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RECORD OF CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND KING HUSSEIN  
AT No. 10 DOWNING STREET ON FRIDAY 13 MAY AT 1000 HOURS

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Present

Prime Minister  
Mr. Hurd  
Mr. Coles

King Hussein  
Jordanian Ambassador

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The Prime Minister said she would be grateful if King Hussein could give his impressions of the current situation in the Middle East.

King Hussein said that he had not yet seen the text of the agreement reached between Lebanon and Israel. Mr. Shultz had promised him a copy and had explained its contents. It provided for total Israeli withdrawal from the Lebanon and a Tripartite Committee under Lebanese Chairmanship to supervise implementation. Some aspects of the agreement gave rise to concern, for example, the provisions for gradual normalisation of trade. But under the circumstances it was probably the best agreement that could have been achieved.

While he had been in London, the Lebanese President had been in touch with him to seek his full support. As soon as the agreement was signed, it would be presented to the Lebanese Parliament for approval.

The Prime Minister said that we were watching Syria's role with considerable anxiety. King Hussein said that he did not know what had transpired during the visit of the Syrian President to Saudi Arabia. The Syrian attitude was traditionally negative and they were probably hoping to extract further aid from Saudi Arabia in return for any movement. The Prime Minister commented that Syria always seemed to be an obstacle to progress - it was hard to believe that their actions were entirely independent. Mr. Hurd said that Syria was dependent on the Soviet Union for armaments and on Saudi Arabia for money. Which did the King think was the strongest influence? King Hussein replied that it was the Soviet Union which influenced Syria more. Agreeing, the Prime Minister said that a threat was always more

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influential than generosity. She wondered whether the point would not be reached when the Saudis would have to cease being generous towards Syria. Mr. Hurd said that the trouble was that the Saudis were ambiguous. They had allowed Syrian spokesmen to claim <sup>that</sup> Saudi Arabia agreed with Syria in its attitude towards the Lebanon/Israel agreement. King Hussein said that he wondered whether the Russians were merely concerned at present to demonstrate that they retain influence in the Middle East or whether they were putting strong pressure on Syria to reject the agreement. The truth was that the only alternative to agreed withdrawal was for Lebanon to be divided between Israel and Syria. That would be very dangerous and would bring comfort to no one except the Soviet Union and Israel. He had told Mr. Shultz that he hoped that the Saudis would not reward Syria again. In response to a question from Mr. Hurd, he said that his own dealings with the Syrians were no better than at earlier periods. Arafat had recently visited Damascus and had apparently been less than happy with his talks. The PLO were now trying to organise a meeting in Tunis of Palestinian intellectuals and representatives of the West Bank and Gaza. Arafat had said that he hoped to resume his dialogue with the Jordanians, to which the King had replied that the opportunities were now much more limited than in the past. The Prime Minister agreed with this view. In the latter half of this year, the United States would be preoccupied with negotiations about nuclear weapons and might not be able to concentrate on more than one major international issue. Had Mr. Shultz also discussed the Palestinian problem?

King Hussein said that Mr. Shultz had assured him that President Reagan had remained as intent as ever to make progress on this issue. But he had an uneasy feeling that American interest was declining. The memories of the Lebanese massacres were beginning to fade in the United States. There was a recurring theme in American comment that Jordan was Palestine. There had been a genuine chance of progress at the end of 1982 but the prospects were fading with every day. A freeze on Israeli settlements in the West Bank would now be almost meaningless.

/The Prime Minister

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The Prime Minister said that she believed that Israel did wish to withdraw from the Lebanon. The conflict there was taking its toll and disrupting the Israeli economy. This was creating major domestic problems. Israel had been used in the past to achieving quick victories. But the maintenance of troops in hostile territory was a different proposition.

Mr. Hurd asked whether the West Bank Mayors were putting pressure on the PLO. King Hussein said that they tried to put pressure on Jordan but he told them to turn their attention to the PLO. Israeli restrictions still made the life of the Mayors difficult - it was by no means certain that they would obtain permission to leave the West Bank for the proposed meeting in Tunis. He had told Mr. Shultz that even if progress could not be made on the substance of the West Bank problem, the Americans should exert themselves to make the conditions of life in the region better. In response to a question from the Prime Minister, he said he found it hard to judge whether Mr. Shultz had learned a great deal from his visit to the area. It was difficult to penetrate his feelings.

The Prime Minister said that the Middle East would be discussed at Williamsburg. She was considering whether to attend herself. What message would the King like her to take to President Reagan? The King said that the Americans had little leverage with the Syrians. To influence Damascus, they would have to work on Saudi Arabia. During the negotiations of the past few months the Americans had promised Jordan that Saudi Arabia and Morocco would be helpful - but in the event this had not been true. The important message to convey to the United States was that the Middle East was becoming the top priority target for the Soviet Union. The Prime Minister said that it appeared to her that Andropov may have taken a decision to keep the area on the boil. She would therefore convey to President Reagan the message that the Russians appeared to be becoming more active in the area, that the West must respond to this activity and that a fresh initiative could not be long delayed.

/In response

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In response to a question from the Prime Minister, King Hussein said that the Iran/Iraq war had reached a position of virtual stalemate. Iraq had fared quite well in the last battle with Iran. He had understood from the Algerians that they had been helping to promote a dialogue between Washington and Tehran. He wondered whether the recent Iranian action against the Tudeh Party foreshadowed an improvement of relations with the United States. That in turn could lead to the Soviet Union becoming more deeply involved in the Iran/Iraq situation. He was not encouraged by present circumstances in Tehran. Khomeini appeared to be nearing the end of his life. The Algerian view was that the contenders for power would be even more extreme. The Prime Minister said that she doubted that Khomeini would change his policies but a successor might be able to settle the war on certain conditions. We were appalled by the casualties. Mr. Hurd observed that a recent Red Cross report suggested that both sides were treating their prisoners very badly.

Reverting to the Arab/Israeli problem, King Hussein said that there was still a chance of progress. He had had to announce his inability to enter into talks in order to wake up people in the area. The reaction had been quite positive and the door was still open for talks with the Palestinians.

The conversation ended at 1040.

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13 May 1983

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JW MP  
Jordan

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

13 May 1983

*Dear John,*

KING HUSSEIN'S CALL ON THE PRIME MINISTER

Thank you for your letter of 11 May.  
I enclose a record of the conversation between  
the Prime Minister and King Hussein which  
took place here this morning.

*Yours ever*

*John Cole.*

J.E. Holmes, Esq.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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