

PRIME MINISTER

MIDDLE EAST

I had one of my regular lunches with the Israeli Ambassador today. He spun me a long tale of woe about the very negative effect which some of William Waldegrave's statements were having in Israel. He drew my attention in particular to a statement which William had made following a recent meeting with the PLO spokesman, Bassam Abu Sharif, in which he had spoken of the PLO's "courageous and imaginative diplomacy", and called for the Palestinian diaspora to be represented in any Palestinian delegation for talks with Israel. This had been very badly received indeed in Israel. The Israeli Prime Minister's adviser on counter-terrorism had just published a fully-documented report, which showed that in 1989 the PLO itself had been responsible for 13 terrorist attacks in Israel, 17 cross-border raids and the murder of 125 Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The Israeli Government had come close to issuing a public statement denouncing British policy. It had been decided not to go ahead with this, but rather to send the Ambassador to have it out with Mr. Waldegrave personally. The Ambassador wondered whether remarks of this sort, which were actually making it more difficult to get a sensible response within the Israeli coalition to American and Egyptian proposals, really represented British views.

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I said that I had not myself been aware of the comments and did not think you had been either. He might deduce from this that the matter was not the result of deliberate policy decision at the highest level. Nor had they attracted any significant public attention. The Ambassador said that, in a recent Parliamentary Answer, Mr. Waldegrave had told the House that the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary had "renewed his acquaintance with Mr. Qaddumi in Paris on 22 December" (Mr. Qaddumi is the PLO Foreign Minister). He assumed from the phrasing that this had

been a chance encounter. But it was hard to avoid the conclusion that there was a steady policy of raising the level of our contacts with the PLO by stealth. I said there was no doubt that we did believe that Israel ought to talk to a Palestinian delegation, and soon: that represented the only way to make progress with their own proposal for elections in the Occupied Territories. But our position on high level meetings with the PLO remained, to the best of my knowledge, unchanged: we did not believe in meetings for the sake of them.

The Israeli Ambassador said that Mr. Arens was likely to visit London towards the end of March or early April. He wondered whether you would be prepared to see him. I said that I thought in principle you would be ready to do so if a convenient time could be found.

I said we had been disturbed to hear reports that Jews emigrating from the Soviet Union to Israel were being settled in the Occupied Territories. This would not be good recompense for all our efforts to get them out of the Soviet Union. The Israeli Ambassador said he doubted whether there was really a problem. Soviet Jews were refusing to be directed anywhere. 95 per cent of those going to Israel were insisting on settling in urban areas. But he took note of our concern and would let me know if the situation was different to that which he had described to me.

You will want to consider whether you should have a quiet word with the Foreign Secretary about Mr. Waldegrave's pronouncements on the PLO. Things are reasonably quiet in the Middle East at present and we are sitting fairly comfortably. It seems a pity to be stirring up the Israelis unnecessarily, although we should of course continue to urge them to talk to the Palestinians.

C.D.P.

He goes to Bonn tomorrow

C. D. POWELL

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