

CALL BY THE ARAB LEAGUE DELEGATION LED BY KING HUSSEIN OF JORDAN  
ON THE PRIME MINISTER AT 1050 HOURS ON FRIDAY 18 MARCH 1983 AT  
10 DOWNING STREET

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Present:

The Prime Minister	King Hussein - Leader of the Delegation
The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary	The Syrian Foreign Minister - Mr. Abdul Halim Khaddam
Mr. Hurd	The Saudi Foreign Minister - Prince Saud bin Faisal
Sir John Leahy	The Moroccan Foreign Minister - Maitre Boucetta
Mr. Miles	The Algerian Secretary- General for Foreign Affairs - Mr. Hadj Bin Abdel el Kader Azzout
Mr. Miers	
Mr. Plumbley	The Palestinian Representative - Professor Walid al-Khalidi
Sir Anthony Parsons	The Secretary- General of the Arab League - Mr. Chedli Klibi
Mr. Coles	- and other members of delegations

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The Prime Minister welcomed the delegation and said that we were glad that arrangements satisfactory to all parties for their visit had been made. She invited King Hussein to speak.

King Hussein thanked the Prime Minister for her greetings and for the good atmosphere and delivered an opening address (attached at Annex A).

/ The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister thanked King Hussein for his excellent presentation. Britain and the Arab Delegation shared a common view of the fundamentals of the problem, the need for freedom, justice and fairness for all. This was the heart of the question. Britain was closely involved both because of our history and because of our close friendship with the Arab peoples.

We had recognised the importance of the Fez Summit declaration from the outset. A unified Arab peace programme was a major step forward. She would not comment on every one of the principles of Fez, some of which would be the subject of negotiation in the eventual peace process. She wished to lay special emphasis on the principle of self-determination. Any party demanding self-determination for itself could not deny it to others, and this was something we had repeated to the Israelis and to everyone else with whom we discussed the matter. The Israelis claimed self-determination for themselves and must grant it to the Palestinians.

King Hussein's address had stressed the right of all people to live in peace, and had supported this by a reference to the legitimacy of the situation based on the 1947 Resolution of the United Nations on the partition of Palestine.

We were committed as members of the Ten and as part-authors of the Venice Declaration to the association of the PLO with peace negotiations. We differed in some respects with the Arab view of the PLO, but unreservedly welcomed the Palestinian representative in the delegation.

We had been distressed by the incidents in the al Aqsa Mosque. Any nation which rested on a strong basis of religious belief was obliged to respect the religious rights of others. We believed that the Israelis had acted quickly to arrest those responsible for the latest troubles, but fully understood the shock which had been felt in the Muslim world.

We deplored and had publicly condemned the continuation of settlement building by the Israelis in the occupied territories.

Every time the world tried to tackle the fundamentals of the Middle East another phase seemed to begin, bringing its own difficulties to block progress. She was referring particularly to Lebanon; at the time of the Venice Declaration the Lebanon problem had been less acute, and the Ten had thought there was a real opportunity for progress. That opportunity had been missed. We now had to ask how to make progress both on withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon and on the Arab-Israel problem. Sometimes a way could be found to make progress even as a result of tragedy.

We would do all we could both at the forthcoming European Summit and at the summit meeting at Williamsburg to emphasise to President Reagan that time was short and that the opportunity for progress on Lebanon and on the Arab-Israel problem must not be lost.

Summing up the Prime Minister emphasised our belief in the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and in the right of all States in the area, including Israel, to live within secure borders, and said that we saw an opportunity now for progress, beginning with the Lebanon. We shared the faith of the Arab delegation in a just and lasting peace for all the region, to be pursued by peaceful means.

Professor al-Khalidi thanked the Prime Minister for her remarks about the solution to the problem of the formation of the delegation, and her welcome to himself. Speaking in the name of the party and people which he represented, he asked that Britain should do everything in her power to obtain the right of self-determination for the Palestinians. Nothing in Israel's position could take away this right, which was the right of his people living in their own lands from the Jordan river to the sea.

The recent Palestine National Council had made some important points. First of all it had fully confirmed Palestinian commitment to the Fez Plan. He agreed that the Fez plan was of historic importance; all the leaders of the Arab States, with only one

exception, had endorsed for the first time principles which could lead to a viable settlement.

Fez had also endorsed the principles of Palestinian dialogue with the Lebanese Government and with Jewish leaders who were ready to consider measures consistent with Palestinian rights.

The PNC had pointed out the deficiencies of the Reagan plan: first, the question of Palestinian return (Professor al-Khalidi commented that Russian Jews enjoyed this right while Palestinians did not). Next, the Reagan Plan failed to refer to Palestinian sovereignty which was of great political and psychological significance if the Palestinians were to escape from their mood of statelessness. Speaking personally, sovereignty was important for the Palestinian diaspora exactly as Israeli sovereignty was important for the Jewish diaspora.

The PNC had also endorsed the concept of Palestinian/Jordanian confederation, which was of the greatest significance. The Jordanian people were the closest of all their neighbours to the Palestinians in every respect.

Finally, the form of Zionism to which Mr. Begin adhered went back to the 1920s when the 'revisionists' wanted to change the Palestine mandate in order to allow Jewish settlement east of the Jordan river. Zionism in this sense had nothing to do with resistance to Soviet influence in the area. Revisionism was basic to the thinking of Mr. Begin, Mr. Shamir and Mr. Arens. It was fruitless to think that they would change unless Washington sent unmistakable signals that change was required, as for example President Reagan had sent an unmistakable signal to end the bombing of Beirut. Professor al-Khalidi appealed directly to the Prime Minister as the only person, probably in the world, who had the moral influence to bring these points home to President Reagan.

The Prime Minister said she would not reply in detail to all the points made, but mentioned that only Britain and Pakistan had

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recognised the West Bank as Jordanian territory. She had noted carefully the reference to confederation. Fez was a big step forward, and so was the Reagan plan (which had not been welcomed in Israel). We must use the positive elements in order to make progress; if we failed, with the well known problems of US elections we should find we had lost two years. We must concentrate on working together on what we had in common. In government one could never get one hundred per cent of what one wanted, and to get two-thirds was doing very well. Nevertheless we would continue to press the Americans.

Mr. Khaddam said that he did not believe that the Reagan plan provided a serious framework for peace. The problem was not just the occupied territories and indeed the problem had existed before 1967. The essence of the problem was the Palestinians in exile. He recalled a former US statesman who had said of the Palestinians that America would turn them into a problem for the Arabs.

Washington was not serious about peace, as was shown by the vast arms supplies which the US gave to the Israelis. If Syria looked to receive anything like as much there would be a tremendous row.

The Americans now faced a crucial test in Lebanon; if they could secure Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon with no conditions he would admit there was some chance of their playing a useful role on the Palestine problem. Peace required balance. Peace between the strong and the weak was hard to achieve; the weak could do nothing and even the strong could not make peace alone. To create the necessary balance, US arms supplies must be checked. Israeli air power, for example, was greater than that of the UK and France, and equivalent to one-fifth of that of the US.

He was tired of hearing about US elections. This was always put forward as a reason for doing nothing.

/ The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister said that she agreed that the future of the Palestinian people was at the heart of the problem; she believed this message had been understood in Washington. Secondly, she believed that the Americans were genuinely trying to solve the problem; even in electoral terms this would be a tremendous achievement for a US Administration, in spite of all the lobby difficulties. Mr. Khaddam said President Carter had signed the Camp David agreements and then been defeated in an election; the Prime Minister retorted that this had more to do with President Carter than Camp David. She and Mr. Khaddam both loved argument but perhaps they should resist the temptation. Mr. Khaddam said it was not a matter of argument but of 'to be or not to be'. Syria had been attacked by Israeli air power; she had to find a way to defend herself.

The Prime Minister and King Hussein withdrew at 1155 hours for a tête-à-tête discussion; the Prime Minister invited the rest of the meeting to continue for a few minutes and then to join the two leaders for more informal conversation.

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Mr. Pym referred to the forthcoming European Summit and with the Americans. The Prime Minister had repeatedly stressed to President Reagan the urgency of progress in the Middle East, and he had done the same to Mr. Shultz. The two essentials were a coordinated position on the Arab side, on which great progress had been made, and a real change in Israel. The urgency was such that something had to be done within a very few weeks. What advice would the Arab delegation offer for progress on our common objectives, especially self-determination?

Prince Saud said that with the Fez Summit much of the Arab part had been done. They now had a clear common position based on legality. The crux of the matter was for the Israelis to change, and this required action by Washington as Professor al-Khalidi had explained.

/ The US

The US must show Israel that if there was no change, Israel would lose US support. A way must be found to bring the Americans to their responsibility. Prince Saud paid a warm tribute to the British media, particularly the BBC, for the way that they had portrayed developments in the Middle East. He said that the forthcoming summit meetings were very important and that we had an important role.

Professor al-Khalidi said one thing we might be able to do, since like the Palestinians, we knew Mr. Begin, would be to tell the Americans about him. They seemed, for example, to assume that Mr. Begin would be ready to trade territory for peace, as he had done with Sinai in the Camp David Agreements. This showed a misunderstanding; Sinai was not part of the territory to which Mr. Begin's Zionism committed him, as the West Bank, Gaza and even Golan and South Lebanon were.

Another US misconception was that the more aid the Israelis were given the more reasonable they would be. We should bring home to the Americans that this was false.

Mr. Klibi said that the Prime Minister had mentioned the British position, shared by the rest of the Ten, on self-determination. This was a key gap in the American position and we should bring it home to them. He asked whether the US-Israeli alliance covered only Israel within present frontiers, or whether it was applicable throughout the area?

Mr. Pym said we would continue to press the Americans, but they did now realise that the Palestinians were the heart of the problem, and the Reagan plan showed progress in this direction. Mr. Klibi said he could not understand why the Americans did not accept self-determination for the Palestinians, when self-determination was of such crucial importance in their own history.

Mr. Pym said he would not exclude an adjustment in the US position if peace negotiations began. On Mr. Klibi's second point

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he said that the formal position was that the US/Israel strategic alliance was suspended.

Prince Saud said he had the impression the Americans did not pay adequate attention to European and world opinion on the Middle East. They felt obliged to consult us fully over missiles, but surely the Middle East problem was just as important to the international community and to world peace? Mr. Pym agreed.

The meeting ended at 1220 hours.

18 March 1983

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