

MR. INGHAM

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO ISRAEL : LOBBY BRIEFING

You may find it helpful to have the following general steer for your lobby briefing on the Prime Minister's visit to Israel.

The most important thing about the visit is the fact that it is taking place. British Prime Ministers have hitherto found it impossible to visit the Middle East, and particularly the countries central to the Arab/Israel conflict, for fear of upsetting either the Arab governments or the Jewish lobby here respectively, and damaging our wider interests in the Middle East. It is a mark of this Prime Minister's diplomacy that she has created a situation in which she is able to visit both sides, not only without damage to our interests in either but successfully to advance them. She has the confidence of both sides to an unprecedented degree. This is a result both of her personal prestige and respect for her determination to play a helpful and practical role in advancing the Middle East peace process. Hence the visits to Saudia Arabia, to Egypt and Jordan last year and now to Israel; and the fact that the Prime Minister maintains an extensive personal correspondence with all the main Arab leaders and with Mr. Peres.

The visit also marks the culmination of two years hard work to strengthen our relations with Israel without prejudicing our basic position on the Arab/Israel conflict. We acknowledge very readily the debt owed to Mr. Peres for his role in this. But the Prime Minister has demonstrated, and will underline with this visit that we can have a friendly relationship with Israel while maintaining the confidence of Arab governments. She has not shirked difficult steps to achieve this, from some of which British governments have for years shied away, e.g. ending the practice of authentication by the FCO of signatures on certificates of origin required by the Arab Boycott.

The Prime Minister will not be taking new proposals for a Middle East settlement and we have no illusion that the visit will in itself move the peace process forward significantly. That process is at a very difficult stage with the failure of King Hussein's initiative. It is important that there should not be a vacuum, which could lead to instability. The Prime Minister will of course be reiterating our views on what is required for a settlement - arrangements to give Israel secure and defensible borders, an end to settlements on the West Bank and Gaza, withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians. But more immediately she will be exploring the possibilities of a number of practical steps to improve conditions on the West Bank and Gaza, enabling the Palestinians there to have a greater say in running their own affairs. This is the way to build up a responsible political leadership on the West Bank and to improve the prospects for eventual peace negotiations. In all this, what the Prime Minister says in private will be a lot more important than what she says in public. It is in private that her influence can best be applied.

The Prime Minister will also, during the visit, meet Palestinian leaders on the West Bank to hear their views and explain our policies.

An important point to get across is that Britain's role on Middle Eastern issues is independent of the United States. Of course we do not have their degree of influence: nor would we do things which would wantonly cut across their efforts to achieve progress. Indeed we want them to take a more active role. But ours is a distinct voice and one which is ready to say things less palatable to the Israelis where necessary.

The visit also comes on the eve of the British Presidency of the EC. It can be assumed that the Prime Minister will be discussing how the European Community can help the peace process during our six months in office.

You should discourage speculation that the Prime Minister will be carrying any specific proposals from King Hussein or will in any way seek to act as a broker between Jordan and Israel (e.g. through proximity talks). But you can say that she has conducted a round of consultations with Middle Eastern leaders and the Americans before her visit, either personally, e.g. meetings with King Hussein and President Reagan or by messages; and will no doubt be discussing the results with them afterwards.

There are no great expectations on the bilateral front. In particular no relaxation of our arms embargo is likely while Israeli forces remain in Lebanon. Our policy on the sale of North Sea Oil remains unchanged.

You will also want to play down terrorism and measures to combat it as a theme of the visit. We have a clear policy on the response to terrorism reflected in the communiqué of the Tokyo Economic Summit, and do not expect this issue to feature in any particular way in the Prime Minister's talks.

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(C. D. POWELL)

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