

Top copy: United Nations, April 80, Visit of Sec-General

Record of a conversation between the PM and the Sec-General of the United Nations at No 10, on Tuesday 20 May 1980 at 1630hrs.

Middle East

12. Dr Waldheim thought it his duty as Secretary-General to say he was very worried about the situation in the Middle East. The autonomy talks had collapsed. The Americans were paralysed, the Europeans hesitant. In the vacuum, many things could happen. The radical Arabs could make trouble. The Israelis were not cooperative. Major Haddad, supplied by the Israelis, was bombing UNIFIL's headquarters and killing Irish soldiers. Now was the moment for Europe to play a constructive role. He heard a lot of talk in the media about a European initiative. One option was to seek to amend Security Council Resolution 242 so as to give the Palestinians their political rights, i.e. self-determination. If this was not feasible - and a US veto would seem certain before the Presidential election - the Arabs would ask for a Special Session of the General Assembly. Mr Arafat might wait if a European initiative was in prospect, otherwise he would call for a Special Session in June or July. There would be a tough resolution, which could be opposed by the United States, but which if not too radical might get some other Western votes.

13. The Prime Minister said that at Luxembourg the Nine had decided not to discuss the options until 26 May, by which time they had thought the Camp David process would be exhausted. They were to discuss the problem at the Venice Summit, but it now looked as though the process might still be alive at the point; she was doubtful about action which would cut across the Americans. She questioned what was meant by self-determination for the Palestinians. There was no such animal in constitutional law. What were they to determine? Did their land really belong to Jordan? There were many Palestinians in Syria and the Lebanon: where were they to go? King Hussein had indicated he might be ready for some loose federation of the West Bank with Jordan: would they still be Jordanian citizens?

14. Mr Urquhart said there were no real answers to these questions. No-one had discussed with the inhabitants what all this meant. The Israelis and Palestinians, dealing only through intermediaries, had a nightmare view of each other. They could never discuss the future, only the past. There was the prior question of recognition. The Palestinians had inched forward on this. Mr Arafat was more reasonable

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in private contacts that he was in public. Sir A Parsons believed that only two powers, the UK and Pakistan, had ever recognised Jordan's title to the West Bank. The only way to answer the Prime Minister's questions was for someone to talk to all the parties.

15 Mr Urquhart suggested that some half-governmental/half-unofficial enterprise might break down the barriers. The Prime Minister asked if Europe could work this out? Sir D Maitland suggested that in the present vacuum only Europe could be active, not to achieve dramatic results, but to keep discussion going. The Prime Minister thought that something more was required: exactitude. Sir D Maitland said we could draw up a questionnaire and put it to the Israelis, the Egyptians and the PLO. Agreeing, Sir A Parsons pointed out that none of the studies of the options since 1967 had been written as a result of consultation with the parties. Europe could talk to all the parties; a questionnaire could help to provide the exactitude the Prime Minister was seeking. To mount a resolution at the UN this year would be a waste of time; inevitably, the Americans would veto.

16 Dr Waldheim believed that no concrete solution was possible before November. Meanwhile, there should be a revival of talks in one way or another.

The Prime Minister believed that the vacuum would extend beyond November. Both sides in the Presidential election would be courting the Jewish vote; there would be a year's delay.