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SUBJECT

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND KING HUSSEIN OF JORDAN AT NO. 10 DOWNING STREET ON 8 APRIL 1981 AT 0930 HOURS

Present:

Prime Minister	King Hussein
The Hon. Douglas Hurd MP	His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Izziddin (Jordanian Ambassador)
Mr. M. O'D. B. Alexander	

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US/Jordanian Relations

The Prime Minister asked whether Mr. Haig's visit to Jordan had been successful. When she had herself been in Washington in February, she had told President Reagan that relations between President Carter and King Hussein had not been good and that the US should make an effort to improve them. King Hussein said that Mr. Haig's visit had been a very good one. There had been a full discussion of the problems in the area and the threats to it. He had had the impression that the Prime Minister's visit to Washington had had a great impact on those whom she had met there. There seemed to be an entirely different atmosphere. The Prime Minister said that the visit had gone off well. The new Administration wanted advice and were prepared to consult right across the board. Mr. Haig had appeared keen to get to grips with the situation in the Middle East. Had he given any hints to King Hussein as to how he intended to proceed? King Hussein said that Mr. Haig seemed anxious to learn about the situation in the Middle East from the leaders involved. He did not think that the Americans would elaborate a new policy until these exploratory discussions had been completed. But they clearly recognised that Communist influence in the area was of great concern and that the Palestinian problem lay at the root of the instability in the region.

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/ Arab/Israel

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The Arab/Israel Dispute

King Hussein said that the Arab/Israel dispute was responsible for the divisions within a people whose background and traditions would place them naturally in the free world. He had made it plain to Mr. Haig that he was deeply grateful to his European friends for their Middle East initiative. It had helped to prevent the further polarisation in the area which was sought by the Zionists and the Communists. This polarisation posed a great danger. A spark in the Middle East could set off an explosion which would destroy the world. Europe's policy had given the Arabs the possibility of hope for the future. The United States should welcome this. They should also welcome the opening it gave to them to educate US opinion about what was happening. The Prime Minister recalled an earlier conversation with King Hussein in which he had said that there was no-one in the United States putting the Arab case. The new Administration were very conscious of this.

The Prime Minister said that it was not easy to envisage the next steps towards a solution of the dispute. Mr. Van der Klaauw was pursuing his discussions. But he was not a very dynamic character. She would have wished that it had been possible to make more rapid progress with the clarification of attitudes commissioned at Venice. Everything in fact depended on how the US saw the way ahead and with whom they intended to deal.

King Hussein said that he had discussed this with Mr. Haig and had told him that the Palestinians would have to be involved. He was keeping in close touch with the moderate Palestinian leadership. Unfortunately they were to some extent hostages of events. Great pressures tending to the destruction of the moderate leadership were building up. The moderates had asked him to suggest to the Prime Minister that she should consider using him as a channel for communication. This would enable contacts to be

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kept out of the public eye. The Americans themselves had said that at some point, perhaps before very long, they would like to make contact with the PLO, perhaps through the Jordanians or the Saudis. King Hussein said that he had stressed the need for the Americans to avoid dealing with "anyone who comes along". The Prime Minister said that she thought the idea of using King Hussein as a channel of communication was a good one. The US and British Governments had the same difficulty about contacts with the PLO: they gave rise to pressure from the Jewish community and from Israel. Mr. Hurd asked whether it would be possible to prevent the Palestine National Council, which was due to meet shortly, giving rise to the usual kind of inflammatory statements. Could King Hussein do anything? King Hussein said that he would try. Since the meeting was being held in Syria, the Council would be under considerable pressure. Nonetheless, he was not hopeful.

The Prime Minister asked whether there was any sign of an alternative group of Palestinian leaders emerging. She recalled a previous conversation with King Hussein in which he had told her that the Israeli Government were preventing this. King Hussein said that attempts to encourage such a group continued. The overwhelming majority of Palestinians were anxious for a lasting and honourable peace. There was a continuing struggle between the moderates and other elements. In reply to a question from the Prime Minister about the longer-term objectives of the PLO, King Hussein limited himself to saying that his Government's contacts with the PLO were very promising. The Prime Minister asked whether the PLO would continue to cause difficulties even after a solution to the main problem had been found. Would they, for instance, try to stir up trouble in the Gulf? Would they continue to be under the influence of the Soviet Union? King Hussein said that only very small groups were under Soviet influence. The majority of the Palestinians were very responsible. Although Israeli policy encouraged extremism, he could not see that the majority of the Palestinians would, if given the opportunity, choose anything other than peace, freedom and prosperity.

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The Prime Minister said that she thought we were now at the beginning of a period of a year or 18 months when a solution in the Middle East might become possible. Nothing would happen until after the Israeli election but then the United States would make its move. It would not be easy to choose the right direction but President Reagan and Mr. Haig would want to make real progress. (The assassination attempt would have enhanced President Reagan's authority - assuming he emerged fit and well.) The European initiative had been meant to prevent the development of a vacuum and to give Europe influence on the United States. There must be no competition between Europe and the United States. They would have to work together to help the countries in the area find a solution. It would be important to recognise that the Arab/Israel dispute and the difficulties in the Gulf were part of the same problem. The Americans had a tendency to parcel things up separately and to ignore the links between them. She had told President Reagan that it would not be possible to ignore the Palestinian issue in dealing with the Gulf. King Hussein said that if anyone could influence President Reagan, it would be the Prime Minister. The United States had lost a great deal of ground during President Carter's Administration. The period needed for the new Administration to organise itself was likely to be a dangerous one. The Prime Minister commented that she was sure King Hussein and President Reagan would get on very well together.

Syria

Mr. Hurd asked about Syria's attitude to Middle East peace efforts. Were they likely to veto attempts to make progress? King Hussein said that he found the present policy of the Syrian Government "deeply shocking". They seemed to live for today and give no thought to the longer term. They had signed a treaty with the Soviet Union after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The treaty was in some ways worse than similar ones signed with the Soviet Union by other Arab countries. Syria's attitude towards Middle East peace efforts was obstructive to progress of any kind. Their

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performance in Lebanon was "unbelievable". Their intention appeared to be to keep the country destabilised in order that they could bargain over its future. This had created the danger of intervention by Israel. Relations between Syria and Jordan had seriously deteriorated. Syria was a negative influence in the region as a whole.

The Prime Minister asked whether Syria's policy reflected the country's internal problems. King Hussein agreed that these were very serious, but said that they were not an excuse for turning guns on innocent people. Syria had become, like Libya, an arsenal. Who was the arsenal to be used against? The Prime Minister asked whether she was right in thinking that the situation on Jordan's border with Syria had been defused for the moment. King Hussein agreed that this was so but added that the Syrian build-up continued and that tension might well be renewed at some stage. The reason for Syria's attitude lay in Jordan's support for Iraq. Jordan had had no option but to offer this support. Iran's activities were a threat to the whole region. Exacerbation of the divisions between the Sunni and the Shia would have terrible consequences. It would be far worse than Northern Ireland.

Iran/Iraq War

The Prime Minister said that she could not at present see any end to the hostilities between Iran and Iraq. King Hussein said that one might have hoped that the war might have led to the coming to power of patriotic elements in Iran but this had not so far happened. The situation was in some ways rather ominous. No way forward would be possible unless there was a cease-fire, but this posed great difficulties. He had visited the battlefield himself and had seen that the terrain would make it impossible for Iraq to withdraw from its present positions except on the basis of a lasting solution. There was nowhere for them to establish defensive positions between their present lines and the

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border which would place the Iranians once again within a few miles of Baghdad. The Iraqis claimed that they had no desire to humiliate Iran. But if no solution was found, the Iraqis might have no choice but to push further.

The Prime Minister said that renewed hostilities between Iran and Iraq would be a cause for great concern. They would bring to an end present efforts to restore the supply of oil from the two countries. This would have a very bad effect on oil prices and, therefore, on efforts to bring the recession to an end.

UK/Iraq Relations

The Prime Minister said that the visit to London by the Iraqi Foreign Minister had been very successful. It was clear that the Iraqi Government were anxious to distance themselves from the Soviet Union and improve their relations with the West. Closer relations should be certainly be possible. She was most grateful to King Hussein for the help he was giving in our discussions with the Iraqis about the supply of military equipment. She was also grateful for the King's help in securing the release of Mr. Sparkes. King Hussein said that the Iraqis had also been pleased by the outcome of the Foreign Minister's visit. Their mood was now very anti-Soviet. He hoped that Iraq would develop into a positive force in the area. This would be very helpful in counterbalancing the influence of Syria.

Rapid Deployment Force and the Gulf

The Prime Minister said that she had been upset by the reception given to the remarks she had made in the United States about the Rapid Deployment Force. The RDF was basically a good idea. She hoped that the United States would go ahead with its establishment. If they did, the United Kingdom would make a modest contribution. The fact was that

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the world was now a "kaleidoscope of hostilities". One never knew where trouble might break out next. Of course she had in mind the possibility that the trouble between Iran and Iraq might spread to the Gulf. But equally there might be problems in Africa or anywhere else. Those directly concerned would of course have to rely on themselves in the first instance. But they would also need their friends. If there were an RDF in existence, one could react. If there were not, one could not. No-one, of course, was asking for stationing rights.

King Hussein indicated that he agreed. Jordan had been preparing herself to offer help within the limits imposed by her means. There were two aspects to the present situation - in the first place there was the need to make progress on the question of Palestine (the Prime Minister interjected that this was the main problem); beyond that there was the general polarisation of the region. The Soviet Union was, of course, anxious to gain control of the energy resources there. This danger was already on the doorstep. The Arab countries had a duty to defend themselves. But it had been recognised at the recent Arab Summit that it would take Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States a long time to develop a capability to defend themselves. If there was a Soviet move, the Arabs would need more than their own strength.

North Yemen

The Prime Minister asked whether there was anything new to be said about the situation in North Yemen. King Hussein said that the Saudis continued to deal with the situation in the wrong way. They wanted to control what happened in the YAR but they did not want to create a strong state because they feared it would pose a threat to them. Jordan remained very close to the country's leadership but they no longer had the same kind of involvement there as they had had in the past.

/ Egypt

Egypt

The Prime Minister asked whether relationships between Egypt and the other countries in the region were improving. King Hussein said that relations with Sudan had been restored. He added that if Egypt were prepared to rest content with what it had already achieved with Israel and would stop trying to determine the future of the Palestinians, this would be very helpful.

Tornado

The Prime Minister commented that King Hussein would shortly have the opportunity to fly Tornado. She was very anxious to push ahead discussions on the possible sale. She thought that the Federal Republic would "come to an accommodation". The German Government had been rather slow to move but she did not anticipate any overriding difficulty. It would be helpful if King Hussein could make his views clear to the Chancellor. Chancellor Schmidt had his own problems, but she was sure that he would come along once he realised that there was a real interest on the part of the Arabs. Mr. Hurd said that there was something of a chicken-and-egg situation but that the omens were quite good. King Hussein said that the Prime Minister's messages had been relayed to the other Heads of Government concerned. The position of the Federal Republic would be crucial. The fact that the Saudis were having difficulty over the purchase of the Leopard tank and that the Iraqis had been denied the supply of a number of helicopters already contracted for by the Germans was unhelpful. King Hussein added that the prospect of a new air superiority fighter based on Tornado was very exciting. A particular attraction would be that the project was conceived of as an all-British one.

/ Prime Ministerial

Prime Ministerial Visit

The Prime Minister said that she was very much looking forward to her visit to the Gulf. King Hussein said that he was sorry not to be receiving the Prime Minister in Amman. The Prime Minister said that when she came to Jordan it would have to be a visit specially for that purpose.

The discussion ended at 1030.

8 April 1981

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Jordan

8 April 1981

Call by King Hussein

King Hussein of Jordan called on the Prime Minister this morning. Mr. Hurd was also present. I enclose a record of their discussion.

I am sending copies of this letter and enclosure to Brian Norbury (Ministry of Defence) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

MICHAEL ALEXANDER

F. N. Richards, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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