

COVERING CONFIDENTIAL



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

6 May 1983

A. J. C. Esq.

Dear Sir,

I enclose a copy of Sir James Craigs's despatch from Jedda. Although ostensibly about Mr Pym's visit there, it ranges considerably more widely than this and is both interesting and very readable.

Yours ever

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. E. Holmes'.

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

COVERING CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

SAUDI ARABIA : THE SECRETARY OF
STATE'S VISIT, MARCH 1983

SUMMARY

1. The visit had been postponed from January by the Saudis because of our refusal to receive a PLO member in the Arab League's delegation to London. The vehemence of the Saudi reaction was strange, for our policy on the PLO was not new. But King Fahd's personal disappointment with us reflected very strong public opinion throughout the Kingdom (paragraphs 1 - 4).
2. The situation was retrieved by patient and skilful British diplomacy in London and Rabat. As a result the Saudi Foreign Minister pressed the Secretary of State to take up the renewed invitation as soon as possible. The welcome in Riyadh was warm. The PLO problem was never mentioned. (Paragraphs 5 and 6).
3. The whole episode was irrational, a spurious crisis with a spurious solution. The Saudis praised the reception we gave to the delegation in London; but we had not changed our attitude at all and the delegation's visit was totally unnecessary anyway. (Paragraph 7).
4. We have not solved the problem of our relations with the PLO - only postponed it. The episode will be held against us when the Arabs find it convenient to do so. (Paragraph 8).

CONFIDENTIAL

(4)

Prime Minister



As usual with
James Craig, a
good read.

A.T.C. 5/5.

With the compliments of
HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S
AMBASSADOR

I am not meant to
have this, but the P.M.
might like to see it.

JEDDA

Handwritten scribbles and numbers, including "13" and "5" with a diagonal line through them.

Mr Coles



BRITISH EMBASSY

JEDDA

026/1

26 April, 1983

The Right Honourable
Francis Pym MC MP
etc etc etc

Sir,

SAUDI ARABIA: THE SECRETARY OF
STATE'S VISIT, MARCH 1983

1. The visit which Your Excellency paid to Riyadh from the 8th to the 11th of April had originally been planned for January. But it had been postponed by the Saudis because of a disagreement between us over the arrangements for the reception in London of the Arab League Delegation which had been commissioned to come and explain the decisions taken by the Arab Summit at Fez in September 1982.
2. Like the Americans, but unlike the French, the Russians and the Chinese, Her Majesty's Government had refused to accept the inclusion within the Delegation of a member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). The Arabs had privately agreed to veil this refusal by replacing the PLO member, for the visit to London only, by a prominent Palestinian who was not a member of the Organisation. But they had later withdrawn their agreement when it was made public by an indiscreet Arab diplomat. Various Arab leaders,

/among



among them King Fahd, had pressed you, at very short notice, to change our long-established policy on contacts with the PLO and receive the whole Delegation as it stood. You had suggested in turn that the PLO representative could be received provided that the governments constituting the Delegation would authorise the issue of a statement offering the conditional recognition of Israel and rejecting the use of terrorism. This alternative was indignantly refused by all, and in the case of the Saudis the indignation was given concrete form by the postponement of your visit, even though it had been arranged at their invitation.

3. I confess that though I had expected the Saudis to refuse your proposal, I had not foreseen the vehemence in which their refusal was couched. Though they later claimed that it was the tactics of our proposal that angered them rather than our basic policy, and that a straight refusal to receive the PLO would have been preferable to an offer of acceptance on humiliating terms, I do not believe them. It is true that the episode was not an example of British diplomacy at its most adroit; but the core of Saudi opposition was not to our ploys and manoeuvres but to our strategic attitude towards the PLO. That attitude may have been nuancé but it was not new. It had been maintained, and publicly declared, over a period of several years and it had not been challenged by the Saudis during several visits

/by



by your predecessor and one by the Prime Minister. King Fahd regarded the unanimous endorsement of his peace plan by the Arabs at Fez as a victory for his personal diplomacy; and it was natural that he should be disappointed by our inability to support him in the sequel. But it was depressing that the Saudis, famous for their moderation and for their avoidance of flashy gesticulations, should lead the pack in an unnecessary and unprofitable attack upon us.

4. It is tempting to guess that they were seeking to gain some easy credit with the extremist Arab governments, to whose reproaches they are more accustomed than to their praise. But I must record that in their action against us King Fahd and his Government were faithfully reflecting public opinion in this country. Never, except over the wretched affair of the television film in 1980, have I known criticism of us so unanimous, so universal and so outspoken. Meanwhile the Americans, whose position on the same issue was much less favourable to the Arab side than was ours, escaped virtually scot-free. Alas for the illogic and inconsistency of human affairs.

5. There followed a period of protracted and exasperating negotiations between Her Majesty's Government on the one hand and King Hassan of Morocco, leader of the Arab side, on the other. In that, thank Heaven, this Embassy had no part to play. But since I have dared to be obliquely

/critical



critical of our earlier diplomacy, I should now express my admiration for the monumental patience and longanimity displayed by Your Excellency and your Department, and for the urbanity under intolerable provocation of Her Majesty's Ambassador at Rabat, during those negotiations. They reached a truly triumphant conclusion when the Arab League Delegation was finally brought to London by King Hussain of Jordan, on whom the leadership had been dumped at the last moment by King Hassan with a stunning insouciance and irresponsibility. One of my colleagues said a long time ago that our real interest in the survival of King Hussain is that he is the only Arab who can be relied upon to behave with dignity, courage and good sense and thus win support from British public opinion for the policies which we judge to be right.

6. During the Delegation's stay in London the Saudi Foreign Minister renewed his invitation to you to visit the Kingdom and pressed you to come soon. It is typical of this infuriating country that it then took a fortnight to get agreement to the dates; and equally typical that, when you came, the arrangements should have been generous and the welcome warm. You were received by all the leaders who count: the King, the Crown Prince, Prince Sultan, Prince Naif, Prince Saud; and there was a large and notable attendance of dignitaries at the dinner given in your honour. The

/coffee



coffee drunk and the ice broken during those meetings will stand us in good stead later. The discussions have been reported separately. I need here only remark the astonishing fact that not once during the whole visit was our attitude to the PLO even mentioned.

7. Altogether a strange and slightly discouraging story for one who pins his hopes on human rationality. We for our part, having been unable to receive, for example, Mr Khalid al-Hasan of the PLO, warmly welcomed the Palestinian Professor Walid al-Khalidi, although there is between their political views scarcely a theological hardsbreadth. Professor Khalidi, a strong and sour critic of our policies, was by all accounts entranced by the Prime Minister's exposition of them. The Saudis, having bitterly attacked us for refusing to receive a member of the PLO, lavishly praised our traditional British flexibility, our skilful diplomacy, and our historical understanding of the Palestine problem, though we had not deviated one inch from our original position. Moreover, the ostensible purpose of the Delegation's visit to London was to explain to us decisions which had been taken at a meeting held six months earlier and which had been explained, analysed and interpreted a thousand times already. It was a spurious crisis ended by a spurious solution. I am neither so foolish nor so innocent as to fail to recognise the inevitability of these capers in modern diplomacy (or in ancient diplomacy, for that matter) or to ignore their usefulness. But sometimes they distract us from the real issues - and they distract the wretched Arabs

/even



even more. So Your Excellency will, I hope, permit me to feel a little sad.

8. One final word: there may be a tendency to think that, having solved this difficulty, we have won great credit with the Saudis and can now exploit it. We have not, and we cannot. The problem of our relations with the PLO, behind all the flummery, is a real one. We have papered it over, but it will not be forgotten. It has been taken down and at difficult moments will be used in evidence against us.

9. I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives at Washington, Tel Aviv, Rabat, Tunis, Cairo, Amman, Damascus, Kuwait, Doha, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi and Muscat.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

with the utmost truth and regard,
Your Excellency's most humble
and obedient servant,

James Craig