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visits to London by King Hussein: June 79
Middle East

RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND KING HUSSEIN
OF JORDAN AT NO. 10 DOWNING STREET ON 17 NOVEMBER AT 1000 HOURS

Present

The Prime Minister
Sir John Graham
Mr. M.O'D.B. Alexander

King Hussein
HE Mr. Ibrahim Izziddin

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King Hussein's visit to Washington

The Prime Minister said that the media had suggested that King Hussein's visit had been extremely successful and that a close rapport had been established between the King and President Reagan. Had President Reagan in fact understood the message the King was giving him? King Hussein said that the President had been extremely warm and cordial. He had spoken bluntly to the President and at the end of their first meeting had left with him a copy of his speaking note. (He had also sent copies to his friends.) At their second meeting together President Reagan said that the King's presentation had been an "eye-opener". The President had confessed to not having as much background as he should have.

The President remained hopeful of finding a way through. He aimed to make sure that Israeli withdrawal from Sinai took place and would then press for further progress. However, the professionals with whom the King had spoken in Washington anticipated very serious difficulties. They were deeply concerned about current Israeli attitudes. They thought there might be difficulties even about the withdrawal, although they were determined to keep the Israelis under pressure. They were pessimistic about progress once the withdrawal had been completed. For his part, the King had urged them not to smother Egypt and to leave to her the possibility of getting closer to the other Arab States. The King characterised the present situation as a "juggling act" designed to ensure that the Israeli withdrawal went through.

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The Prime Minister said that she had two concerns at present:

(a) the difficulties which had arisen over the European contribution to the Sinai MFO. She was determined to ignore so far as possible Mr. Haig's remarks about Lord Carrington. She was inclined to think that these flowed from a false report of some kind received by Mr. Haig. But the difficulty over what to say about the MFO was genuine. The fate of the West depended, of course, on the United States, but this did not mean that the Europeans had to follow the Americans slavishly. We owed them our judgement. We intended to contribute to the MFO but that did not change our views on the best course to follow. We were committed to the return of Sinai to Egypt but not to any other part of Camp David. We had to say something to Parliament to make it clear that we adhered to the Venice Declaration. The Americans had got their way on the MFO: it was therefore distressing that a diplomatic incident had been allowed to arise;

(b) the current attitudes of the Israeli Government. The Israelis were at present in an extremely aggressive frame of mind. Their reaction to the AWACS decision and to the setting up of the MFO was very worrying, the more so since this was a time when we needed more agreement rather than disagreement. Had the American Government taken on board the fact that President Sadat had been rendered vulnerable by the absence of movement for two years in the follow-up to Camp David? Unless there was progress after the return of Sinai, President Mubarak might find himself in similar difficulties. King Hussein said that he thought this message had gone home in Washington.

King Hussein said that in general he had spoken very plainly to the Americans. He had told them that until a solution to the Palestinian problem was found, Israel was enemy No. 1 of the Arab people, the United States enemy No. 2, and Communism, despite being the fundamental threat, only enemy No. 3. Somehow, the Americans had to improve their image in the region. The

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Prime Minister asked whether King Hussein had succeeded in conveying to President Reagan that the so-called Jordanian option was a non-starter? King Hussein said that he thought he had. Indeed, President Reagan had apologised for past statements on this question which had betrayed a lack of background briefing. Sir John Graham recalled that President Reagan's briefing had consisted in large part of a paper by Mr. Rostow. King Hussein indicated that he was familiar with the paper in question and said that attempts to have it rebutted had failed.

The Prime Minister asked whether President Reagan had given any indication of being aware of the inherent difficulties in the autonomy negotiations or of the problems likely to arise in trying to persuade the Palestinians to participate in elections under the resulting arrangements. King Hussein said that at least at their second meeting the President had indeed shown more awareness of the problems. He had also made clear his anger with the Israelis over their recent behaviour. The Prime Minister commented that Mr. Begin's position at present seemed stronger than ever. King Hussein agreed that Mr. Begin had sizeable support at this stage.

The Prime Minister asked whether the Americans had given King Hussein any written response to the paper he had left with the President. King Hussein said that he had asked for such a response but had not yet received it. The Prime Minister said that she would herself be glad to have a copy of King Hussein's paper. It would be essential that the exchange in Washington should not be an isolated one. It would be essential to follow up the exchange "week after week". King Hussein agreed.

The Prime Minister asked whether there had been any signs of willingness on the part of the Americans to enlarge the peace process. King Hussein said that he had not seen any. However, he had told President Reagan that there was a large measure of consensus between the Arabs and their friends in Europe as to what the elements of a settlement should be. Even the Soviet Union seemed to be speaking along the same lines. The President

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had appeared to take the point. The Prime Minister said that President Reagan's welcome for Prince Fahd's initiative had been significant. This no doubt owed much to King Hussein's intervention. King Hussein said that he had told the Americans that while he recognised the difficulties about the refusal of the PLO to recognise Israel (and vice versa), he could not understand why the Americans were not prepared to be in direct contact with both parties. He had reminded them that President Sadat had suggested that President Reagan should talk to the PLO. King Hussein said that he remained willing/ ^{to act} as an intermediary but there would have to be direct contacts at some stage.

Sir John Graham said that he did not think the Americans would make any significant move until Sinai had been safely returned. They did not wish to risk further upsetting Israel in her present mood. They were also worried about the possibility of an Israeli attack on Lebanon. It was for this reason that they urged caution on the Europeans. The King and the Prime Minister both agreed that nothing was likely to happen until after the Sinai withdrawal and that, indeed, the Americans were unlikely to reply in full to King Hussein's approach until that time. Sir John Graham stressed the awkwardness of the gap in the next four or five months. On the one hand, there had to be enough movement to prevent the extremists in the PLO taking over from the moderates. On the other hand, the United States could not go so far that Israel dug in and refused to carry out the withdrawal. We had to be prepared for a major effort after 25 April.

The Prime Minister asked whether the Arabs really wanted Sinai back on the present terms. King Hussein said there would be a major argument at the Arab Summit in Fez. The confrontation states and the PLO could well adopt an extreme attitude and might urge Egypt, for instance, to abandon the Camp David process. He himself intended to work for the return of Sinai and to urge the others to concentrate on the period after that. The Prime Minister hoped that the Summit would endorse the Fahd plan, in particular its seventh point, and urge conditional recognition. This would put Israel on the spot. King Hussein agreed that this would be the ideal outcome.

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King Hussein reverted to the question of the Lebanon. He confirmed that Mr. Haig was extremely worried about the possibility of an Israeli attack which might then develop into a major confrontation in Syria. The Prime Minister wondered whether the Israelis would use hostilities in the Lebanon as an excuse for not withdrawing from Sinai. Sir John Graham said that there ought to be no link. The ceasefire in South Lebanon was in fact holding well. There were some signs of helpful movement on the part of the PLO. These were being encouraged by the United Nations. But Israel was reluctant to do anything that seemed to imply a measure of agreement with the PLO.

The Prime Minister thanked King Hussein for his visit. She repeated that she would be grateful to receive a copy of the paper he had left with President Reagan. It was essential that the effort to make progress should continue and that we should avoid a vacuum. The present time was one of opportunity. If we let the chance slip, it might not return.

The discussion ended at 1035.

Paul

17 November 1981

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