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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

Prime Minister

1 February 1983

AA 1/2.

Dear Sir,

Arab League Delegation

/ You will have seen the enclosed telegram from Rabat about the Moroccan Foreign Minister's visit. It has been agreed that he will call on the Prime Minister at 3.15 pm on 2 February. Mr Pym proposes that Mr Boucetta call at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for a further discussion afterwards.

/ I enclose a short brief. We do not know exactly what King Hassan's message will say, particularly on the Palestinian representation point, and Boucetta may well expect that a substantive reply will be sent later in writing. Our objective, at this stage is principally to show that we remain keen to welcome King Hassan and the Arab League delegation once the conditions are right. In his own meeting with Boucetta, Mr Pym may be able to probe in more detail the reasons for this late move on the Moroccan side and the possibilities for getting a visit by the delegation back on to the rails.

Perhaps we could have a further word in the morning about who should be present. Our Ambassador in Rabat is coming back with Boucetta at the latter's specific request. It would be very helpful for his position if he could be involved in the talks at No 10. On the Moroccan side, we do not yet know whether Boucetta wishes to be accompanied at all, eg by the Ambassador here. We have arranged for a French/English interpreter, Mrs Dennis, to be available for the meeting.

Yours ever

J E Holmes

(J E Holmes)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 79 OF 01 FEBRUARY

INFO PRIORITY MIDDLE EAST POSTS, WASHINGTON, PARIS,
UKMIS NEW YORK.

ARAB LEAGUE DELEGATION

1. AS I HAVE ALREADY REPORTED BY TELEPHONE TO MR MILES, BOUCETTA SUMMONED ME THIS MORNING TO SAY THAT THE KING FELT COMPELLED TO POSTPONE THE ARAB LEAGUE DELEGATION VISIT TO LONDON. THE REASON WAS THE DEATH OF GENERAL DLIMI (MY TELNO 56). THE KING HAD TO REMAIN IN MOROCCO FOR THE NEXT TWO OR THREE WEEKS TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT INTERNAL SECURITY AND THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR IN THE SAHARA WERE PROCEEDING SATISFACTORILY IN THE HANDS OF DLIMI'S SUCCESSORS.
2. BOUCETTA SAID THE KING HAD ASKED HIM TO FLY AT ONCE TO LONDON WITH A MESSAGE FOR MRS THATCHER. HE HOPED IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE FOR MRS THATCHER TO GIVE HIM A FEW MINUTES OF HER TIME TOMORROW AFTERNOON, 2 FEBRUARY. FAILING THAT, ON THURSDAY 3 FEB. HE WOULD ALSO HOPE TO CALL ON YOU. BOUCETTA EXPLAINED THAT THE KING VERY MUCH WANTED THE VISIT TO GO AHEAD, AND HE STILL LOOKED FORWARD MOST POSITIVELY TO HIS MEETING WITH MRS THATCHER. BUT HE HAD HAD TO ACCEPT A DELAY NOW IN VIEW OF DLIMI'S DEATH.
3. I SAID THAT THERE WOULD BE CONSIDERABLE DISAPPOINTMENT IN LONDON OVER THE POSTPONEMENT OF THIS VISIT FOR WHICH WE AND THE MOROCCANS HAD BOTH WORKED SO HARD. HOWEVER I COULD UNDERSTAND THE KING'S REASONS. (BUT SEE PARA 6 BELOW). I UNDERTOOK TO GIVE BOUCETTA A REPLY LATER TODAY ABOUT WHETHER AND WHEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND YOURSELF COULD RECEIVE HIM. I REMINDED BOUCETTA THAT I HAD EARLIER ON EXPLAINED THAT THE QUEEN WOULD BE TRAVELLING ABROAD LATER THIS MONTH. SHE MIGHT NOT BE BACK IN TIME FOR A LATER VISIT BY THE DELEGATION. BOUCETTA SAID THAT THE KING WOULD REGRET THAT, BUT HE WOULD NOT WANT TO MAKE IT A REASON FOR DELAYING THE VISIT ANY FURTHER. HE COULD ALWAYS RETURN LATER ON BY HIMSELF TO PAY HIS RESPECTS TO THE QUEEN.

4. I ASKED WHETHER BOUCETTA COULD GIVE ME ANY CLARIFICATION YET ABOUT HOW THE PALESTINIANS WERE TO BE REPRESENTED ON THE DELEGATION. AGAIN HE WAS EVASIVE. HE SAID HE HAD THIS MORNING RECEIVED A NOTE FROM THE PLO ABOUT WHICH HE WOULD GIVE ME FURTHER INFORMATION LATER TODAY. HE SAID IT MENTIONED KHALED AL HASSAN. I SAID I THOUGHT HIS INCLUSION IN THE DELEGATION WOULD PRESENT US WITH THE SAME DIFFICULTIES WE HAD FACED LAST NOVEMBER.

5. I HOPE TO TELEGRAPH FURTHER ABOUT THIS POINT LATER TODAY WHEN BOUCETTA SEES ME AGAIN, AND ABOUT HOW THE MOROCCANS PROPOSE TO ANNOUNCE THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE VISIT.

6. COMMENT. I HAVE ALREADY REPORTED (MY TELNO 71) THAT THE SUCCESSION TO DLIMI SEEMS TO HAVE TAKEN PLACE SMOOTHLY. WE HAVE SINCE HAD CONFIRMATION, REPORTED THROUGH OTHER CHANNELS, THAT THERE IS NO (NO) REAL EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT RUMOURS THAT HE WAS IN FACT MURDERED. I SUSPECT, THEREFORE, THAT THE KING IS USING DLIMI'S DEATH AS A PRETEXT TO PUT OFF THE VISIT. THIS INDICATES THAT HE IS STILL HAVING TROUBLE IN GETTING ARAFAT'S AGREEMENT.

7. EXASPERATING AS THIS LATEST HITCH UNDOUBTEDLY IS, I HOPE YOU AND MRS THATCHER WILL AGREE TO GIVE BOUCETTA A HEARING. I AM CONVINCED THAT KING HASSAN GENUINELY WANTS TO FIND A WAY THROUGH THE COMPLICATIONS WHICH HAVE ARISEN OVER THIS ARAB LEAGUE VISIT, AND TO BUILD UP A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH US.

8. SEE MY I.F.T. (FCO ONLY)

CAMBRIDGE

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CALL ON THE PRIME MINISTER BY MOROCCAN FOREIGN MINISTER:
2 FEBRUARY

ARAB LEAGUE DELEGATION VISIT

Points to Make

1. Much regret further postponement of visit. Attach great importance to hearing the King's views and those of delegation. But understand the King's difficulties, and grateful for your visit to explain position.

2. Palestinian Representation. Know that you are aware of our policy on contact with PLO. Encouraged by agreement with King Hassan that a Palestinian Mayor should join the delegation. Grateful for King's efforts to persuade other participants this was best compromise for both sides. Hope that efforts to rearrange the delegation's visit can start from this understanding.

3. [If Boucetta suggests Khalid al Hassan as Palestinian member of delegation for future visit] We should stick to earlier agreement on Palestinian Mayor. Milhem not the only candidate: open to other suggestions. To have Palestinians represented by elected figure would make good impression on public opinion in this country. Khalid al Hassan closely identified with the PLO. As you will know from previous exchanges not possible to accept him or other PLO member.

4. Next steps. Strong British interest in receiving delegation soon to discuss Fez and peace prospects. Arab League decided to come to London and presumably still wish to. How should we proceed? If we miss 7-8 February, re instatement impossible for practical reasons for at least a month. Even then, as you know, The Queen will be out of the country.

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Background

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1. HM Ambassador Rabat has reported (his telno 79 attached) that Boucetta will be coming to London at the King's request with a message for the Prime Minister, presumably explaining the reasons for the decision to postpone again the Arab League Delegation visit to London.
 2. Boucetta has told us that the reason is the death of General Dlimi, King Hassan's most powerful aide, on whom the King has relied since attempted coups in 1971/72 to maintain loyalty in the army, to mastermind the war in the Western Sahara, and to run his External Intelligence Services. King Hassan rarely travelled abroad without Dlimi.
 3. Dlimi's death may be partly a pretext. It has become increasingly apparent that the Moroccans were having great difficulties in selling to the other Arabs, particularly the PLO, the proposal that the Palestinian place in the delegation should be taken by a Mayor eg Milhem. King Hassan had committed himself to coming to London with Milhem, or if this was not acceptable to the Arab side, without any Palestinian representation. Boucetta had repeatedly assured us that the King was intending to bring Milhem, and had insisted that we should ignore the flurry of comments from Palestinian sources suggesting that Milehm was unacceptable, and leave it to the Moroccans to handle the other Arabs.
 4. King Hassan seems to have made an effort to get Arafat on board during the weekend of 22/23 January, when the Arab League Committee were meeting in Morocco. The Moroccans failed to make a statement which had been expected 22 January confirming dates for the visit; this was the first signal that the King's talks with Arafat had run into trouble. As late as 29 January Boucetta was assuring Cheysson that the delegation were coming to London with Milhem. Since then the Moroccans have received a note from the PLO (para 4 of Rabat telno 79) which evidently created difficulties for them. We know separately that King Hassan asked King Fahd to

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help find a solution to the Palestinian problem, and that Fahd passed the buck to Arafat. The latter has now taken his decision. We do not know its terms precisely, but it probably concludes that Khalid al Hassan should take the PLO place in the delegation. His name has been mentioned to us by several Palestinians and other sources in recent days. Khalid al Hassan is an office-bearer in Fatah, the senior organisation in the PLO, and a close confidant of Arafat. He would not therefore be acceptable on the basis of our policy on contacts with the PLO.

5. It is just possible that Arafat has agreed to a Washington-type solution, where Khalid al Hassan would remain in his hotel, while the rest of the delegation called on The Queen and the Prime Minister. But it is hard to see what incentive Arafat has to settle for that. We have already put to him (and to King Hassan) the proposal that, separately from a successful Arab League delegation visit, Mr Hurd would see a PLO leader in the region. Arafat reacted coolly when this suggestion was put to him, and we have had no subsequent indication that the PLO will be swayed by it. The PLO have no stake in a mission on lines acceptable to us.

5. If the Moroccans maintain their decision to postpone the visit from 7-8 February, it would not be possible for diary reasons to reinstate it until about 10 March. The Queen will still be out of the country then; the Moroccans know that, and the King has said that he is nevertheless prepared to come.

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