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~~MR. LANKESTER~~

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RECORD OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND MRS. GANDHI  
HELD IN SOUTH BLOCK, NEW DELHI ON WEDNESDAY 15 APRIL 1981

Present: Mrs. Gandhi	The Prime Minister
Mr. Narasimha Rao	Sir John Thomson
Mr. Seyid Muhammed	Sir John Graham
Mr. Krishnaswamy Rao Sahib	Mr. M.K. Ewans
Mr. Sathe	Mr. Ingham
Mr. Malhotra	Mr. Alexander
Mr. Kapur	Mr. Mathrani
Mr. Khosla	Mr. Lankester
Mr. Hiremath	Mr. Jay
Mr. Gharekhan	Mr. Wetherell
Mr. Bhalla	
Mr. Ramanathan	

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Mrs. Gandhi welcomed the Prime Minister and referred to the traditional relations between India and the UK. However nothing could be taken for granted and one had to work hard to give relations greater meaning in changed circumstances. It was fortunate that India and the UK shared a common language. She wanted the Prime Minister's visit to be a success and to strengthen friendship between the two countries.

The Prime Minister said she had looked forward to her visit for a long time and hoped to make it a success. She agreed that it was necessary to work hard at the relationship between the two countries and not to take it for granted. She felt there had not been as much contact between India and the UK as there should have been. Her size, and status as a leading democratic Non-Aligned, and Commonwealth, country put India in a unique position of power and influence, which could be exerted for the benefit, not only of India, but of mankind in general. She knew that relations between India and other countries, such as the US, were not as good as might be expected between two democracies. The Prime Minister wanted to learn how India saw things and how one could help to bring to an end hostilities around the world and make sure that greater conflicts did not

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~



break out. The weapons of evil were greater now than ever before. But though one could analyse problems, it was not always easy to see the way ahead. She referred to her recent visit to the United States, which like India, enjoyed a great position in the world, and said she would like to give Mrs. Gandhi an account of her discussions with President Reagan and Secretary Haig, whom she had seen again after his recent visit to the Middle East.

The Prime Minister said that quite naturally the American Administration's first priority was to put their economic ideas into practice. It was on these that they had concentrated during their first 5 or 6 weeks in office. The Administration were now turning to all the important foreign affairs questions, but they had not yet made up their minds. She had received the very strong impression that they wanted to consult widely. They were aware of the criticism about insufficient consultation which had been levelled at the US in the past. This had led to the adoption of policies which were less successful than they might have been. This was why Secretary Haig had visited the Middle East. The Prime Minister pointed out that many people in the outlying parts of the US were not as familiar with international problems as those in Europe.

The Prime Minister said that President Brezhnev's letter to Western Heads of Government had been received just before her visit to Washington. It needed a careful and considered reply. Like us, the US would have rejoiced if it had been accompanied by a manifest sign that the Russians were ready to withdraw from Afghanistan on certain conditions. President Reagan and Secretary Haig had made it clear that they needed time to consider each point in the letter and that they would not want to negotiate until a US position had been prepared on all the issues, including SALT II and SALT III. The Prime Minister recalled that NATO countries were already pledged to try to negotiate a reduction in the number of tactical nuclear weapons. She said it would take time to set up a meeting with the Russians and that the US might attach conditions to one. Like us, they took the view that one

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could not accept as normal the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan. However, there would eventually have to be a meeting. Great sums were being spent on new weapons. Each generation of weapons was more sophisticated, dangerous and expensive than the previous one. But the US Administration would need time. It would also need to carry Congress with it.

On the Middle East, the Prime Minister said that the US Administration had not made up their minds on how best to carry the peace process forward. What the European countries were doing in this area was not in competition with the United States. Only the Americans could bring influence to bear on Israel, and the Middle East problem could not be settled without them. For a long time, there had been talk about the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and about secure borders for Israel. But the detail of these ideas, including who would have the right to vote and the status of Jerusalem, had not been worked out. In the European Community's effort, the country holding the Presidency was eliciting views in the area itself. No significant move would be made until after the Israeli elections and after the Americans had made up their minds on how to move forward. But there was an acceptance that positive steps had to be taken. At first, the US Administration had thought that, because of the Iran/Iraq crisis, the Arab/Israel problem was not so urgent. But during her visit to Washington, the Prime Minister had explained that the two problems were connected; that feeling about Palestine ran high in the Gulf; and that steps must be taken to solve the Arab/Israel problem, which in turn would have positive repercussions on the Gulf.

Turning to Southern Africa, the Prime Minister said that she was pleased at how Zimbabwe had evolved, though some problems remained. She said that, at the request of the government, British military advisers were in Zimbabwe to help integrate the guerrillas into the security forces. She referred to Lord Soames' recent visit to Zimbabwe and to the successful donors conference. This increased the prospects for genuine democracy in Zimbabwe which could influence

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CONFIDENTIAL

- 4 -

developments in the rest of Southern Africa in a desirable direction. The Prime Minister said she had discussed Namibia with President Reagan. She had previously talked to the South African Foreign Minister, who had given the impression that South Africa was waiting to see what stand the US would adopt before taking any further steps itself. She had tried to persuade him that there must be movement on Namibia if a difficult motion at the UN was to be avoided. However, though the South Africans had agreed to attend, the Pre-implementation talks in Geneva had not been a success. The UK was impressing on the US the need for progress on Namibia, and wanted to see a free and fair ballot in that country. However, the UK's role was not the same as in Zimbabwe. Instead of being in sole charge, five nations were involved.

The Prime Minister said that the US looked at almost every problem, be it Iran/Iraq, the Middle East, Namibia, Cuban presence in Africa, El Salvador or Libya, very much in an East/West context. This was valid in many cases. Nevertheless, she welcomed the fact that President Reagan was keen to maintain good relations with Mexico. The President had stated that he could not attend the Summit in Mexico in June, but that he might be able to if it were delayed. She stressed again the US Administration's desire to consult widely and to resolve some of the longer standing international problems in the right way. There was a wish to further the cause of democracy throughout the world, and to ensure that it was not in retreat. An open society, with all its problems, remained the best system that had ever been created. It provided the best opportunity for promoting prosperity and human dignity. The Prime Minister said that the US Administration was not, however, judging others, for example, on human rights. Unlike their predecessors, they did not take the view that foreign affairs were governed by this factor. They were much more realistic. She said that she and Lord Carrington had succeeded in influencing them on one or two issues, such as El Salvador. Mr. Rao asked to what extent the US position on El Salvador had been modified as a result of the Prime Minister's talks in Washington. The Prime Minister said that before her visit, a statement had been issued in London saying that there was evidence that the guerrillas

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CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL

- 5 -

were getting large quantities of arms from outside. We had condemned that. We condemned violence wherever it occurred. But we took the view that any sovereign country, be it Poland, Afghanistan or El Salvador must sort out its problems in its own way. If one accepted that view, one had to be careful about the number of advisers one sent to any country. The Prime Minister did not think that there were many US advisers in El Salvador.

At Mrs. Gandhi's request, Mr. Rao gave an account of the recent visit by three Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers and the Head of the PLO Political Department to Iran and Iraq. The Group had been asked by the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers to try to bring about peace between the two countries. In Iran, Mr. Rao said the Group had visited areas close to the fighting. They had been to Dezful and Ahwaz, where there had been intermittent shelling. The purpose of the mission had been to listen to both sides and not to put forward concrete proposals. Mr. Rao noted that, following the failure of the Islamic Conference initiative, to get both sides to accept its proposals, the Non-Aligned Group had felt it more appropriate to try to understand the positions of both sides before making proposals. The Group had been received cordially "and with confidence". In Baghdad it had met Mr. Tariq Aziz and Mr. Izzat Ibrahim who had given them a full account of the Iraqi position. They had spoken of the incessant interference by Iran in Iraq's internal affairs, which had compelled the latter to send their troops in in sheer self-defence. The Iraqis were prepared to have a ceasefire and then negotiate on substantive aspects of the ~~dis~~pute, before withdrawing. The Iranian approach was exactly the opposite. However, the two positions were not as inflexible and diametrically opposed as they might appear. In informal discussion with the two sides, the Non-Aligned Group had found signs of flexibility which needed to be analysed carefully and built on. The Group would meet again in Algiers in two or three days time to compare notes. If issues were identified, on which further discussion with Iran and Iraq was necessary, there would be a second trip to Tehran and Baghdad. In answer to the Prime Minister's question, Mr. Rao said that there was ground for hope, but a solution would take time. The Prime Minister said that it would be a great achievement if peace was

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CONFIDENTIAL



brought to the area. It would make a great difference to the world economy and might bring down oil prices. Though Mrs. Gandhi doubted whether these would come down, the Prime Minister pointed out that this had happened and there was pressure even now on the premiums. Mr. Rao said that it was something that the fighting between the two countries had not escalated. The Prime Minister spoke of apprehensions that, if peace initiatives showed no sign of success, this might happen. Mr. Rao said that the Non-Aligned Group hoped that its initiative would reduce this danger. He referred to the efforts of others, including Mr. Palme. The latter was concerned primarily with the Shatt-el-Arab, though he accepted that this issue could not be seen in isolation. He had come to no conclusion about how to resolve it. All the strands of the Iran/Iraq dispute were interdependent.

The Prime Minister said that three-quarters of the Indian correspondents she had seen in London last week had asked questions about US/Pakistan and UK/Pakistan relations. She asked for Mrs. Gandhi's views on relations with Pakistan. She had told the reporters that every nation had the right and duty to protect its own people. Mrs. Gandhi said that India fully accepted the right of Pakistan, as of any other country, to defend itself. But it should come as no surprise that Indians were agitated about the supply of arms to Pakistan. On more than one occasion, India had had to face pointless and unnecessary aggression from that country. India had taken the initiative to improve relations. Mrs. Gandhi said that, when the Bangladesh problem had broken out, she had told the West that, unless it exerted its influence on Pakistan, the situation would get out of control. India had taken no action, except for trying to prevent a massive inflow of refugees, until 11 of her cities were bombed. After the Pakistani surrender, there had been a strong feeling in the country that India should not stop but go on to consolidate her position. Without knowing what the reaction of her colleagues and the country would be, she had taken it upon herself to insist on a ceasefire. An hour after the surrender of the Pakistani forces, she had started a series of meetings with the Chiefs of Staff, the Cabinet and leaders of the Opposition. Though these had initially

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been strongly opposed to her line, within two hours she had been able to announce a unilateral ceasefire. Had she waited 24 hours, she would not have succeeded. At Indian initiative, Mr. Bhutto had visited India and the Simla agreement had been signed. Mrs. Gandhi had told him that two types of agreement were possible; one in which it was recognised that the problems of the two countries were complementary (and essentially economic), and that they should work for lasting peace; and another in which it was held that the interests of the two countries conflicted and that only a patchwork peace could be achieved. Mr. Bhutto had taken the line that Pakistan had unsuccessfully tried war and taking its case to the UN, and would now try the course of friendship. Had he taken a strong line on his return, he could have succeeded in this policy; but perhaps for understandable domestic reasons he had hesitated. Matters had become more difficult with his successors. Mrs. Gandhi said that India was anxious for friendship with Pakistan and her other neighbours. This friendship was a necessity. India was faced with huge problems and could ill afford confrontation. President Zia talked of friendship but raised issues which did not create the right atmosphere and excited Indian people. He raised Kashmir, though it had been agreed at Simla to leave it aside. During the communal disturbances last summer, which the Indian Government had deplored, the Pakistanis had reacted in an unhelpful way. India had nothing against friendship between the US and Pakistan, but was worried about the form the relationship might take. There was a feeling that it might be directed against India, though not intentionally or necessarily in the immediate future. Mrs. Gandhi recalled that President Eisenhower had told the Pakistanis that arms supplied by the US were only to be used against the Communists, but these had eventually been used against India. However, India would continue to try for friendship with Pakistan, no matter what the difficulties. Agha Shahi had been to Delhi twice over the past year and Mr. Rao would be going to Islamabad, perhaps in May.

The Prime Minister referred to the tremendous problems which Pakistan was facing. From its own experience, India would know what it was like to have to cope with a huge number of refugees. The hijacking incident had been appalling.

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CONFIDENTIAL



Mrs. Gandhi said she had reason to believe that for the first time the people of Pakistan were genuinely interested in good relations with India. However, military dictatorships tended to be worried about the influence which a democracy might have on their own people.

In answer to Mr. Rao's question, the Prime Minister said that she had not discussed military assistance to Pakistan with the US Administration. Mr. Rao said that persistent reports of a US decision to provide arms to Pakistan on a massive scale had caused concern to India. The Prime Minister said that her discussions in the US had concentrated on NATO and bilateral defence matters. They had briefly touched on the Rapid Deployment Force, though not in the terms reported by the press. There was a need for a force which could be moved quickly to where it was needed but only if requested. The US had some capability to do this and the UK had a parachute regiment available; but these were not adequate to respond quickly to urgent requests. We were faced with a girdle of conflicts around the world and any one of these conflicts might escalate. The question of an RDF had therefore been discussed briefly in Washington and she had stated that the UK would wish to make a modest contribution to such a force.

The Prime Minister said that following Lord Carrington's trip to Pakistan, she had received a letter from President Zia asking her to use her influence in Delhi to remove the deep-seated doubts and suspicions which continued to thwart the development of relations between India and Pakistan, and to explain Pakistan's genuine need to arm itself against an external threat. President Zia hoped that she would assure Mrs. Gandhi of Pakistan's genuine desire for friendship and the fact that Pakistan had neither the wish nor the capacity for an arms race with India. Mrs. Gandhi said there would be no arms race if Pakistan did not buy sophisticated modern weapons. She observed that all the new Pakistani airfields were along the Indian, not Afghan, border. She wondered how Pakistan could be expected to help over the Afghan crisis. The Russians took the view, with or without reason, that the refugees in Pakistan were in many cases not genuine. They

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used Pakistan as a base for insurgency. Supplying arms to Pakistan would only make the Russians dig their toes in and feel that they could not cede Afghanistan to influences hostile to them. The Prime Minister said that it was possible that, with the experience of Afghanistan, Pakistan would realise that its future lay in friendship with India. Mrs. Gandhi hoped this was so and thanked the Prime Minister for passing on President Zia's message.

The Prime Minister said that she had had the impression following Lord Carrington's visit to China that the prospects of friendship between that country and India were brighter. Mrs. Gandhi replied that, once again, it was she who had taken the initiative in trying to improve relations. Though she had been ignored to begin with, diplomatic relations had been re-established between the two countries and some agreements signed. Relations were not ideal, but India was working to improve them. The Chinese Foreign Minister was due to visit Delhi in the near future, but the dates which had been proposed conflicted with a UN conference. The Prime Minister said that, in the dangerous situation existing today, great efforts must be made to achieve an understanding with other countries.

The Prime Minister said that she had heard that the Saudi Foreign Minister's visit to Delhi earlier in the week had been successful. Mr. Rao said that the latter had confirmed what the Prime Minister had said about the policy making process in the US. The Saudi Foreign Minister had reported that, during his recent visit to Riyadh, Secretary Haig had made it clear that no firm conclusions should be drawn about the attitude of the US Administration for some time to come. Mrs. Gandhi said that, while she agreed with the Prime Minister that the Reagan Administration had not made up their minds on a number of issues, she had the impression that some of their statements aggravated rather than softened the situation. Mr. Rao continued that, bilaterally, the Saudi Foreign Minister's visit had been very important. New areas of co-operation had been identified and Protocols signed. The Prime Minister said that she hoped to meet Prince Saud in Riyadh. In answer to the

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Prime Minister's question, Mrs. Gandhi said she had not visited Saudi Arabia herself, though her father had done so.

Returning to the Iran/Iraq conflict, the Prime Minister said it would be a great achievement if the Non-Aligned Group could resolve it. Mrs. Gandhi said that the prestige of the two sides was involved. Mr. Rao added that, though the Non-Aligned Group had the goodwill of both sides, there were no hard issues to get to grips with. When the Prime Minister remarked that the conflict had started over differences about the Shatt-el-Arab, Mr. Rao said that the Iranians had taken the line that there would be no difficulty over resolving substantive issues, once the Iraqis had withdrawn. Sir John Graham asked whether they had insisted on observance of the 1975 agreement. Mr. Rao conceded that the Iranians would want to use that as a basis for discussion, but they were not inflexible about it. Bani Sadr had made it clear that Iran would be flexible on substantive issues. However, Mr. Rao did not rule out the possibility that Iran's position would harden once negotiations started. He said that both sides agreed that there must be a package solution. They accepted that specific aspects of the conflict could not be taken in isolation. Mrs. Gandhi said that the various issues would have to be resolved simultaneously so that neither side would lose face. Mr. Rao explained that when the Iranians said that a ceasefire and withdrawal of troops must take place simultaneously they meant that a decision about both must be taken at the same time and that withdrawal must follow as soon as possible after a ceasefire. Mrs. Gandhi recalled that at the start of the conflict, dignitaries from both sides had visited India and urged the latter to brand their opponents as the aggressors. Mr. Rao commented that both sides could only agree to a fact-finding mission on the understanding that its purpose was to identify the aggressor. It would be better to deal with the issues and leave the allocation of responsibility on one side.

18 April 1981

