

*D. Patterson**H.G.**Smith 8/4*FCS/80/150SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY

1. I was sorry that you were not after all able to visit Iraq during your recent visit to the Middle East.
2. Our Ambassador in Baghdad has telegraphed to say that the Iraqis now plan to mount the Trade Fair from 15 November, and that he would greatly value your presence there on the British Day which he hopes to have on 16 November. I understand that you would be willing to attend, but that you would like to be reassured that a visit by yourself to the Baghdad Trade Fair would be worthwhile and that it is a realistic proposition in the circumstances.
3. I am sure that your presence at the Fair would be valuable. The Iraqis regard the event as important, and attendance by VIPs from overseas as the touchstone of individual countries' views of the Iraqi market. Although one cannot say that the presence of a Cabinet Minister will produce dividends in the form of contracts, it is clear that countries which do not send such high level representatives will be handicapped in their pursuit of government business, which is what counts in Iraq. And we are, for other reasons, already at a disadvantage in that market vis-a-vis our European competitors. Although our exports at £250 million show a healthy increase, we have yet to secure a really big contract, for which some political gesture beforehand is probably necessary.
4. Whether the Iraqis are being realistic in aiming to mount the Fair as soon as mid-November, I cannot say: certainly their plan for a quick strike against Iran has misfired and the two countries may be in for a longish conflict. But I would hope that the international community would have found some way of arranging a durable ceasefire in less than six weeks from now. It is unlikely that the air raid damage to Baghdad will be so severe as to rule out a Trade Fair in the immediate aftermath of



a ceasefire, though I suspect that life in the city will be uncomfortable for some time to come. I would expect the Iraqis to make every effort to mount the Fair on schedule, provided that they judge it safe to do so.

5. Our Ambassador has pointed out that despite the obvious uncertainties we need to respond to the Iraqi announcement fairly soon. It would be most helpful therefore if you could let me know before too long whether or not you would, in principle, be prepared to attend the British Day at the Fair. The decision on whether or not it will be feasible for you to do so will need to be taken later in the light of developments.

6. I am copying this minute to the Prime Minister, to John Nott and to Robert Armstrong.

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(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

8 October 1980

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