



PM/79/78

PRIME MINISTERMiddle East: Policy Towards the Palestinians

1. Middle East peace efforts have now turned to the Palestinian problem. Discussion in the Security Council may resume at short notice on a resolution which would reaffirm Resolution 242 and recognise the Palestinian right to self-determination. The attitude of the PLO on this and on efforts to resolve the Middle East conflict is crucial.

2. In our policy toward the Arab/Israel conflict we are committed to:

(i) Israel's right to exist within secure and recognised boundaries;

(ii) a comprehensive peace settlement based on Security Council Resolution 242, and taking account of the rights of the Palestinians, including their right to a homeland;

(iii) support for US peace making efforts insofar as they can contribute to this end.

3. Within this framework we need to consider whether to recognise the Palestinian right to self-determination. At the Security Council it was hoped that the passing of a self-determination resolution could secure acceptance by the PLO of Israel's right to exist. We should see whether we can do more to bring the PLO to this position.

Self-determination

4. The right to self-determination commands our general support, and the Palestinian Arabs have as good a claim as most to be considered a people entitled to that right. So long as this is denied Israel's position will not be secure. Only if the Palestinians can decide their own future will they accept Israel's right to exist. The United States and Europe have recognised that no settlement will work unless it commands broad Palestinian support.

5. There



5. There are practical objections. It would not be easy to consult the Palestinians in any meaningful sense. It could be argued that an international commitment to self-determination meant a referendum first and negotiations afterwards and thus run counter to the Camp David gradualist approach. It might be, falsely, equated with a commitment to a sovereign Palestinian State, and held to exclude any other solution.

6. To meet these objections we should stress that self-determination applies for an area of Arab Palestine, namely the West Bank and the Gaza strip, occupied in 1967 excluding the (Syrian) Golan Heights, but including East Jerusalem. For the right to be exercised it would be necessary for Palestinian negotiators and representatives to accept Israel's right to exist within secure and recognised boundaries as stipulated in Resolution 242. It should not necessarily entail an independent sovereign state but cannot exclude it. It should be seen as a necessary development if the Camp David negotiations are to lead in the end to a durable, comprehensive settlement.

#### The PLO

? 7. The PLO is a political organisation but encompasses the main Palestinian guerrilla movements. It was committed by its Covenant in 1965 to armed struggle (in practice terrorism) and the establishment of a secular state throughout Palestine (ie including Israel). But the statements of its mainstream leaders leave little doubt that they would settle for a Palestinian state on the West Bank and in Gaza (and on this basis would accept Israel's existence). The PLO claims to be the sole authentic voice of the Palestinians. This is impossible to test. But it certainly represents a very large number of Palestinians.

8. There are informal contacts between British officials and the PLO in New York, Beirut and London and elsewhere but successive Governments have avoided Ministerial contacts until the PLO accepts Resolution 242 and recognises Israel's right to exist. Had the moves in the Security Council succeeded, the way would have been open for such contacts. They failed

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through Israeli opposition to any modification or addition to Resolution 242 and to dealings with the PLO.

9. Nevertheless, any agreement on the future of the West Bank and Gaza must have the support of the Palestinians if it is to endure. For the foreseeable future, there will be no valid spokesman for the Palestinians who do not shelter under the PLO umbrella: even Mr Dayan talks with PLO supporters in Gaza. If we are to help toward a settlement we too must be able, like the other Europeans, to talk with political authority to the more responsible PLO leaders.

10. The US cannot at present deal direct with the PLO because of commitments made to Israel by Dr Kissinger. Hence the Andy Young affair. If Ministers did have contacts with the PLO, the Israelis and their supporters (but not the US Administration) would react bitterly. We should be asked how we should like it if friendly governments had a dialogue with the IRA. Links between the PLO and the IRA would be brought up (the evidence is sketchy and does not justify press allegations, but there have certainly been contacts). Israel's willingness to listen to us would for a time at least be less. In dealings with Mr Begin this would not make much difference.

#### Conclusion

11. We should be better placed to help bring about a Middle East settlement if we supported the principle of Palestinian self-determination and moved toward more political contacts with the PLO. Such moves would bring us into line with the majority of our European partners, notably the French and the Germans. They would help defend our material economic interests in the Arab world and help us give more effective, because more independent, support to the United States. They could also help the position of the moderate Palestinian leaders and the conservative Arab regimes where growing dissatisfaction with the United States is a source of regional instability. They would in no way endanger the security of Israel.



12. I invite my colleagues to agree that we should publicly accept the principle of self-determination as set out in para 6 above, either in the context of a renewed Security Council debate or in my speech to the General Assembly.

*No* → I further invite agreement in principle that we should make a modest advance in our contacts with the PLO. We should not announce any change in policy, but continue to use existing senior official contacts in New York and elsewhere to impress on the PLO the need to accept Resolution 242 as a basis for negotiation. If a suitable opportunity arose for an informal Ministerial meeting, we should take it.

13. I am sending copies of this minute to the other members of OD and to Sir John Hunt.

(CARRINGTON)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

11 September 1979

I am deeply opposed to the course of action set out in Lord C's minute. I don't believe that West Bank or Gaza + corridors is viable and I don't think we have studied the 'homeland' policy sufficiently to know what it means in practice.

CONFIDENTIAL

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SEP 1979

