

# How to Read a Cable

## What Is a Cable?

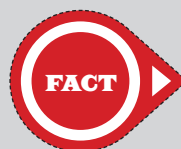
DIPLOMATIC CABLES are the official communications between embassies and consulates abroad and the Department of State. They memorialize the conduct of foreign policy; they contain démarche instructions to posts, negotiation guidelines, memoranda of conversations, and policy recommendations; and they report on local events, providing a constant stream of information about what's happening around the world. Cables often include a "comment" with analysis and policy recommendations from embassy officers.

## What's Happening Here?

This cable from 3 May 2000 details a meeting between US ambassador to Jordan William Burns and King Abdullah bin Al-Hussein II of Jordan regarding a potential bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) between Jordan and the US. Having become king of Jordan after his father's death in February 1999, Abdullah II focused on building Jordan's economy following years of excessive debt. Jordan became a member of the World Trade Organization in April 2000, but King Abdullah II wanted further integration into the global economy.

After negotiations between Amman and Washington and ratification by the US Senate, the US-Jordan FTA entered into force in December 2001. It was the first US FTA with an Arab state and the fourth such agreement at that time. According to Burns in his memoir, *The Back Channel*, Jordanian exports to the US increased from \$9 million in 1998 to more than \$1 billion by 2003 thanks to the agreement and this quiet diplomatic and legislative success.

**CLASSIFICATION: SECRET**  
Classification is determined by the originator of the message for a specific period of time. This message was originally marked SECRET. Other categories include SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED (SBU), CONFIDENTIAL, and TOP SECRET.



The greatest cable ever written was George Kennan's Long Telegram, sent from the Moscow embassy in 1946.

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RELEASE IN PART  
1.4(B), 1.4(D)

DECLASSIFIED

~~SECRET~~ PTO6988

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ACTION NODS-00

INFO LOG-00 CCOE-00 SAS-00 /000W  
-----529BB1 031524Z /38

O 031604Z MAY 00  
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4229

~~SECRET~~ SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002370

NODIS ~~DECLASSIFIED~~

E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/3/20  
TAGS: PREL, JO

SUBJECT: KING ABDULLAH DEEPLY DISAPPOINTED BY UNCERTAINTY ABOUT FTA, WORRIED ABOUT MONTHS AHEAD

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR BURNS FOR REASON 1.5 (B,D)

1. (S) AMBASSADOR MET ONE-ON-ONE MORNING OF MAY 3 WITH KING ABDULLAH, WHO EXPRESSED DEEP DISAPPOINTMENT WITH WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS THE "VERY BAD NEWS" HE HAD RECEIVED FROM HIS AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR PURSUING A BILATERAL FTA FOR JORDAN THIS YEAR. WITH UNCHARACTERISTIC FRUSTRATION, HE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD (RELUCTANTLY) THE TACTICAL NEED TO AVOID ANY OVERT EFFORT TO BEGIN TALKING ABOUT AN FTA UNTIL AFTER THE HOUSE VOTE ON CHINA PNTR LATER THIS MONTH, BUT CONTINUES TO PLACE GREAT IMPORTANCE ON LAUNCHING FORMAL NEGOTIATIONS IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS VISIT TO

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1.4(D)

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WASHINGTON JUNE 8-8. THE KING MADE CLEAR THAT HE SEES A MUTUAL COMMITMENT TO TRY TO ACHIEVE A BILATERAL FTA BEFORE THE END OF THIS ADMINISTRATION AS THE "CRUCIAL OBJECTIVE" OF HIS TRIP TO THE UNITED STATES.

2. (S) ABDULLAH EXPLAINED IN FAMILIAR TERMS THE URGENCY OF HIS INTEREST IN MOVING AHEAD ON AN FTA. HAVING TAKEN VERY IMPRESSIVE STRIDES ON STRUCTURAL ECONOMIC REFORM, AND HAVING STUCK HIS NECK OUT ON COUNTER-TERRORISM AND A VARIETY OF OTHER ISSUES, HE NOW FEELS MOUNTING PRESSURES TO SHOW ECONOMIC RESULTS, AND REASSURE HIS PUBLIC AND ESPECIALLY HIS BUSINESS COMMUNITY THAT THINGS ARE MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. PURSUIT OF AN FTA, COUPLED WITH WTO ACCESSION, IS A WAY TO HELP LOCK IN ECONOMIC REFORMS AND COMPEL HIS PRIVATE SECTOR TO BECOME MORE COMPETITIVE.

Declassification Authority: Geoffrey W. Chapman, OCA, Senior Reviewer, A/GIS/IPS

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3. (S) THE REGIONAL SITUATION IS BECOMING MORE EXPLOSIVE, WITH ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON AND THE POSSIBILITY OF AN UPRISER IN SYRIA LOOMING AHEAD. PEOPLE IN JORDAN ARE FEELING MORE AND MORE FRUSTRATED ECONOMICALLY, WITH UNEMPLOYMENT AT 21 PERCENT. STANDARDS OF LIVING STILL FALLING STEADILY, AND THE GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR GROWING MORE OBVIOUS. THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL CLIMATE IS SOBER TOO, WITH PALESTINIAN-EAST BANKER FRUSTRATIONS RE-EMERGING, AND THE GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT AT EACH SECRET.

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OTHERS' THREATS.

4. (S) ABDULLAH ACKNOWLEDGED READILY THAT A BILATERAL FTA IS HARDLY A PANACEA FOR ALL THOSE CHALLENGES. HE SAID HE PLANS TO CHANGE THE GOVERNMENT THIS SUMMER, FOLLOWING AN EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF PARLIAMENT IN JUNE-JULY.

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5. (S) THE KING STRESSED HIS APPRECIATION FOR AMERICAN SUPPORT SINCE HIS FATHER'S DEATH, BUT ADDED THAT "I'M AFRAID NEXT YEAR WILL BE A LOT TOUGHER." HE SAID AGAIN THAT HE FELT INCREASING PRESSURE TO SHOW RESULTS, ESPECIALLY ON THE ECONOMY.

6. (S) JIS GISH RECENT OFFERS TO THE WHITE HOUSE RECENT CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS AS EVIDENCE OF WIDE SUPPORT FOR A JORDAN FTA ON THE HILL, AND EMPHASIZED THAT HE WANTED TO WORK WITH THE ADMINISTRATION TO FIND A WAY TO MOVE AHEAD ON AN FTA THAT DIDN'T CUT ACROSS THE CHINA ISSUE. "I KNOW WE CAN GET THIS DONE IF WE SECRET.

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WORK TOGETHER, AND IT WILL HELP ME MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE YOU COULD DO THIS YEAR."

6. (S) AMBASSADOR UNDERSCORED THAT OUR COMMITMENT TO JORDAN IS AS STRONG AS EVER. HE SAID HE WAS SURE HE WOULD CONTINUE TO LOOK FOR A WAY FORWARD ON THE FTA, EVEN IF WE HAD TO DELAY ACTION IN MAY. HE PROMISED TO CONVEY TO WASHINGTON THE IMPORTANCE THE KING ATTACHED

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TO HAVING A CONCRETE COMMITMENT TO POINT TO AT THE END OF HIS VISIT, AND URGED THE KING NOT TO JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS AT THIS STAGE ABOUT WHAT MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT BE POSSIBLE. THERE COULD BE NO GUARANTEES, BUT THAT DIDN'T MEAN HE WOULDN'T KEEP LOOKING HARD AT HOW TO ADDRESS THE KING'S CONCERNS.

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7. (S) COMMENT: IN SEPARATE CONVERSATIONS WITH AMBASSADOR, ROYAL COURT CHIEF TAWAHMUK FOREIGN

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SUBJECT: KING ABDULLAH DEEPLY DISAPPOINTED BY UNCERTAINTY ABOUT FTA, WORRIED ABOUT MONTHS AHEAD

MINISTER KHATEB AND GID DIRECTOR BATTIKH WERE CONSIDERABLY MORE ALARMIST THAN THE KING. AMBASSADOR MADE THE SAME POINTS TO THEM ABOUT NOT OVERREACTING AT THIS POINT AND CONTINUING TO PLUG AWAY. HE DELIVERED A SIMILAR MESSAGE TO MINISTER OF TRADE HILALAH, WHO SAID HE CONTINUES TO WORK QUIETLY WITH HIS TEAM TO PREPARE FOR TRADE TALKS. END COMMENT.

BURNS

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**O 031604Z MAY 00**  
Known as the cable's date-time group (DTG), this is the standard date and time format recording when the document was created. The DTG uses Zulu time (GMT)—as indicated by the Z—followed by the month and two-digit year.

**NODIS**  
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*"Cable writing is thoughtful and reflective—a cross between reporting and essay writing. Cables provide context."*

—MARY THOMPSON-JONES, TO THE SECRETARY:  
LEAKED EMBASSY CABLES AND AMERICA'S  
FOREIGN POLICY DISCONNECT

**DIPLOMATIC DOCUMENTS**

- aide-mémoire:** An informal note of a conversation that serves merely to help with memory recall.
- démarche:** A formal diplomatic take on a government's official position on a given subject written to another government or international organization.
- memorandum:** A written statement on any subject, generally routine, from one organization to another.
- non-paper:** A paper—despite the name—that summarizes a démarche or other verbal presentation to a foreign government. See *aide-mémoire*.
- opinion piece:** An article that articulates specific US government policies and views written for foreign media outlets.