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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

22 May 1986

Dear Charles

Prime Minister's Visit to Israel

The Israeli Cabinet Secretary has told Mr Squire that Mr Peres may ask the Prime Minister to commend to King Hussein secret and deniable bilateral talks with the Israelis at working level, perhaps in London. Beilin claimed that King Hussein was aware of this idea and had not so far rejected it, and that intervention by Mrs Thatcher might tip the balance. The Israeli Ambassador has also mentioned to Ewen Fergusson a hint which he had had from Mr Peres that Britain might be asked to act as host for proximity talks with Jordan.

The idea of such talks is not new. It reflects the longstanding Israeli objective of peace talks with Jordan without the PLO, an objective which remains unrealistic as long as King Hussein is unable to build himself a Palestinian constituency. There have been secret Jordan/Israel talks in the past, for example about the Jordan river. These have been not without risk to Jordan, and King Hussein will have carefully assessed the balance of advantage in going further by agreeing to political talks. The risks to King Hussein personally and to Jordan's position in the Arab world if they became public knowledge would clearly be considerable.

We think that the main Israeli interest in seeking Mrs Thatcher's help would be to exploit her good relationship with King Hussein to put pressure on the King. He is currently in a mood of disillusionment with the Americans. The Israelis may feel that Mrs Thatcher could persuade him.

King Hussein for his part would not need our help in setting up bilateral contact; and talks held at a local venue are more likely to remain secret than if they were held in a major capital. Mr Coles doubts whether the King

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Prime Minister
I am sure this is
right. King Hussein does not
need our help to get in
touch with Mr. Peres.

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would consider that the chances of making real progress are nearly good enough to justify taking such a risk at the present time.

If Mr Peres raises these ideas we therefore recommend that the Prime Minister should avoid endorsing them or giving any commitment to press King Hussein against his better judgement to accept them. She might offer instead to transmit a message to King Hussein (who is likely to be in London for about a week from 14/15 June), and seek to draw Mr Peres out on the subjects for discussion at the talks and what he hopes they will achieve.

This letter has not been seen by the Foreign Secretary, but will be submitted to him in parallel tonight.

Yours ever

(R N Culshaw)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
PS/10 Downing Street

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