

PM/Board of Deputies of British Jews

Middle East  
meeting note.

No 10 at 10.00 hours on Tuesday 27 November

Original on PM: October 1979

the case of Rhodesia, the sooner a settlement was achieved in the Middle East, the better for all parties concerned.

Mr. Janner asked whether there might be some quiet Government move on oil supplies for Israel. Her difficulties were much greater now that the last fields had been handed back to Egypt. The Prime Minister doubted whether there could be any developments here. Britain had responsibilities both as part of the EEC and as a member of the International Energy Agency. The 5% shortage created by the Iranian situation had been bad enough. If the 7% shortage were to be reached, triggering the IEA sharing arrangements, there would be an entirely new situation. Politics had taught her never to extrapolate from trends. In respect of oil supplies there had been few predictions of the Yom Kippur war and recent Iranian events, both of which had had a dramatic impact. Those monitoring developments had been alarmed by the Mecca Mosque attack whose ultimate meaning was not yet clear. It was still proving impossible to get the consumer countries and OPEC countries together. In Western countries faced by the alternative of massive unemployment, Governments were getting their oil where they could. This created a volatile spot market. The Prime Minister could not blame Governments who took this action. The UK was not yet up to self-sufficiency. If future developments did create shortages above the 7%, i.e. the trigger point, there would be major international activity because of the crippling economic effect: the long-term implications could not be properly assessed. It was not in the Arab interest to create such a disturbance. Mr. Janner said that Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and some other producers had an interest in stability, but it was not true of all. The Prime Minister said that it was in the interest of some major Arab states to keep the Western economies functioning. Dr. Kopelowitz said that the delegation were asking whether the Israeli oil companies could obtain commercial supplies from the North Sea companies. The Prime Minister said that North Sea production was committed for some time ahead. About half our exports were already going to Europe. Mr. Janner said that the Board of Deputies understood that there had been approaches to the

/ British Government

British Government in connection with the Egyptian/Israeli peace process. The Prime Minister responded that she was not in a position to comment on detailed possibilities. The Board of Deputies should pursue this with the Secretary of State for Energy.

Mr. Janner asked about the Government's attitude to the PLO. The Prime Minister emphasised that the Government had never recognised the PLO. The Foreign Secretary had not done so in his recent speech. He had, correctly, said that there must be discussions with the Palestinian people. Mr. Lucas commented that the Prime Minister must mean the Palestinian Arabs. The Prime Minister said that the PLO was linked with terrorism. Mr. Young said that the Board of Deputies believed there were links with the IRA. They had been unable to produce evidence. They hoped to be able to do so in the future. The Prime Minister said that she had an intellectual problem when she spoke of no recognition of the PLO. People asked why she was negotiating with Messrs. Mugabe and Nkomo. Her answer was this was essential to stop a war. She had had to derogate from her absolute stand on terrorism to pursue peace in Rhodesia. This was a practical problem. Lord Carrington's whole speech should be considered. It was a very balanced presentation. There was a major problem in the Middle East. For this reason the Prime Minister could not say that she would never, never, deal with the PLO. This might be necessary to get a settlement, as in Rhodesia. The representatives of all people involved would have to participate. King Hussein had told her that he was working on Yasser Arafat, to get him to cut down terrorist activity. He believed that Arafat was becoming more moderate. Mr. Janner said that the Board of Deputies appreciated the Government's stand in respect of the PLO within Europe and within the EEC. It mirrored the position that Mr. Callaghan had taken in the past, in the teeth of strong opposition, especially from the French. The Board of Deputies would not disagree with the Prime Minister's view about the possible need for contacts in the future. They well understood the reasoning. Mr. Savitt said that the problem in talking to moderate Palestinian Arabs was their difficulties with the PLO.

/ The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister said she did not know how effective King Hussein's contacts with Arafat were proving. She believed that he was having quite an influence.

Dr. Kopelowitz asked how the Prime Minister saw the future of the West Bank. The Prime Minister said she had no definitive answer to this question which was frequently put to her. There were a range of possibilities. She did not believe that the problem had yet been thought through with proper intellectual clarity. But, whatever perfect solution might be devised, it could not be imposed on the various inhabitants of the area who had their own strong ideas. A loose federation with Jordan seemed perhaps the most likely outcome. Mr. Savitt asked whether the position would not be eased if King Hussein would declare himself and join the peace negotiations. The Prime Minister said that this might seem the case to the British, but it was not for the British Government to do anything which might weaken Hussein's internal position. Mr. Janner agreed, but asked for the Prime Minister's assessment of the likelihood of his joining the peace discussions. The Prime Minister said that she did not see much likelihood of further changes in the current groupings over the peace process. Mr. Janner said that in Israel King Hussein was seen as having made the wrong choices, first in 1967, again in 1973 and now over the peace process. Mr. Pinner said that the peace making process lacked encouragement in the United Kingdom, especially in the media and in the universities. He would not wish to extend his criticism to the Government. The Prime Minister stressed that everybody had to work for a comprehensive solution. It would be to the advantage of everyone in the area, and of all Western countries. Only the Soviet group could benefit from maintenance of the problem. She found it surprising that this reality was not universally recognised. But reason did not always work in politics. Mr. Janner commented that this was particularly true in the case of Israel, a democracy with groups publicly expressing positions which were difficult to reconcile. Dr. Kopelowitz commented that November was a sensitive month for the Jewish community, and included the anniversary of the Balfour

/ Declaration.

Declaration. The Board of Deputies asked Her Majesty's Government to do all possible at the highest level to assist the peace process. The Prime Minister noted that there was probably very little prospect of movement during the build-up to the United States election.

In concluding, the Prime Minister agreed with Mr. Janner that the meeting should be regarded as totally private. Mr. Janner said that the Board of Deputies would be putting out a press release noting that the meeting had taken place and listing the topics touched upon. There would be no further comment.

The meeting concluded at 1050.