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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND
KING HUSSEIN OF JORDAN AT 10 DOWNING STREET ON WEDNESDAY,
28 OCTOBER 1981 AT 1200 HOURS

Present:-

Prime Minister	King Hussein
Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary	General Khammash
Sir John Graham	H.E. Mr Ibrahim Izziddin
Mr. M.O'D. B. Alexander	

AWACS

The Prime Minister commented on the great efforts being made by President Reagan to secure the passage through the Senate of the agreement to sell Saudi Arabia AWACS. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that it now looked as though the President might win. King Hussein questioned whether it would be altogether disastrous if the President were to lose. The Prime Minister asked whether defeat in the Senate would not be humiliating for both President Reagan and the Saudi Government. King Hussein replied that the humiliation had already occurred. If the Senate approved the sale, it would of course be the end of a period of agony. But if the sale was rejected, the US Administration might be prompted to consider a different approach to the problems of the Middle East. They might ask themselves who had more authority, President Reagan or Mr. Begin. The Prime Minister commented that King Hussein seemed to be ready to make a virtue of whatever decision was reached by the Senate.

Sinai MFO

The Prime Minister asked the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to explain the situation on the Sinai Multilateral Force. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that the British Government had been put in a difficult position. The

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

Americans had asked Australia, New Zealand and Canada to contribute to the Force. The Australian Government had, in effect, invited their Press to ascertain whether or not Australian participation would be acceptable to the Australian public. Public opinion polls had appeared to suggest that 80 per cent of the Australian electorate disliked the prospect. As a result the Australian Government, and subsequently the New Zealand Government, had said that they could only contribute if HMG also did so.

The Americans had then approached the UK. We had made it clear to them that we had hoped not to be asked. We pointed out the difficulties which participation raised for us and said we could only consider joining in if our European allies were also involved. Egypt had asked France who, somewhat surprisingly, had agreed. Italy had volunteered. Both had made UK participation a condition of their own participation. The situation therefore was that unless we agreed, the five others would refuse. We should then be accused of sabotaging the return of Arab land to Arabs. After some hesitation, we had decided to make a contribution. We were doing so:-

- (a) because we wanted to see Sinai returned to Egypt; and
- (b) because, in our view, our support for the arrangements could be differentiated from our attitude towards the rest of the Camp David process.

The statement which the four participating Governments would be issuing would be explicit on the latter point and would make it clear that we saw the return of Sinai in the context of Resolution 242 and its declaration that the acquisition of territory by war was inadmissible. We considered our position would be respectable and defensible. Crown Prince Fahd and Prince Saud, to whom the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary had spoken in Cancun, had been inclined to accept that our participation in the arrangements would be tolerable provided we, and our European partners, distanced ourselves from Camp David.

CONFIDENTIAL

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E. R.

CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

It would of course have been better if we had not been asked to provide a contingent. But if we had refused we would probably have lost our ability to influence the United States in the future. Moreover it was possible to perceive a slight shift in the position of the US Administration towards the PLO. President Reagan had referred to the PLO while he was in Cancun. Insofar as his position had moved, this was probably due to the activities of Mr. Begin. If the MFO could be successfully launched and if there could be general acceptance of Principle 7 in Crown Prince Fahd's list, a situation might be created in which it would be possible for the United States to enter into overt contact with the PLO. The Prime Minister said that the difficulty about the MFO had been that everyone's participation had depended on that of the UK. She herself had protested at the situation in which we had been put and had stressed the special nature of our position in the Middle East.

But it had become clear that a UK presence, however small, was needed to give respectability and stability to the arrangements. We had therefore agreed. There was now a need to build on this to secure a shift in American opinion. King Hussein indicated that he understood the arguments advanced by the Prime Minister and by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary. He regarded it as essential that there should be no link between this limited action and the Camp David process. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary confirmed that the statement to be issued by the participating Governments would be explicit on this point.

US Policy on the Middle East

King Hussein said that he regarded his impending visit to Washington as the most important he had ever made. He was going to see if there was any basis for progress. President Sadat's death had been due to his inability to carry out the programme he had laid down, e.g. in his appearance before the Knesset. He had been frustrated and let down by Israeli intransigence. Events on the ground bore no relation even to those agreements which had been reached. Israeli policy on settlements was an obvious example. It was now being claimed in Israel that there was no Palestinian problem, only a Jordanian problem. The tilt towards

CONFIDENTIAL

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E. R.
CONFIDENTIAL

- 4 -

Israel in US policy had to be corrected. Since Camp David it had been impossible for anyone to act independently or for those in the area to act as intermediaries. Hence the welcome accorded to the efforts of the Europeans at Venice and subsequently. If the US was determined to forge ahead on its own, an impossible position would be created. He hoped therefore to find out whether they were interested in seeking the help of others.

The Prime Minister said that she did not think the autonomy negotiations would get anywhere. She thought that King Hussein would receive a more sympathetic hearing from President Reagan himself than from Mr. Haig and his officials. King Hussein said that he had been told that President Reagan would listen. He hoped to be able to get him to do so. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that Mr. Haig had no idea what he was going to do if the autonomy talks failed. King Hussein therefore had a good opportunity to implant new ideas in President Reagan's mind. There was a blank sheet on which to write.

King Hussein said that he had heard that even before President Sadat's death Egypt had had no proposals for further action before April next year, i.e. after Israel had withdrawn from Sinai. This would have been a disaster itself. The initiative always seemed to be in the hands of the trouble-makers. He himself had written to President Mubarak to wish him well. He had suggested that President Sadat was a victim of his inability to implement his programme in full. He had urged President Mubarak to avoid giving legitimacy to any approach which would deny the rights of the Palestinians generally or of the rest of the Arabs in Jerusalem. He was anxious to see Egypt back in the Arab family. He had offered President Mubarak a dialogue. So far he had had no reply. The Prime Minister said that the re-opening of a dialogue between Egypt and Jordan could be very important. Sir J. Graham asked whether, if Egypt indicated that she was ready to re-join the fold, the other Arabs would be prepared to accept the results of the "normalisation" of Egyptian relations with Israel, e.g. the

CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENTIAL

- 5 -

presence of the Israeli Embassy in Cairo. King Hussein said that this was indeed a major difficulty. He did not know the answer to the question. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary wondered whether Israel in the event would hand back Sinai or whether they would be nervous about the freedom of action which the return of the territory would give to Egypt. Again King Hussein said that he was uncertain as to the answer.

King Hussein said that he did not see why the United States could not open direct contacts with the PLO. He had said as much to ex-President Nixon recently and had asked him to convey the message to the US Administration. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that some prior move by the PLO would be necessary. The Americans were formally committed not to talk to the PLO unless and until the PLO had renounced terrorism and accepted Resolution 242. Hence the United Kingdom's efforts to break the log jam. King Hussein said that two of the principles left behind him by Dr. Kissinger had been unhelpful. He had asserted:-

- (a) that a strong Israel would also be responsible; and
- (b) that there should be no contacts with the PLO unless the conditions mentioned by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary had been fulfilled.

There was now no reason why the Americans should not talk to the PLO. The Prime Minister commented that President Reagan would encounter major difficulties at home if he were to meet Yaser Arafat. Those difficulties might be less if he were, for instance, to see some of the Palestinian Mayors. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that sooner or later the Americans would have to talk overtly to the PLO. They had already done so privately.

King Hussein said that the tragedy was that American attitudes towards the area were so superficial. The strategic consensus was unreal. It was important that the Americans should not "smother" Egypt. The Foreign and Commonwealth

/Secretary

CONFIDENTIAL

Secretary said that President Reagan and Mr. Haig had a different sense of priorities from others. Mr. Haig in particular saw the problem in the Middle East primarily as one of global strategy. He thought in terms of the Soviet intervention of Afghanistan, of Islamic fundamentalism and so forth. He regarded the Arab/Israel dispute as secondary. This was of course wrong. The Arab/Israel dispute was crucial. If it could be resolved, other problems might become easier to deal with. A powerful speech by King Hussein pointing this out might be helpful. The Prime Minister said that the Arab/Israel dispute served, if anything, to increase Soviet influence in the area. It was a pity that security considerations made it so difficult for President Reagan to visit the Middle East. She agreed with the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary that it would be an excellent idea if King Hussein were able to put specific propositions to the US Administration. The Arab case had never made the impact which it should in the United States. This was part of the reason for the trouble with the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary suggested that it would be helpful to think in terms of a timetable. Perhaps nothing should be attempted until the autonomy talks had collapsed and Sinai had or had not been returned to Egypt. But could not the Arabs as a whole issue a statement along the lines of Prince Fahd's seventh principle recognising the right of all states in the area to exist in peace. If the PLO would associate itself with this statement the US could take it up as evidence of a PLO willingness to recognise Israel and talks could get underway with the PLO.

/The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister suggested that Israel would do its best to prevent the autonomy talks from collapsing. Sir J. Graham agreed. He thought that Israel's approach, under the influence of Mr. Sharon, would be relatively subtle. They would try to keep the talks with Egypt going. They would talk about autonomy leading to self-determination even if in fact they saw it as autonomy leading to incorporation. The whole issue might lead eventually to further elections in Israel. The Prime Minister observed that she had never believed there could be such a thing as autonomy of a people without their having autonomy over the land which they inhabited. Sir J. Graham said that the Americans had regarded the transition from autonomy to self-determination as more or less self-evident. However Mr. Begin did not. Mr. Sharon was now trying to set up what might, somewhat unkindly, be described as a "quisling" group on the West Bank. This attempt would no doubt fail but it had to be given a chance to do so. The Prime Minister said that any form of interim government was bound to fail. Sir J. Graham said that Mr. Begin, like Mr. Ian Smith, might not realise this. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that he doubted whether the Israeli ideas would ever get off the ground. King Hussein agreed.

The Jordanian Ambassador said that it was vital that Egypt should not sign any agreement with Israel related to autonomy. The Egyptian Foreign Minister had seemed very forthcoming after his recent visit to Israel. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that if Egypt did sign anything, it would be the end of any chances of a rapprochement between Egypt and the other Arab nations. King Hussein said that an entirely new approach was needed. President Mubarak must not give legitimacy to a process which had no chance of success. The Prime Minister said that she thought an Egyptian agreement with Israel would isolate President Mubarak and indeed put his life in jeopardy. She wondered whether Mr. Haig understood this. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that unfortunately the Americans regarded the autonomy talks as all that was available to them. They preferred to have something rather than nothing.

King Hussein then reviewed the problems in the area as a whole. He mentioned, in rapid succession, Mauritania, Libya, Sudan, South Yemen, North Yemen, Lebanon, Iran/Iraq, the Gulf and even Greece.

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He stressed the need for American understanding if these difficult problems were to be tackled successfully. The Prime Minister said that she was sure he would find President Reagan receptive. The President had to work under the limitations imposed by Congress and by the views of his electorate. The Israelis were, of course, excellent lobbyists. Nonetheless, if President Reagan could be brought to understand the Arab case, he would take action. No doubt the Saudis would already have put much of the case to him. King Hussein said that the Saudis were extremely polite, so much so that they failed to put their arguments convincingly. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that they were so polite that they often left a misleading impression. King Hussein said that he doubted whether the Saudis would ever provide a rallying point for the Arabs as a whole. But they would "go along" if matters could be put on a better course. The Prime Minister asked whether the Gulf Co-operation Council could not play a role. King Hussein said that the next summit might be helpful. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary asked about the meeting at Fez. King Hussein, while acknowledging that the meeting would be very important, said that he did not know what would happen there. The Prime Minister noted the co-incidence of dates with the European Council Meeting and said that those involved in the two meetings should try to keep in touch.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that the problem with the Americans was they still did not appear to understand the extent to which they were alienating the moderate Arabs. King Hussein should try to persuade them of this. Sir J. Graham said that the Americans did not realise that leaders like King Hussein and King Khalid had problems of public opinion to deal with. They tended to regard Middle East governments as autocracies which could ignore the views of their citizens. If one forced one's friends to do unpopular things, eventually one undermined them. King Hussein said that he agreed fully. This had, of course, been President Sadat's problem. The handling of the question of Jerusalem was important in this context. Jerusalem mattered to all Arabs. It could never be merely the capital of Israel.

Sudan

Sir J. Graham drew attention to the problems of the Sudan.

He said that these were primarily economic. Events had forced Sudan into the Egyptian camp. As a result the Sudanese Government was being kept at arms length by the other Arab governments. This was a very short-sighted policy. If President Nimeiri did not get financial assistance, he would be forced to take extremely unpopular measures. The Sudanese economy should, eventually, be a relatively strong one. What he needed now was money to tide him over a difficult period. King Hussein agreed about the nature of the problem. The Prime Minister asked whether food aid would be any good. Sir J. Graham said that it ought to be possible for the European Community to make sugar available to him but there would be difficulties with other sugar producers. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that in any case we must make sure that some of the Community's recent food aid package went to the Sudan. Sir J. Graham said that it would be more helpful if other Arab governments, like Saudi Arabia and Iraq, could be more generous and consistent with their assistance. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that he would mention the matter to the Saudis during his visit next week.

The discussion ended at 1250.

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28 October 1981

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28 October 1981

King Hussein

I enclose a record of the conversation which took place here earlier today between the Prime Minister and King Hussein.

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Francis Richards, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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