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Weekend Box.



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Prime Minister

London SW1A 2AH

You may like to be aware
of this useful summary of the present
position.

27 February 1980

Dear Michael,

RMB: 27/2

M

PLO

You asked recently about policy towards the PLO in the light of FCO briefing for the Prime Minister to use in the House of Commons on 19 February in case Mr Greville Janner raised the Middle East. We had suggested the Prime Minister should not give an assurance that the Government will not recognise the Palestine Liberation Organisation until they accept Israel's right to exist. You may appreciate a rather fuller account of our thinking.

Talk of 'recognition' of the PLO is misleading. Official recognition is given only to Governments. The PLO is not, and does not claim to be, in any sense a Government-in-exile and there can therefore be no question of giving the organisation recognition in this sense.

What the PLO themselves mean by 'recognition' is principally acceptance of their claim to be the 'sole legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people', a status they have been accorded by the Arab League (of which they are a full member) and a large proportion of UN membership. We, together with most other Western countries, voted against the original (1974) UN resolution giving them this status and have maintained our opposition since. There is no cause for us to modify this view. We have not given other comparable movements or organisations, eg the Patriotic Front or SWAPO, such status, even when we have been prepared to negotiate with them. Nevertheless, no other body has come forward claiming to represent the Palestinians and it is unlikely that any will do so in the near future. Furthermore there is little doubt that a majority of Palestinians at present look to the PLO as representing their political aspirations. For this reason other members of the Nine (most recently Italy, Belgium and Ireland) have accepted the PLO as the de facto representatives of the Palestinians, but not as sole legitimate representatives.

Recognition of the PLO has another sense also: that of accepting PLO representatives as appropriate interlocutors for Government Ministers. We have for some years maintained occasional and informal contacts with the PLO at official level, but Ministers have taken the line that they find it difficult to meet PLO representatives while the Organisation continues to have links with terrorism and has not accepted Israel's right to exist. The advantage of this formulation is that the Government's freedom of action is not thereby unduly restricted should a higher level of dialogue with the PLO seem likely

/to contribute

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to contribute to a comprehensive peace. Three members of the Nine (France, Belgium and Italy) have contacts with the PLO at ministerial level. (There was also a German ministerial contact in special circumstances in Beirut.) To give a commitment analogous to the US commitment to Israel not to talk to the PLO until they accept Resolution 242 and Israel's right to exist might cause us no immediate problems but could place limits on our freedom of action in future circumstances which are not necessarily foreseeable now.

Lord Carrington hopes therefore that we can maintain the present position, which reflects the line taken by the Prime Minister when she met a delegation from the Board of Deputies of British Jews on 27 November 1979.

Yours etc

Paul

(P Lever)



27 FEB 1980