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14 July 1980

MESSAGE TO MR. BEGIN

As I mentioned to you on the telephone, the Prime Minister has decided that she would prefer not to write further to Mr. Begin at present (your letter of 9 July to me refers).

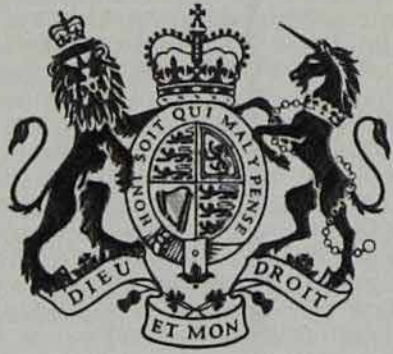
I am sending a copy of this letter to Brian Norbury (Ministry of Defence).

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Paul Lever, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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NOT SENT

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your letter of 17 June, which was passed to me by your Embassy in London. May I say how pleased I was to hear that you are recovering from your recent illness.

I welcome your candour. I shall be equally frank in reply.

I understand and respect your views about the PLO. The document adopted by the Fatah Congress in Damascus was repugnant not only to my Government but, I know, to the British people as a whole. We view it with the most serious concern.

However, we must ask ourselves whether this is the whole story as far as the PLO are concerned. Who would have believed peace between Egypt and Israel possible if they had judged Egyptian policy solely on the basis of public statements by Egyptian leaders from the establishment of Israel onwards? Our policy is based on the belief that a peace settlement can be negotiated on terms which both Israelis and Palestinians can freely accept and that this is the only basis on which lasting peace will be possible. If such a settlement is to be negotiated, how can the PLO be ignored? The organisation clearly has very substantial support among the Palestinian people, both inside and outside the occupied territories. The European Council statement acknowledges the present reality that if the Palestinians are to take part in negotiations the PLO will in some way have to be associated with this process.

The European Council statement does not encourage the PLO in unacceptable policies. It makes clear that the PLO, like all other

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concerned parties, must respect the principles of a negotiated settlement. A cardinal principle is the right of Israel to existence and to security. We have taken every opportunity to urge the PLO to accept this principle. We shall continue to do so. There can be no possibility of negotiating a settlement if the Palestinians, including the PLO, do not at some stage accept fully, openly and sincerely, Israel's right to live in peace.

We are under no illusions about the difficulty of bringing this about. But there is no alternative to the attempt. To dismiss the PLO out of hand will bring neither peace nor an end to terrorism. There are Palestinians who have shown signs of readiness to accept compromise based on co-existence with Israel. They must be encouraged.

But Israel, too, will have to moderate her position if peace is to be possible. It is not easy to reconcile the continuing expansion of settlements in the occupied territories and Israel's claim to ultimate sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza with the principle of Israeli withdrawal embodied in Resolution 242. This Resolution is regarded by the Nine and more widely as indispensable for peace and, of course, forms part of the basis of Camp David. Nothing could contribute more to the establishment of an atmosphere of goodwill and confidence in the area than an end to the process of settlement.

I welcome your commitment to continue the autonomy negotiations with goodwill in order to reach an agreement. We continue to wish these talks well and to hope that an autonomy agreement can be reached capable of attracting Palestinian support.

Finally, you refer in your letter to Israel's defence needs and the refusal of supply of certain items of equipment. I have looked into the circumstances but regret that I cannot add to the answers already given to your Government on these items. If there are, however, any particular points on which you require further clarification, might I suggest that our respective officials discuss them? We look at every decision on arms sales on its merits. There is no bias against Israel.

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I hope we can remain in touch. As I said in my message of 14 June, we must work together. Otherwise we will achieve nothing.

Mr. Menachem Begin