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6th March 1984



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NOTE FOR THE RECORD OF A MEETING WITH FIELD MARSHAL
ABU GHAZALA AT 1010 ON MONDAY 5TH MARCH 1984

Present:

The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine MP
Secretary of State for Defence

Mr R C Mottram
PS/Secretary of State for Defence

HE Field Marshal Muhammad Abdul
Halim Abu Ghazala
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister
of Defence and Military Production
of the Arab Republic of Egypt

HE Mr Hassan A H Abou-Seeda
Egyptian Ambassador

Lebanon

1. Field Marshal Abu Ghazala said that he was very pessimistic about the prospects for the Lebanon. Israel and Syria each had strong reasons for remaining there and were therefore likely to continue to set conditions for their withdrawal which they knew were not acceptable to the other side. The best outcome that might realistically be sought would be for the country to be divided into 5 "states" under a confederal system of government. But it was difficult to see how the problem of Beirut could be handled.

Jordan

2. Later in the conversation, Field Marshal Abu Ghazala said that the chaos in the Lebanon had suited Israel since it had diverted attention away from the consolidation of her position on the West Bank. Looking two years ahead, he believed that Jordan would be the next country to face de-stabilisation. The Israelis would extend their search for defensible borders on to the East Bank and the Syrians would be tempted to move into the North of the country. King Hussein might find the area under his effective control substantially reduced.

The Gulf War

3. Field Marshal Abu Ghazala said that he believed that Iraq would succeed in stopping the latest Iranian offensive. He discounted claims that the Iraqis were using chemical weapons - he believed that the burns were caused by Napalm. If Iraq stopped the present offensive, there would be a possibility - though this was fairly remote - of moderate opinion asserting itself in Iran. If, on the other hand,



the Iranian offensive was successful and the present regime in Iraq was toppled this would represent a major victory for Khomeini and for Shi'ite fundamentalism. Khomeini's position within the Shi'ite movement would be further strengthened since he would have achieved his second prediction following the toppling of the Shah. If Iraq fell, Kuwait would be the next country to go and the Shi'ite movement would be likely to spread throughout the Gulf. It was therefore very important to help Iraq to withstand the latest offensive.

4. Field Marshal Abu Ghazala said that he did not believe the Iraqis would deliver a knock-out blow against the Iranian oil installations. She would do this only if desperate and this stage had yet to be reached. Nor was it in Iran's interest to block the Straits. The Secretary of State asked whether, if the Straits were to be blocked, the Americans should immediately use military force to resolve the situation or should first pause to consider what options were open. Field Marshal Abu Ghazala said that he favoured the latter approach. The Americans could not become involved without inflaming passions in the area.

5. The Secretary of State suggested that there was no evidence of increasing Soviet involvement to exploit the war. Field Marshal Abu Ghazala said that the Russians had no need to get further involved since events were in any case moving in directions helpful to them. If the United States was forced to become involved militarily, this would represent a major propaganda benefit for the Soviet Union. The Secretary of State suggested that the Soviet Union had nothing to gain from the growth of Shi'ite fundamentalism given the possible implications for her own Muslim population. Field Marshal Abu Ghazala said that the Russians would ruthlessly suppress any such movement in their own country. He doubted in any case whether it would have much impact particularly on the young who were increasingly unaware of religion and of historic loyalties. He agreed however that the underlying power of Muslim fundamentalism was difficult to judge.

6. The tête à tête discussion ran over until 1105. In the subsequent plenary session, the Secretary of State formally welcomed the Field Marshal to this country. Field Marshal Abu Ghazala said that he wished to extend to the Secretary of State an invitation to visit Egypt at his convenience.

7. There was a brief discussion of the role of the MFO in Sinai and Field Marshal Abu Ghazala said that the British contingent was making a valuable contribution to an operation which was working well. On the provision of military training in Britain, it was recognised that we had difficulties in competing with the Americans since they provided their courses to the Egyptians for nothing. Field Marshal Abu Ghazala said that we should adopt for our charging policy the system the Egyptians used which recognised that the poorest countries should pay least and should place Egypt in that category!



8. It was agreed that the procurement and sales issues should be dealt with in discussion with Minister(DP).

Rm

Ministry of Defence

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PS/Prime Minister
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PS/Secretary of the Cabinet
Defence Attaché, Cairo

17 MAR 1984

