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HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

24th November 1982

Prime Minister  
We shall let you have a  
copy. A.J.C. 19/11

Dear Prime Minister,

As Chairman of the Conservative Middle East Council (which numbers sixty members of the House of Commons and House of Lords), I have been asked to write to you about two matters which seem to us urgent and important in regard to British policy in the Middle East.

They are the need for us to do all we can to encourage Palestinian leaders to develop a constructive response towards the Reagan Administration in its new efforts to promote a comprehensive peace settlement and, secondly the desirability of British participation in an enlarged multinational peace keeping force in Lebanon.

This summer's events have forcibly brought home to us in America and Europe the urgency of the need to reach a comprehensive settlement. Terrible though those events were, they may have provided a chance, possibly the last for a very long time, to bring about a lasting peace. The shift in Washington towards a more even-handed policy and the initial cautious, but not wholly unreceptive, response of the PLO leadership to President Reagan's new peace initiative afford a glimmer of hope.

At this juncture it seems to us extremely important that Western leaders should go out of their way to persuade the Palestinian leaders to put aside their suspicions and to look afresh and constructively at the real options before them. But that cannot be done unless we are prepared at the ministerial level to meet and talk to the PLO frankly and without preconditions. It is an enormous pity and a costly error that the Americans have tied their own hands so as to rule this out for themselves. Who knows what opportunities of progress towards peace may have been lost as a result of the commitment which Dr Kissinger gave to the Israelis and to their supporters in America in September 1975? I believe them to be incalculable.

Had we in Britain taken a similar line in the past we would never have succeeded as well as we did in the difficult task of decolonisation.

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But this American error makes it all the more important that ministers of governments in Europe should meet and try to foster a moderate, constructive attitude among PLO leaders. It is we believe a mistake to assume that this will undermine American peace efforts. On the contrary it should help them and indeed the whole cause of peace.

We earnestly hope that Her Majesty's Government will take a fresh look at this question and decide that Ministers should agree to the inclusion of a PLO representative in any Arab delegations they may receive concerning the search for peace. Even from the limited, but by no means irrelevant, standpoint of Britain's own interests it is, we believe, damaging that we should appear to lag behind some of our European partners in this matter.

As for Lebanon there can be no question about the extreme importance for all of us in Europe and the United States of maintaining and if possible strengthening the precarious stability which now exists there and of speeding up the withdrawal of foreign armies from Lebanese territory. Not only for Lebanon itself and its people who have suffered so appallingly but also for the hope of any lasting settlement of the wider Middle East problem it is essential that the Lebanese cauldron should be prevented from boiling over again and engulfing the whole region in a new and still more bloody conflict. And there are no doubt forces at work which may try to bring about just such an outcome in order to frustrate progress towards a tolerable and lasting settlement. The prestige of British soldiers stands so high throughout the world that even a limited contribution by our country to a multinational force would, we believe add greatly to its credibility and effectiveness.

*Yours ever,  
Denis*

The Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Thatcher MP  
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