

CONFIDENTIAL

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1. Sir C. Hamilton  
2. Mr. Cawley  
3. Mr. McLaughlin  
4. Mr. [unclear]  
R. Lawrence 2/9

BRITISH EMBASSY,

CAIRO.

September 18, 1964.

B1022/12

Dear Ronald,

I called on the Foreign Minister on September 17 to hand him the copies of my Credentials and the Letters of Recall of my predecessor. After some general conversation he said that I no doubt understood that while relations between our two countries were normal, they could not be described as particularly good. The U.A.R. Government for their part were anxious to improve this situation, but there were a number of problems causing mutual mistrust which must first be settled. He did not propose to argue about Israel, but the greatest stumbling block was the question of recognition of the government in the Yemen and the future of the "Arab South", which he said "you, of course, call by another name". As regards the Yemen, he said that the present régime had now been in power for two years and it was surely time that we recognised it. Failure to do so made the Arab countries suspicious of British intentions in the area. He went on to say that the U.A.R. had no intention at all of abandoning the Republican régime in the Yemen, and their troops would stay there as long as necessary to ensure its survival. But he agreed that the presence of Egyptian troops might be the cause of mistrust, not only to ourselves but also to Saudi Arabia. Some progress had been made with the latter and he hoped that it might also be possible to come to a better understanding with Britain. The Minister said that the financial burden of maintaining U.A.R. forces in the Yemen was a heavy one, and an unwelcome burden to a developing country which needed to utilise its resources for productive purposes. Some people, though he did not necessarily share their opinion, believed that Britain was perhaps maintaining unrest in the area precisely because of financial embarrassment to the U.A.R. These were the sort of mistrusts which must be dissipated.

2, As regards Aden, the Federation and the Protectorates (which the Minister of course referred to throughout as "The Arab South"), he said that whereas our process of de-colonisation had been good in other parts of the world he thought that we had been unnecessarily slow in this instance. For his Government, colonialism in any form was objectionable and they were pledged to its eradication. At the same time he recognised that the process had to differ in various parts of the world, but it was important that we should have a definite programme and timetable so that the Arab people whom we still ruled could have hope for the future. It would also greatly help to improve relations between the U.A.R. and Britain. These were matters which we ought to be able to discuss quite frankly.

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R. S. Scrivener, Esq.,  
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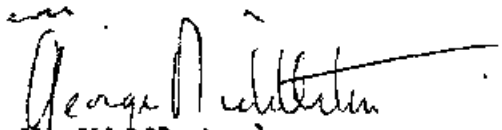
3. The Minister then turned to the Persian Gulf, as he knew that I had served there. Why, he asked, had we so long denied the benefits of progress to the Arabs of these small Sheikdoms. They were terribly backward, but it was all of our doing. I took him up on this and said that this was nonsense. As his own people must know, we had brought education, agriculture, administration and security to an area which had lacked it before. These people were indeed backward by the standards of much of the modern world, but they could not take their place in international society, or for that matter among the Arab nations, until they had acquired the basic equipment. I pointed out that the efforts we had made to hasten the independence of Kuwait. Far from denying these poor Arabs the benefits of civilisation we were doing everything possible to ensure that they participated in the benefits of their new-found wealth. If he did not believe me he only had to get the evidence of the many Egyptian teachers in that area who, if they were honest, would agree with what I said. The Minister seemed a little taken aback and shifted his ground to the Sultanate and said that he had heard that conditions in Muscat and Oman were still mediaeval. I did not deny this but emphasised that we had no direct responsibility and that anyway the resources of the Sultanate were so exiguous that material progress was a gigantic task which was made worse by the geographical nature of the country.

4. The Minister said that these were all matters which we could discuss on future occasions. He was glad that I had had experience of the area, which he was sure would prove useful. He went on to say that he realised until after the elections there was little progress to be hoped for, but that the new government in Britain (whether Conservative or Labour) would be bound to take a new look at its policy and he hoped this would provide the occasion for useful discussions. I said that we were sorry that Mr. Heath had been unable to visit the U.A.R. but that I felt sure that any new government was likely to want to send a Minister here for discussions if there was a fair hope that we could make a beginning in solving our differences.

5. The Minister was amiable enough and at some pains not to over-emphasise our differences at this first meeting. He more than once said that his Government were just as anxious to improve relations as our own. But professions and words were not enough and we must move on to actual deeds. He does not seem to mind frank speaking and even, I should think, the exchange of quite hard blows. But he is a cold fish and I imagine no friend of ours. I got the impression that he was being extremely cautious about what progress, if any, had been made with Prince Faisal.

6. In conclusion he enquired about Sir Harold Beeley, and volunteered that the most important thing about the Disarmament talks was to keep them firmly in Geneva among people who understood them and out of the General Assembly of the United Nations where, he said, "it would be very dangerous". He did not elaborate on this and I then took my leave.

I am copying this letter to Washington and Jeddah and to the Political Resident at Bahrain, and POMEAC Aden.

*Yours ever*  
  
(G. H. Middleton)

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