



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

(2) London SW1A 2AH

27 January 1981

PRIVATE

*Princ Amster*

*Dear Keith*

Thank you for your letter of 15 January.

I am also exclusively concerned with British interests. It is in our interests that we act on the reality of the Middle East, not what we may wish it were like. This is not to say that we accept uncritically what we are told or write off the possibility of future changes, even fundamental ones, but to pretend that things are not as they are can only damage our interests, in both the narrow and broad senses.

There are of course Arab countries that reject any settlement with Israel (although Syria is not quite in this category) and others which are ready to contemplate a settlement and live with Israel. (It is incidentally not true that Saudi Arabia was only critical of Camp David after and because of the Iran debacle; she was anxious to avoid isolating Egypt if at all possible but there was never much doubt about her views on the Palestinian aspects of Camp David. But there is no Arab country which believes a final settlement will be possible without involvement of the PLO and satisfaction of Palestinian claims in some way. (Sadat's claim is simply that the PLO can only be brought in when he has fixed some interim deal with the Israelis.) Jordan and the PLO are hardly friends and their private views about the right future for the West Bank certainly differ in many respects. But even Jordan will not negotiate with Israel without the tacit consent of the PLO, and even then only if she can be sure enough of Arab support. I find it very difficult to think of any circumstances in which Syria (under either its present or any likely future regime) would negotiate with Israel about her occupied territory while the PLO was

The Rt Hon Sir Keith Joseph MP

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completely left out of negotiations over the West Bank and Gaza. In other words, I see no possibility of Jordan and Syria reaching separate agreements with Israel and 'brushing aside' the PLO. It may just have been possible shortly after the 1967 war, but it is not now, and we will do well to recognise this.

I appreciate that the chances of an Israeli government being prepared to deal with the PLO are poor as things stand, but our aim is to make the PLO into an organisation with which it is possible to deal. Contacts are essential for this. I do not, of course, claim that the PLO is representative in the way that elected leaders are representative (how many governments in the world are elected?), but I am pretty sure that its support among the Palestinians goes a good deal deeper than you suggest. Intimidation exists, of course, but the PLO is seen by virtually all Palestinians as the only leadership they believe can properly represent them in negotiations. They will certainly not accept that Jordan or any other Arab country should claim to speak for them unless the PLO agree to this to bring a settlement nearer.

We are not likely to be seen by the Arabs as a 'soft touch' because we have come to accept that the PLO will not go away. We continue to tell the Arabs home truths that few others are prepared to tell them and to make clear our fundamental commitment to Israel. (You may like to see a copy of my recent speech to the Arab community in Britain.) Our approach is even-handed. Both sides accuse us angrily of bias towards the other, but both will have to come to recognise this for the nonsense it is. I need hardly add that we have not been blindly following the French, as you seem to suggest.

Finally, the assumption in your letter that all will be well if Israel achieves peace with her neighbouring states

/and that



and that the Palestinians are somehow just a pretext for trouble. I do not believe it. Even if these states were prepared to do deals with Israel (which they are not) the problem of the Palestinian people would remain (and let us not forget that one result could be the overthrow of Hussein by Arafat; Arafat in a demilitarised West Bank is far less of a danger, including to Israel, than an irredentist Arafat with Jordan's resources at his disposal). Unless the Palestinians are given a decent future, there will never be peace. That is the sense in which the establishment of a Palestinian entity, state or whatever, is in our British interest.

I am sending a copy of my reply to the Prime Minister.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'John Carrington', with a large, stylized initial 'J' and 'C'. There are some small marks above the signature, possibly 'u' and 'a'.

(CARRINGTON)