledged that a sensible step would be an even-handed Security Council resolution, supplementary to 242. But the US had warned that it would veto any resolution however sensible. Thus, while the tabling of a resolution might be a signal to the moderate Arabs, it would gain little more, and would be most damaging in the US pre-election campaigning. It could drive the candidates to give undertakings which would tie their hands for a long period after the election. There seemed little prospect of making progress with either candidate in the electoral period. Some European diplomatic activity seemed to be indicated. King Hussein said that Jordan was fighting despair in the area. This created ideal conditions both for the local radicals and for potential Russian influence. The Prime Minister said that King Hussein's talks with President Carter^{would} come at a valuable time, between the European Council and the Venice Economic Summit. The European declaration should have been settled by then, and work would be in hand on the follow-up. It would be most helpful to learn of the outcome of the King's discussions in Washington. King Hussein said that he would inform the Prime Minister from Washington of what had happened, and would endeavour to call in London on his way back.

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Other Middle East problems

In response to the Prime Minister's question about Saudi Arabia, King Hussein said that many Saudis realised that they had overlooked any relation to Britain. He sincerely hoped for a normalisation of relations before long. He found the mood in the country a little more relaxed. Saudis were beginning to address themselves to their internal problems, but not much had yet happened and the dangers remained. There was still hostility towards Saudi Arabia in the rest of the area. He saw little significance in Prince Fahd's New York Post interview, and had not interpreted it - as suggested by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary - as an olive branch to Egypt. The Gulf was nervous about the future. Iraq seemed to be interested in returning its relationships to a more natural plane, as they prepared to host the non-aligned summit. In the area as a whole, the communist threat helped to encourage people to stand together. In respect of Algeria he had great faith in the President's wisdom and good sense, but was not sure that he had yet consolidated his position. He was still puzzled by the grouping of Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Libya and Syria.

The meeting concluded at 1830 hours.

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29 May 1980

As you know, King Hussein of Jordan called on the Prime Minister yesterday afternoon.

I enclose a copy of the record of that meeting.

I am sending a copy of this letter and enclosure to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. A. PATTISON

Paul Lever, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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