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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS MAJESTY KING HUSSEIN OF JORDAN AT 1700 HOURS ON FRIDAY 16 DECEMBER 1983 AT 10 DOWNING STREET

Present: Prime Minister King Hussein of Jordan
Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary
Sir Anthony Parsons
Mr. Coles

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The Prime Minister said that she was very pleased to see the King but very worried about the situation in the Middle East. She was grateful to him for letting us see his recent letter to President Reagan. In considering the situation in the Middle East, we first asked ourselves how the future of Jordan could be ensured - she had spoken to President Reagan about this matter on her last visit to Washington. Secondly, we considered how progress could be made on the fundamental problems confronting the area. One test we applied to proposals was their likely effect on the future integrity of Jordan. If we regarded them as prejudicial to Jordan, we rejected them as unacceptable. King Hussein said that the entire Middle Eastern area was in very great danger of destabilisation. There could be eruptions but he could not predict their timing or their scope. The root cause of instability was still the Palestine problem. But for the present the Lebanon was receiving more attention. He was very pessimistic about the future of the Lebanon. The attempts to promote reconciliation were unlikely to succeed. The internal divisions were almost a fact. Even the current evacuation of people from Deir al Qamar was a sign of division - Christian families were leaving a Christian area. The objectives we had all set ourselves in the Lebanon had become hopeless. When the Multi-National Force had entered the country the objective had been to secure an independent and sovereign Lebanon and promote the withdrawal of all foreign forces. But more recently the emphasis had shifted towards the implementation of the Israeli/Lebanese agreement which had been imposed on the Lebanese President and people. It was a peace agreement in all but name. It represented another stage in the fundamentally flawed

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step-by-step approach. The correct approach to Middle Eastern problems was to seek a comprehensive solution.

The Soviet Union was also on the scene. It was behind Syria which controlled much of Lebanon. Israel was still in occupation of the South. It was unclear now whether Europe was involved in the Multi-National Force in order to secure its original objectives or in order to implement the Israeli/Lebanese agreement. If after a certain period the MNF was forced to withdraw, it would represent a symbolic withdrawal from the whole area, leaving the field to the radicals.

President Gemayel had returned empty handed from Washington. In addition the new United States/Israeli strategic co-operation agreement amounted to an alliance. In the Lebanon the two super powers were each supporting a foreign country present in a country which was already divided. If deterioration continued in the Lebanon, the south of the country would become part of Israel and the north part of Syria. There might also be a Christian entity and a Druze entity but this would still leave 300,000 Palestinians who had been there since 1948 and who would have to find refuge elsewhere.

Syria was now attempting to control the PLO. It was not clear whether or not Arafat would be able to leave Tripoli. The PLO had suffered throughout their existence because of the requirement for consensus on every subject. The radical minority were always able to prevent any positive move. He hoped that the moderate Palestinian leadership would remember that their strength lay in their constituents. The Palestinian people, especially those in the Occupied Territories, were in despair. If the moderate leaders would identify with their people, Jordan would see what could be achieved - and was already in touch with Egypt about this matter. But if the PLO were subjugated by Syria a vacuum would be created.

The Jordanian people had decided that they should remain attached to their constitutional life. They did not wish to continue with the contradictory situation of two bodies representing Palestine. There was now the problem that if another five members

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of the old Jordanian Parliament were incapacitated, there would be no quorum and no constitutional capacity to carry out its functions. Therefore, in the next month or so, he would have to recall the old Parliament. He was trying to treat this as a domestic Jordan/Palestine problem. Half of the Parliament was from the West Bank.

The purpose of his recent letter to President Reagan was to establish whether Resolution 242 was still alive, for it was the foundation of all initiatives. The answer he had received was not clear. The President had emphasised his desire to continue the peace process and had said that he would not be diverted from this by the United States elections. In reply to a question from the Prime Minister, King Hussein said that President Reagan had attempted to answer the points put to him one by one but the answers had been more vague on some points than on others. Then the whole situation had changed with the visit to Washington of the Israeli Foreign Minister. So he had again written to President Reagan and had received another reply (a copy of which he handed to the Prime Minister). This reply was very difficult to understand.

The Prime Minister said that President Gemayel, in his talks with her on 14 December, had said that without the presence of the MNF in the Lebanon there was no chance of reconciliation. Undoubtedly, the purpose of the force was no longer the original one. We were concerned about the lack of clarity of the MNF's role. But we felt that if we now withdrew there would be terrible bloodshed and unilateral withdrawal would have a very serious effect on the Western Alliance. But the four contributing countries were still attempting to agree on objectives and methods.

With regard to the reconciliation process, President Gemayel had seemed too optimistic. He had emphasised his desire to reconvene the Geneva Conference next week but coupled this with the statement that this would be purposeless unless basic agreement had been worked out in advance. It would be surprising if the Conference were reconvened next week - and it was perhaps not wise of Gemayel to have conveyed this impression of optimism.

With regard to the King's remarks about the division of Lebanon between two super powers, each with a surrogate, it was

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perhaps encouraging that the Soviet Union appeared to be taking a very low profile. The Moscow ship appeared to be rudderless, partly because of Andropov's illness, partly because of the Soviet failure to prevent INF deployment.

Gemayel had given a very clear impression of a strong relationship between the United States, Israel and himself.

We had earlier considered whether UNIFIL should be turned into a truce supervisory organisation and take the place of the MNF. It might be difficult for the Soviet Union to veto such a proposal. Undoubtedly the Israelis were getting tired of their position in Southern Lebanon.

On another matter, was there any hope of the non-radical Arab world acquiring greater unity, embracing Egypt? When the moderate PLO leadership left Tripoli, could the moderate Arabs co-operate with them?

Any progress required United States action to halt the process of Israeli settlement on the West Bank. As the King had stated in his letter to President Reagan, current United States actions were contrary to the peace process.

During her visit to Washington she had obtained the impression that the United States administration had not thought through their Middle East position. For example, both President Reagan and Mr. Shultz had argued that the number of Israelis in the West Bank was not large. She had warned of the danger of both Israel and Syria trying to force Palestinians into Jordan. And, as she had already told the King, she had emphasised that it was absolutely essential for the integrity of Jordan to be preserved. President Reagan had said that he agreed with the Prime Minister on this point.

With regard to the King's idea of an International Conference on the Middle East, she believed that the United States would reject it. We had to keep trying to influence the Americans to proceed in the direction we desired - and should perhaps attempt

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to make them feel guilty about current developments.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that if the situation in the Lebanon continued, there was a risk of rising conflict between Syria and the United States. We should encourage Gemayel to continue the reconciliation process. We should also encourage the United States to revert to the original role of the MNF. Then pressure should be put on Syria to moderate the actions of their surrogates in the Lebanon. Could the moderate Arab states bring pressure to bear on Syria?

King Hussein said that the King of Saudi Arabia had discussed with him the idea of the majority of Arab states bringing influence to bear. There was a growing feeling in the area that Britain would help in this respect. Any Arab Summit should deal with the question of the PLO Charter so as to enable the moderate Arabs to move ahead.

The Prime Minister commented that it was her impression that the United States and Israel were closer than were the Soviet Union and Syria. King Hussein emphasised the dangers of polarisation.

The Prime Minister asked how influence could be brought to bear on Syria to induce it to withdraw some of its forces from the Lebanon. The Americans believed that a tough approach might achieve this. She was not sure this was right. King Hussein said that Syria would not have had a leg to stand on if the issue had been the simultaneous withdrawal of Israeli and Syrian forces. But the problem was the Israeli/Lebanese agreement. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that we needed to consider how we could move towards phased withdrawals of the various forces.

King Hussein asked what the Soviet role was in all this. Did the Russians want Syria to withdraw from the Lebanon? The Prime Minister expressed the view that the Soviet Union were unlikely to allow Syria to withdraw while the MNF, including the Americans, remained. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary observed that the tough policy of the United States made it more difficult for Syria to withdraw. King Hussein remarked that the United States had

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again missed a great opportunity. This was precisely the moment when Israel had enormous political and economic need of the United States and that should have led the Americans to put pressure on her.

Sir Anthony Parsons said that the only way forward that he saw in the Lebanon was to set aside the 17 May Agreement, try to get a UN force to replace the Israelis in the South (thereby removing Syrian objections to withdrawal), and then progressively replace all foreign forces by UN troops. Only after that could reconciliation happen. There was some evidence that Israelis were not so opposed to a UN presence in the South now.

The Prime Minister then raised the question of the West Bank. What would the effect of the recall of Parliament be on the moderate Arab world and the moderate PLO? King Hussein said that he would be explaining his proposals to these audiences. But he wanted to get the West Bank MPs out before the Israelis stopped them leaving.

The Prime Minister asked whether we should be trying to persuade the United States to put more aid into the West Bank. Sir Anthony Parsons said that he had discussed this matter frequently with Crown Prince Hassan. We were aware of all the difficulties. But it was depressing that development was at such a low level - and it was demoralising for the inhabitants of the West Bank that the outside world was doing so little. King Hussein said that if a more substantial aid programme could be achieved, this would be very welcome - and the channel used was not important.

The Prime Minister said that we always returned to the question of how we could influence the United States. Sir Anthony Parsons said that they would not be positively influenced by public statements by their friends such as the European Community. We should continue our private dialogue. The Prime Minister told the King that Vice President Bush might be visiting London in the New Year and we would discuss these matters with him. King Hussein

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said that the Americans were pushing him into a situation which deprived him of choice.

King Hussein then said that he believed that we were on the verge of a new wave of international terrorism. A number of developments pointed in that direction. The Prime Minister said that there was a new feature of fanaticism in recent terrorist actions.

The Prime Minister said that she would send a message to President Reagan about the King's visit and about the situation in the Middle East. She hoped that if there was any serious deterioration in the Middle East while the King was in London, he would not hesitate to call on her again.

King Hussein said that his priority now was to put the Palestine/Jordan relationship in order and then make a final effort to get a dialogue going. Sir Anthony Parsons commented that, judging from recent PLO statements, they had still not learned the lesson that they must conditionally recognise Israel if a peace process was to start.

King Hussein said that he would try to get the moderate majority in the Arab world to be more active. One of his worries was that Mr. Shultz now appeared to have changed his attitude towards Middle Eastern problems. He himself had had recent contacts with the Soviet Union whose attitude was that they were present in the area; they might not be a party to the peace process; but they could prevent any process from succeeding.

The discussion ended at 1825.

A. J. C.

16 December 1983

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