

MINTOFF - IN THE EYES OF AMERICA (PART 1)

COMPILED BY MATTHEW VELLA

Malta's 'peppery and persuasive socialist prime minister', as he was once described by anthropologist Jeremy Boissevain, was the big man of Maltese politics thanks to his redoubtable persona, deft negotiating skills, and political brinkmanship.

At the same time, the leader of the small island was putting Malta on the map, using his hard bargaining prowess to extract a satisfactory deal for the continued presence of NATO's sixth fleet, and carve himself a niche in world politics by bringing the Mediterranean dimension and Middle East conflict to bear on the Helsinki talks of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

His stormy relations with Western powers, and his flirting with Soviet satellites and emerging independent states within the Non-Aligned Movement, cemented Mintoff's position as the cantankerous leader of a 'juvenile' democratic state, eager to extract any form of financial support from any country that was willing to give it to Malta. But at the same time, as seen in some of these telegrams sent from the US embassy to the Department of State and to the US mission to NATO in Brussels, Mintoff's antics and boisterousness also nurtured a sense of ridicule.

While many of the telegrams in the run-up to Helsinki's final act of 1975 talk of Mintoff's delaying tactics, they also reveal how the Labour prime minister used his role in European politics to strengthen his relations with other Arab states.

The telegrams themselves are peppered with sardonic observations of Mintoff and his personal staff or his 'terrorised' civil service. The observations of US ambassador John Getz show Mintoff to be a man who enjoys working late at night, refuses to go by the rules, and is always angling for recognition of Malta's problems as an emerging independent country in development.

Reading the telegrams

The telegrams were sent on a near-daily basis to the US Department of State, where they sometimes received the attention of the office of Henry Kissinger, the US Secretary of State, or else that of Donald Rumsfeld, then the US permanent representative to NATO in Brussels. Every telegram bears the surname of their author, some of them embassy attaches, who would give a run-down of daily events. Most of them contain some observation of Mintoff and his closest aides.

An American spy in Malta? The Pritzlaff affair

Mintoff forces Kissinger into micro-managing a temporary concern, when he claims that former US ambassador to Malta John Pritzlaff is conferring with PN stalwart Guido Demarco.

27 SEPTEMBER 1973, SECRETARY OF STATE

Mintoff complains of US meddling in Maltese affairs. Prime Minister Mintoff is seriously concerned that a secret "well-known State Department official" visited Malta twice in 1973 and held secret meetings with Opposition politicians. Mintoff would consider a continuation of these activities an act of hostility by the US against the GOM. Embassy Valletta knows of no such US visitor, but would appreciate some sort of response to forestall yet another Mintoff Tantrum. **KISSINGER**

28 SEPTEMBER 1973, EMBASSY VALLETTA

For Ambassador Getz. Contents conveyed orally to Camilleri this morning. He clearly was relieved by our response, and said that PM had authorized him to say that the "State Department Official" concerned is former ambassador Pritzlaff and that the politically active Maltese with whom he is expected to meet in London is Miss Mabel Strickland, leader of the Progressive Constitutional Party. He requested that this info be closely held within USG.

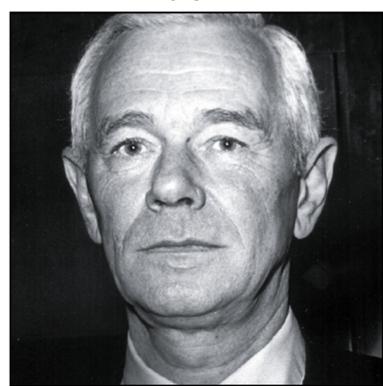
After some probing, Camilleri said that GOM not sure whether Pritzlaff had in fact visited Malta, but definitely knew that he had been in telephone contact with Miss Strickland, Nationalist MPs here, and with those that had visited US. He mentioned only Nationalist MP Guido Demarco (recently in US as Leader grantee) as example.

Chargé told Camilleri that to his knowledge, Amb. Pritzlaff had not visited Malta since his departure and that he believed that he is no longer with USG. Camilleri asked if latter point could be checked out and chargé agreed to query Washington.

At close of meeting, Camilleri, who was his



Dom Mintoff, flanked by right-hand man Joe Camilleri



John Getz, US Ambassador to Malta

usual low-key cordial self throughout, apologized for "all the fuss" and explained that PM is nervous over recent events, such as recent Nationalist demonstration.

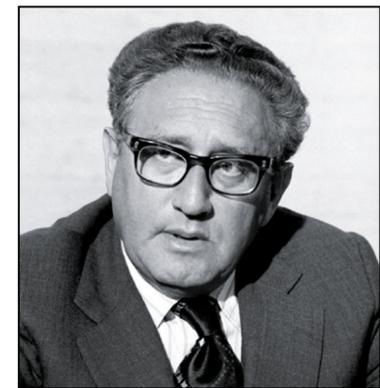
Action requested: confirmation whether Amb. Pritzlaff still employed by USG and authorization to inform Camilleri. **TUCKER**

28 SEPTEMBER 1973, SECRETARY OF STATE

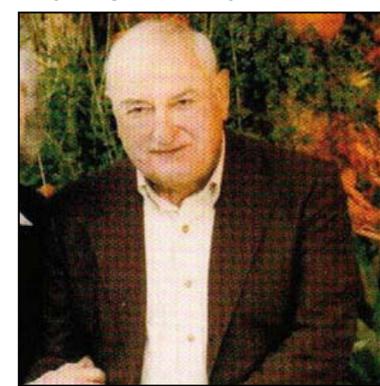
Chargé should give following reply to GOM in response to Camilleri's charges: "The USG is unaware of any visits to Malta by officials of the Department of State that would correspond to those described. Likewise, we are unaware of any planned meeting in London. The USG categorically rejects the allegation that an official of the Department of State has discussed matters inimical to the GOM with Maltese Opposition MPs and further, rejects the implication that the US is involved in any 'activities' that could be considered hostile to the GOM. If the GOM wishes to provide any information to support its allegations, we will, of course, give such information due consideration." FYI: Department also knows of no visitor to Malta in 1973 who could conceivably fit Camilleri's description. **END KISSINGER**

1 OCTOBER 1973, SECRETARY OF STATE

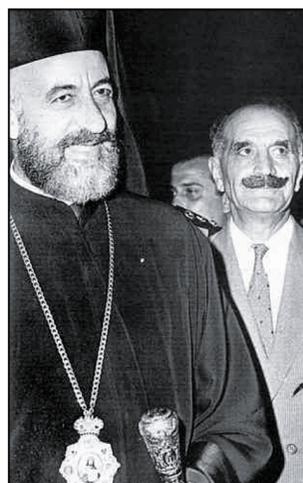
Dept. confirmed with Amb. Pritzlaff's office that latter no longer has any official ties with USG. Pritzlaff out of country for several weeks on trip to Australia and UK. Embassy authorized to inform Camilleri only that Pritzlaff no longer employed by USG, without mentioning that we were in touch with his office. Embassy should also express our unhappiness over fact that GOM saw fit to make serious, formal charges against US based on flimsy and substantiated evidence. FYI we are unable to determine that Pritzlaff met Guido Demarco and have no reason, other than Camilleri's assertion, to believe he did. **END KISSINGER**



Henry Kissinger, US Secretary of State



John Pritzlaff, US Ambassador to Malta



Archbishop Makarios

'Makarios may wish lessons on how to squeeze money out of HMG'

Cypriot President Archbishop Makarios arrives in Malta on transit to Tripoli

7 NOVEMBER, 1973 - EMBASSY VALLETTA

Makarios will call on PM Mintoff morning November 8 and have lunch with him and Mrs Mintoff (probably privately) on November 9. Local press of all political colorations welcome the Archbishop's visit, with Labor press stressing similarities of the two island countries and Makarios' past conflicts with British... **COMMENT:** It would not be surprising if Makarios and Mintoff had meetings additional to those shown on schedule. Their talks certainly will be mainly on Middle East and Mediterranean cooperation, but Makarios also may wish additional lessons on how to squeeze money out of HMG. **GETZ**

'Mintoff terrorises the civil service'

Getz is given the go-ahead for the visit of USNS Wyman, an oceanographic vessel, after considerable delay

19 OCTOBER, 1973 - SECRETARY OF STATE

In view of Middle East situation and recent signs of Mintoff's irritation with both US and British, embassy is requested to withhold notification for time being of proposed visit [of USNS Wyman] pending further instructions. **KISSINGER**

14 DECEMBER, 1973 - SECRETARY OF STATE

You may inform GOM that (a) Wyman is not REPEAT not armed, and (b) uses marine diesel fuel... Embassy should ensure we get clear response - affirmative or negative - by December 15 to Wyman visit request. GOM attitude toward our first such request in 2 and a half years of Mintoff administration has obvious implications beyond question of port call, and we do not wish GOM to evade issue by stalling past deadline.

In pressing for prompt, definitive reply, you should make clear our unhappiness with Abela's initial refusal to transmit what we viewed as routing and legitimate request, and with still further delays. You should stress that we have exceeded any obligation to advise Maltese of Wyman's activities... further temporizing will be viewed as refusal... You should make point

that should GOM turn down US request, after allowing similar Soviet visits, professed Mintoff policy of even-handedness toward big powers would be seriously called into question.

15 DECEMBER - EMBASSY VALLETTA

Administrative Secretary in OPM, Agius Ferrante, has just informed us that PM Mintoff approves Wyman visit on condition that no officers or crew wear uniforms on board within six miles of Malta or ashore. We again stated that all on board Wyman are civilians and would not possess military uniforms, although officers may have uniforms of the type worn by officers on merchant vessels. Agius Ferrante made it clear that Mintoff only concerned that visit Wyman not give an impression that visit has military operational connotations.

Believe it best therefore, that to extent feasible, officers, crew and scientist avoid wearing uniforms that could be taken for those of US Navy. In fairness to Mintoff, and as a result talking with Prime Minister's private secretary Camilleri and Agius Ferrante, it is now clear that delay in agreement not due to political attitudes. Request was in hands of subordinates who were trying to anticipate every conceivable question Mintoff might raise [...] This state of affairs of course results from the way in which Mintoff deals with, and terrorises, the civil service. **GETZ**

A glimpse into Mintoff's diplomatic style

Mintoff shows himself to be 'unusually level-headed' in a meeting with the French foreign minister

8, MAY, 1973 - EMBASSY PARIS

Deputy director for Southern Deputy director for Southern Europe Gelade told Embassy Office May 8 that Mintoff's visit to Paris had served to restore good France/Maltese relations. Relations had been strained in previous year first because Mintoff had tried vainly to arrange instant official visit to France in midst of his Nato base negotiations and second, because he blamed GOF for delays in revision of Maltese accord with EC.



John Attard Kingswell, at the EEC headquarters. A young Alfred Sant is seen first from right

In March 1973, when Mintoff had asked visiting French sec-staf for foreign affairs Lipowski to arrange early meeting with Pompidou [Georges, French president], his primary interest had been Mediterranean affairs... Foreign Minister Jobert [Michel] had patiently explained that EC working on global approach to its Mediterranean relations, of which Malta was only one part...

Mintoff apparently understood but still pleaded for special treatment of Malta in view of its pressing unemployment problems. He said Malta also special case since, while preserving ties with African neighbours, it desires to be European. Mintoff vainly urged that French economic assistance be in soft loans. GOF's only concession was to grant another 5,000 tonnes of wheat...

Gelade commented that Mintoff again give him appearance of level-headed seriousness, although in his impatience Mintoff uses unconventional shock tactics. Team of Mintoff, Attard-Kingswell, Camilleri and Mizzi work well together and thoroughly prepare their cases, Gelade commented... Mintoff showed himself greatly worried about Middle East and also about danger that his friend Qadafi might launch some intemperate action if there is no further movement toward Arab-Israeli solution. **IRWIN**



French foreign minister Michel Jobert

Chief Justice Cremona goes to Tripoli, and checks on any upcoming Israeli raids

12 APRIL, 1973 - EMBASSY VALLETTA

Visits to Tripoli by Maltese figures indicate Mintoff is making systematic effort to demonstrate warmth of Malta-Libyan relations to Maltese population. Last week Brigadier Sammut-Tagliaferro, Commander Malta Land Force, visited Tripoli for several days. In discussion with DATT [defence attaché] following his return, Sammut-Tagliaferro was reticent in discussing visit, but did admit he was asking Libyans for assistance, presumably material and possibly related to needs of pioneer corps which will be created. **COMMENT:** Sammut-Tagliaferro, who has been outspokenly anti-Mintoff and is even more outspokenly pro-British, undoubtedly found this experience somewhat uncomfortable.

Evening April 12, Chief Justice Cremona informed us that he will be visiting Tripoli next week. Again, he did not indicate that PM had ordered him to go, but lacking any sensible reason for visit, such is our conclusion. Cremona was obviously unhappy about trip. Among other things, he asked Israeli ambassador, who was present during conversation, if he could give him assurances there would be no Israeli raid on Tripoli during his visit. His request was only half in jest. Israeli replied with a smile that he could give such assurances for next week but not later... **GETZ.**

...and Mintoff misses his plane to Libya

23 APRIL, 1973 - EMBASSY VALLETTA

Past weekend brought much form if not substance to Malta-Libya relations. Cancellation of brief Mintoff visit to Libya widely publicised in local press. According to reports, Mintoff... planned to make few hours visit to Libya. Although Mizzi, Camilleri, Dalli, who were to accompany him, were at the airport with a high-power farewell committee headed by Justice Minister Buttigieg, neither executive Libyan jet nor Mintoff arrived. Failure of Mintoff to show can be explained by fact that he lives only minutes away from airport. He probably awaits word that aircraft is ready to depart before leaving home. We cannot explain failure of jet to arrive or why others were not informed... **GETZ.**



Chief Justice J.J. Cremona