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PM

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

14 May 1980

BF 21.5.80

Dear Paul,

Call on the Prime Minister by the
Conservative Friends of Israel

A delegation of the Conservative Friends of Israel called on the Prime Minister this afternoon. The delegation was headed by Hugh Fraser and included Julian Amery, Peter Thomas, Maurice Macmillan, Timothy Sainsbury and Michael Fidler.

The issues raised by the delegation were basically those foreseen in the brief which you sent me yesterday. Their pre-occupations were under three headings:

- (a) Foreign Office Ministers had been making statements which implied that recognition of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, or something akin to recognition, was coming closer. The FCO appeared to envisage a radical change in Resolution 242 and the involvement of the PLO in negotiations for a Middle East peace settlement. This was causing keen resentment and a consequent loss of support for the Government among members of the Jewish community in this country;
- (b) the Government was becoming increasingly aligned with the European stance on the Arab/Israel dispute. There was talk of a European initiative and an evident attempt to force the pace on the Camp David process which, in the opinion of the delegation, was not yet exhausted (Mr. Amery argued that far from there being a deadline on 26 May, the process still had three years to run);
- (c) the FCO were increasingly inclined to favour the establishment of a Palestinian state on the West Bank. Such a state would not, in fact, be welcome to the majority of Arab states (Mr. Amery specifically mentioned President Sadat, King Hussein and President Asad as being privately opposed). If such a state was established, the Middle East would explode and the involvement of the Soviet Union would be inevitable.

Taking these points in turn the Prime Minister said that:-

/(a) the Government

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(a) the Government did not 'recognise' organisations and had no intention of 'recognising' the PLO. Her opposition to terrorism was well known, as was her refusal to meet members of the PLO during the visit she paid to Damascus when Leader of the Opposition. However, the very fact that she did not wish to see the Palestinians achieve their objectives by violence meant that it was essential to listen to their case. Just as the Israelis had a right to exist, so the Palestinians had a right to determine their own future. The PLO could not, of course, be brought into any negotiating process until they had abandoned their commitment to the destruction of the state of Israel. HMG's policy was to secure parallel recognition by each party of Israel's right to exist and of the Palestinians' right to determine their own future;

(b) it was now clear that the Camp David process was effectively exhausted and that nothing would be achieved before 26 May. She and other European Heads of Government had been scrupulously careful not to pre-empt the 26 May deadline, eg, during their talks in Luxembourg. However, things could not be allowed to drift on indefinitely. In particular it was inconceivable that nothing further should be done for three years as Mr. Amery appeared to suggest;

(c) the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were not promoting the idea of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank.

Talking more generally about her attitude to the Arab/Israel dispute, the Prime Minister said that she was deeply concerned about Israel's continued occupation of the West Bank. The land there was legally part of Jordan. So long as Israel occupied it, there was the risk that other countries would be tempted to try to occupy Israel's territory and to hold it for the same reason that Israel was holding the West Bank. She found it difficult to argue with those of her Arab visitors who drew a parallel between the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the Israel occupation of Jordanian territory. She thought that inadequate attention had been given to King Hussein's position. He seemed to her to be a key figure both in dealing with the Arab/Israel dispute and in dealing with other Middle East problems as well. It might be true that Jordan had been invited to associate itself with the Camp David process, but the matter had not been handled in a way likely to appeal to the Jordanians.

As regards the Israeli Government's present policy, the Prime Minister had told Mr. Begin that he was making things very difficult for his Western friends. His settlements policy was a terrible mistake. The Israeli Government was in danger of bringing about precisely the outcome they wished to avoid. Nor did their policy on autonomy make much sense. It had always been difficult to imagine how one could give a people autonomy without giving them autonomy over their land. King Hussein had made it clear that he was willing to contemplate a federal solution. This was an approach which should be pursued.

/At the end

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At the end of the discussion, members of the delegation returned to the question of what they saw as the FCO commitment to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. They said that it would be very helpful if the Prime Minister would make a public statement that any initiative with which Britain was associated would be aimed at bringing in Jordan. They also asked the Prime Minister to look at the language presently being used in FCO letters about the PLO. They claimed that phrases such as "we do not recognise the PLO as the sole legitimate spokesman of the Palestinian people" implied that the PLO was "recognised" in some manner. The Prime Minister undertook to consider both points.

The Prime Minister is aware that we are no longer thinking in terms of a UN Resolution or of a fully-fledged Middle East initiative and more in terms of opening up a dialogue with the various parties to the dispute. It would, none-the-less, be helpful if you could let me have a letter setting out the views of the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary on the two points raised in the previous paragraph.

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Paul Lever, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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FROM: THE RT. HON. HUGH FRASER, M.B.E., M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

15th May, 1980

Handwritten signature in blue ink, likely of Hugh Fraser.

Thank you so very much for having received our group from the Conservative Friends of Israel and for giving us so much of your time for a very full and frank discussion. It was very good of you. There will of course be no public reference to our meeting or to what was said.

With every good wish.

Handwritten signature in blue ink, likely of Margaret Thatcher.

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, MP
10 Downing Street
London S.W.1.