

OPS cc MASIBR

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Subject: Middle East Situation: Pt 12

PRIME MINISTER
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T210cc/84

ROUGH TRANSLATION

Dear Prime Minister and Dear Friend,

In the course of an official visit to Tunisia, I decided to meet, together with Foreign Minister Andreotti, the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, with whom I had a wide ranging and in-depth exchange of views. During the meeting it had not been my intention to take soundings for possible initiatives, the efficacy of which depends on conditions that, I believed then and still believe, to be non existent at the present time, nor did I try to interpose my good offices in the complex Arab-Israeli controversy. What urged me to meet Arafat was my keen interest, and I believe legitimate scruples, to scan his ideas, his political perception of the most recent events in which the PLO has been involved.

Above all I felt the need to verify the strength and reliability of the positive signals which, although beset by contrasts and ambiguities, have emerged from the proceedings of the Palestinian Council at Amman.

I met Arafat after I had had intense talks with some of the leaders of the countries of the region: King Fahad, President Mubarak, President Bendjedid, President Bourghiba, Prime Minister Mzali and other representatives of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Tunisia's political leadership. A complex periplus, but one which I think proved constructive. In all the meetings I perceived hopes as well as grave preoccupations; constant reference was made to the urgency of renewed efforts, of the inderogable need to foster the re-kindling of a dialogue as wide and deep as possible, as premise to the re-launching of negotiations

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and to restore credibility to the possibility of a future political solution to the grave crisis in the Middle East. The subversive elements, the hotbeds of extremism, are at the same time - I was generally told - a clear symptom of the spreading of new forms of frustration and indicators of the urgency to tread with resolution the path to peace. These are pressing reminders to make resolute efforts in seeking a new coalition of the forces of reason and wisdom, which are the only ones capable of keeping events under control, to prevent the escape of sparks liable to trigger off dangerous explosions.

These are in essence the outlines of the in-depth analysis expressed to me by my interlocutors. I was impressed, in particular, by the objectivity with which it was expounded to me by King Fahad. An exposition of the facts void of rhetoric and useless exasperations, but deeply imbued with disquiet, question marks and uncertainties about the peaceful future longed-for and sought by all.

The need that a new move for negotiations should come from the countries within the region, the awareness of the necessity to revert the tendency that has gradually taken root in the Arab countries to await the impulses for new glimmers of negotiated solutions from outside, had been clearly expressed to me by President Mubarak, thus interpreting, I believe, the thinking of King Hussein as well.

In the prospects for peace the evolution of the historical moment in the Middle East should or could require adjustments in the political strategies of the countries of the region. This I perceived especially in my discussions with President Bendjedid: a significant detachment on the part of Algeria from the circuit of the more radically intransigent positions.

In particular the Algerian President stressed his encouragement and support of the PLO to induce it to commit itself to the search for a platform of negotiations even at the cost of relinquishing for ever a unity which was becoming evermore paralyzing and the vehicle of heavy conditioning by forces still pursuing tactics other than moderation and compromise.

Pressing appeals were then directed at Arafat not to delay any further the adoption of new initiatives leading to dialogue and negotiations: realistic initiatives, especially in the search for a preliminary accord, undoubtedly essential, with King Hussein. An appeal which Arafat heeded by calling for the Palestinian National Council to take place in Amman, this seat being the expression of an evident political choice.

It is not my intention to probe into the merits of the decisions taken at Amman, it is nevertheless evident that Arafat has taken the first steps on the road which, if tread with coherence and conviction, could lead to more favourable conditions for a political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. I say first steps since the road is long and laden with uncertainties. These are however unequivocal steps which deserve attention and consideration for the sake of the difficult challenges Arafat has decided to take up in a relatively short time: the challenge of Syria, who did not want the PNC; the challenge of Hussein, who has warned the PLO to embrace without reservations the option of negotiations, offering, in his proposals, terms of compromise which are not easy.

Not all the question marks have been erased at Amman. Ambiguities and contradictions still remain. On my part I clearly told Arafat that the progress in Amman is not sufficient and that new gestures have to be made by the PLO to make the choice of the option of negotiations and the repudiation of the armed struggle final and irrevocable.

I stressed that, to my mind, in order to achieve this it was necessary to pursue a Jordanian-Palestinian platform, the engine capable of putting into motion a real process for peace. A platform the contents of which must represent unequivocal answers to all the aspects connected to the solution of the Arab-Israeli crisis. Not only, therefore, the questions pertaining to the relations between Jordan and the Palestinians, in the framework of a future institutional context to be outlined and defined, but also the type and form of relations to be set up with all the States in the region and the specific questions concerning security, the recognition and the right of the State of Israel. Until such time that an acceptable Jordanian-Palestinian platform is set up - I emphasized - it would be extremely difficult to implement formally the steps taken so far and ensure that support which will be deemed appropriate to give the necessary impetus and strength to the prospects of rigorous negotiations.

I can say that Arafat convened with me on this analysis and committed himself to putting forward proposals which responded to the needs expressed of which, in any case, he himself was aware. The PLO leader did however stress what he had already achieved in that respect, as well as indicating that any future decisive gesture calls for a strengthening of his position and signals which can demonstrate, within the PLO and outside it, that the option of the dialogue will pay off, that it can be the road capable of achieving a just, durable and global solution. Western countries - he said - with whom the Palestinian people intend to maintain strong and constructive ties of friendship and cooperation, cannot however remain indifferent towards all that he himself and the PLO, amidst grave difficulties and mortal risks, have been able to accomplish. To this regard he told

me confidentially that the agreement he has reached with Hussein is deeper than would appear publicly and that it was his hope that favourable future events would enlighten the significance and the full meaning of it. He added that the demonstration of courage given by the PLO in freeing itself from conditioning forces, escaping therefore political servitude and exploitation, which could have exacerbated the impasse in the Middle East with grave risks of instability and new conflicts, is by no means secondary. It was his intention to continue the patient search for an Arab consensus. He underlined the importance of the Egyptian role and showed himself confident to be able to rely on an ever increasing firm support of the countries who really wished to pursue peace in the Middle East. He expressed the hope of opening signs on the part of Europa and the United States, declaring himself ready to respond with coherent and significant gestures. During our meeting he clearly expressed his availability, if the right conditions arose, towards unequivocal acts of recognition of the State of Israel, but this - he said - at the time when there will be a clear emergence of everybody's availability to put their cards on the negotiating table in the tormented and bloody game that for years, alas, has been played in the Middle East.

However, I did not fail to convey to Arafat my deep reservations and perplexities about the viability of the hypothesis of an international conference to be eventually realized under the aegis of the United Nations. I told him frankly that to insist on this option meant to push back in time the prospects for a commencement of the negotiations, whereas it must be of interest to all to look for realistic and pragmatic ways, such as the one of the little steps and direct negotiations.

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Arafat did not seem indifferent to such arguments, opposing only his mistrust of Israel's real willingness towards a reasonable compromise. For this reason he looks at the international conference as to the means to bring stronger and concentric pressure to bear on Israel, in order to smooth over her intransigency and make Tel Aviv's Government more open to a compromise acceptable to the Arab countries.

Here is perhaps a further reason to make us reflect upon the need to improve the climate of trust with gestures capable of signalling a willingness to look for points of consensus on which to build more stable foundations of accord.

It has been my intention to put these considerations at your disposal in the hope to continue and deepen our close and effective consultations on a problem greatly instrumental for the safeguard of peace in an historical moment of particular importance.

With my highest consideration and friendship

Signed: Bettino Craxi.