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10 DOWNING STREET

12 September, 1983

From the Private Secretary

cc AP
cc MOD
DTI
CDL
CO
SW

Top copy filed
on Middle East
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S/S

Dear Brian,

POLICY ON THE MIDDLE EAST

On 9 September the Prime Minister held a meeting at Chequers to consider the Government's policy towards the Middle East in the next few years. A list of those attending the meeting is enclosed with this letter. A paper by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was before the meeting. The purpose of this letter is to record the conclusions reached. These were as follows.

It was more important to concentrate on the realities of the situation than to think in terms merely of improving our posture. Equally, while we could usefully seek to bring our influence to bear on others, notably the United States, that would be effective only if we had reached a clear view of the fundamental problems and the possibilities for making progress in solving them.

With regard to the Arab/Israel dispute, it was clear that the United States was most unlikely to bring pressure to bear on Israel to change its policy, e.g. in respect of the West Bank, before the American presidential elections were over. But the United Kingdom could perhaps play a useful role in preparing the US Administration so that it was ready to exert new pressures on Israel after the elections.

It was noted that our consultations with the United States Government on the Middle East had become routine in nature and that they needed to take place at a higher level. Further thought should be given to this in connection with the Prime Minister's forthcoming visit to Washington.

Given the instability of surrounding countries, the importance of stability in Jordan had increased. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary was invited to prepare a paper on ways in which we and our allies could help to ensure that the integrity and stability of Jordan were preserved in the coming years.

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The importance of Syria was noted. It was recognised that attempts to make progress which ignored Syria were unlikely to succeed and that there might be value in carefully timed high level contacts with the Syrians (though these would be difficult while the current situation in Lebanon persisted).

The Gulf remained an area of considerable interest to Britain. More contacts with the Gulf States, and with the Middle East generally, especially where these would help to promote trade, would be worthwhile.

As regards the Iraq/Iran war, we should not take steps in our relations with Iraq which would inhibit the development of better relations with Iran in the longer term, for Iran was strategically more important. But we should, of course, avoid indicating publicly a preference for Iran because of the implications for our interests in the Arab world.

It was noted that contingency planning was in hand with regard to the possibility of Iran closing the entrance to the Gulf as a reaction to the supply by France to Iraq of Super-Etendards.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence), Jonathan Spencer (Department of Trade and Industry), Alex Galloway (Office of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

John

John

B. Fall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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1430 MEETING

Prime Minister

Rt. Hon. Sir Geoffrey Howe, MP

Rt. Hon. Baroness Young

Mr. Richard Luce, MP

Sir Antony Acland

Sir James Craig

Mr. S.L. Egerton

Rt. Hon. Michael Heseltine, MP

Mr. Geoffrey Pattie, MP

Mr. John Stanley, MP

Sir Clive Whitmore

Rt. Hon. Cecil Parkinson, MP

Rt. Hon. Lord Cockfield

Sir Robert Armstrong

Mr. David Goodall

Sir Anthony Parsons

Mr. Robin Butler

Mr. John Coles