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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

22 May 1986

Dear Charles,

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Prime Minister  
This is inconvenient but  
not too serious. I think that  
you should be frank with the  
President. We opposed the  
meeting, but nobody else did

Presidency Meeting with Arafat

The Prime Minister will wish to be aware that Mr van den Broek, acting in his Presidency capacity, is likely to meet Yasser Arafat, at PLO request, during his visit to Tunis from 25-26 May. The main aim of this visit is to see the Secretary-General of the Arab League and the Foreign Minister of Tunisia, in line with the Twelve's approved policy of keeping in touch with the parties to the Arab/Israel dispute. We have asked the Dutch to try to ensure, given the coincidence with the Prime Minister's visit to Israel, that the meeting with Arafat takes place at the latest possible moment in Mr van den Broek's programme.

we were not prepared to block it.

Our

The possibility of a PLO request for a meeting with the Presidency at Foreign Minister level (for which there are precedents in 1980, 1981 and 1982) was considered by the Political Committee on 14/15 May. None of our partners raised any objection, or endorsed the strong reservations we expressed. The Prime Minister will have seen the account of this meeting in The Hague telegram number 301 (copy enclosed for ease of reference).

Minister will not meet

we PLO until...

Sir Geoffrey Howe concluded that, rather than block a meeting which had the unanimous support of our partners, we should work to ensure that the Presidency make the best use of it to put across clear European views. The Presidency have circulated a line to take for the meeting. This includes, at our urging, pressing the PLO to accept SCRs 242 and 338 and renounce violence. This should reinforce and not cut across King Hussein's efforts to bring pressure to bear on the PLO leadership to change their policy.

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In taking his decision, Sir Geoffrey Howe was particularly conscious of the danger that any UK efforts to block the proposed meeting would be leaked and, in the light of our support for US action against Libya and the Prime Minister's visit to Israel, would fuel damaging speculation in the Arab world that we were adopting a new unbalanced policy towards the region. The King's 19 February speech, rebuffing Arafat,

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did not receive the expected support in the West Bank, and has caused concern among his Arab friends, especially the Egyptians, who continue to believe that no progress is likely unless Arafat can be brought along. The Egyptians have in fact been urging reconciliation with Arafat on the King and have pressed us to do the same. By any attempt to block the meeting, we would not only have alienated Arab opinion but would also have risked increasing the pressure on ourselves for a meeting with Arafat during our own Presidency.

The Israelis are lobbying vigorously against the meeting and will certainly complain to the Prime Minister about it. Sir Geoffrey Howe sees no need for the Prime Minister to be defensive in reply. She might emphasise that there are several precedents for such meetings (including one by an earlier Dutch Foreign Minister), that there has been no change in the Twelve's policy, that it is important to keep in touch with Palestinians whose views must find expression in any peace negotiations, and that the Presidency will take the opportunity to put the Twelve's views to Arafat directly in a forthright and constructive way. Her own meeting with Palestinians resident in the Occupied Territories is an indication of the importance we attach to keeping in touch with Palestinian opinion, and our own handling of the abortive Jordanian/Palestinian mission in September last year was a clear demonstration of the caution and firmness with which we approach contacts of this kind.

*Yours ever*

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