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CONFIDENTIAL UK COMMS ONLY
DESKBY 231100Z
FM BAGHDAD 231020Z FEB 83
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 128 OF 23 FEBRUARY, 1983
INFO IMMEDIATE DOT (OT5), MODUK (FOR DEFENCE SALES)

CONFIDENTIAL cc J. Dawson.
PS No: 10

MY TELEGRAM NO 123 (NOT TO ALL): VISIT OF TAHA YASIN RAMADHAN.

1. SAHHAF, DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT, SUMMONED ME TO THE MFA THIS MORNING TO ANNOUNCE, WITH CONSIDERABLE REGRET, THAT, AFTER CAREFUL CONSIDERATION, THE FIRST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAD RELUCTANTLY COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT HE WOULD NOT REPEAT NOT AFTER ALL BE ABLE TO VISIT THE UNITED KINGDOM FOR TALKS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER ON 9 MARCH. SAHHAF, WHO WAS EVIDENTLY EMBARRASSED, SAID THAT THERE WERE THREE REASONS FOR RAMADHAN'S DECISION:-

- (A) THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS ATTENDANCE AT THE DELHI NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT FROM 7 TO 11 MARCH AS HEAD OF THE IRAQI DELEGATION SEMICOLON
- (B) THE THREAT OF A RENEWED IRANIAN OFFENSIVE TOWARDS AMARA FOR WHICH RAMADHAN'S RESPONSIBILITIES AS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE THE POPULAR ARMY WOULD NECESSITATE HIS REMAINING IN THE COUNTRY SEMICOLON
- (C) RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE ECONOMY WHICH WAS NOW UNDER ACUTE PRESSURE.

2. RAMADHAN HAD INSTRUCTED SAHHAF TO SAY THAT THE DECISION HAD BEEN REACHED WITH THE UTMOST RELUCTANCE BECAUSE RAMADHAN SINCERELY ATTACHED GREAT IMPORTANCE TO HIS VISIT TO THE UNITED KINGDOM AND IN PARTICULAR TO HIS MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER. HE WARMLY RECIPROCATED THE VIEW THAT HIGH-LEVEL CONTACTS OF THE KIND ENVISAGED WOULD ONLY BE OF BENEFIT IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. WHILE OFFERING HIS MOST SINCERE APOLOGIES FOR THE INCONVENIENCE THAT THIS LATE CHANGE OF PLANS WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY CAUSE, RAMADHAN HAD HOPED THAT IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR US TO AGREE TO RESCHEDULE THE VISIT EITHER TO THE SECOND HALF OF MAY OR TO ANY DATE IN JUNE. SAHHAF ADDED THAT RAMADHAN HAD WISHED HIM TO SAY THAT HE WOULD GIVE THE MOST CATEGORIC UNDERTAKING THAT, IF IT WERE POSSIBLE FOR US TO AGREE TO EITHER OF THESE PROPOSALS, A VISIT TO THE UNITED KINGDOM WOULD RECEIVE PRIORITY OVER ALL OTHER CONSIDERATIONS.

3. I REPLIED TO SAHHAF THAT WHILE I WOULD OBVIOUSLY REPORT THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER'S DECISION HE COULD NOT EXPECT THAT YOU WOULD BE PLEASED. I DID NOT REFER TO THE LAST TWO OF THE THREE REASONS OFFERED FOR THE POSTPONEMENT (WHICH I REGARDED IN ANY CASE AS SPECIOUS WINDOW-DRESSING) BUT I SAID THAT I WAS ASTONISHED TO LEARN

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THAT THE COINCIDENCE OVER THE DATES OF THE NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT HAD NOT BEEN TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT WHEN RAMADHAN INITIALLY AGREED TO MEET THE PRIME MINISTER ON 9 MARCH, AT HIS MEETING WITH HM AMBASSADOR ON 22 JANUARY. SAHHAF ADMITTED LAMELY THAT THE POINT HAD INDEED BEEN OVERLOOKED. I REMINDED HIM THAT THE PRIME MINISTER'S INVITATION TO RAMADHAN HAD REMAINED OPEN NOW FOR OVER A YEAR AND THAT RESCHEDULING HIGH-LEVEL VISITS OF THIS SORT WAS INEVITABLY EXTREMELY DIFFICULT. SAHHAF SAID THAT THE IRAQIS ACKNOWLEDGED THIS BUT NONETHELESS HOPED THAT ALTERNATIVE DATES IN THE PERIODS MENTIONED COULD BE FOUND.

4. I ASKED SAHHAF WHETHER THE DECISION TO POSTPONE RAMADHAN'S VISIT ALSO INCLUDED THE JOINT COMMISSION TALKS WHICH HAD ALREADY BEEN POSTPONED ONCE. DID THE IRAQIS NOW PROPOSE THAT IT SHOULD BE POSTPONED YET AGAIN IN ORDER TO TAKE PLACE CONCURRENTLY WITH RAMADHAN'S VISIT (ASSUMING WE WERE ABLE TO ARRANGE ONE) OR WERE WE EXPECTED TO RECEIVE HASSAN ALI ALONE BETWEEN 8 AND 10 MARCH ? SAHHAF REPLIED THAT HE DID NOT KNOW THE MINISTER OF TRADE'S PLANS BUT WOULD GET IN TOUCH WITH HIS MINISTRY IMMEDIATELY AND LET ME HAVE THE ANSWER WITHIN 24 HOURS.

RAMSAY

LIMITED)
ME)
MV)
PC)
NEWS)
PUS)
PS (MR HUR)
MR EYERTON

COPIES TO:
MR MARTIN,
OTS, D.O.T.

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Iraq

cf.



please
file.

cf. 14/2

10 DOWNING STREET

MR COLES

[Handwritten signature] 14/2

VISIT OF THE DEPUTY PRIME
MINISTER OF IRAQ TO LONDON

As the Foreign Office have not heard from the Iraqis they are assuming that he will not be here next week. I have therefore taken the lunch out of the diary for the 16th.

[Handwritten signature]

11 February, 1983