

Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The Minister of Foreign Affairs

Port EL Kantooui, Tunisia.

16. July 1993

Memo

To Foreign Minister Shimon Peres

From Foreign Minister Johan Jørgen Holst

1. On July 13th I had a meeting with Chairman Arafat at the PLO Hq. in Tunis. We spent about 20 minutes with the full delegations for general discussion and 40 minutes in closed session. During the closed session Arafat was alone. I was accompanied by Terje Rød Larsen of FAFO and Mons Juul of my secretariat. They have both played a key rôle in managing the "Norwegian Channel" and are my special envoys sent to brief your people directly.
2. During the general session Arafat was somewhat flamboyant and talking in rather sweeping, ultimate terms. He was obviously talking to the "gallery" of his own people, including Abu Jaffer, who are not privy to the existence of the Oslo Channel; the only exception being Abu Ala. Arafat showed us a copy of the American proposal made during the 10th round and which was coloured to depict what percentage of the contents which allegedly originated with Israel (65%), the Palestinians (6%) and the Americans (the balance). He also gave me a copy of his response to the Americans. He indicated that the last American draft did not in his view constitute much of an improvement on the previous American draft. He emphasized that time was running out, and that he was very pessimistic about the prospects of the Washington process after the submission of the last American draft. With respect to early empowerment of the Palestinians he referred to a letter of guarantees from Madrid which envisaged

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a five year arrangement concerning a transfer of authority. He claimed that the American administration had now retreated from what former secretary Baker had promised them. He claimed that Israel was only willing to give the Palestinians what they already had.

3. During the closed session we met another Arafat. My impression is that he knows that he must close a deal soon. He explicitly referred several times to the need for a "breakthrough". He stated that "good progress" had been made in Oslo and expressed appreciation for our efforts. He had sent a message to Rabin also in order to reemphasize the authority of the Palestinian delegation to the talks in Norway. Arafat made the point that more progress had been made through the "Norwegian Channel" than through any of the Arab efforts. He trusted us more than the Egyptians because we had no secret agenda and no interest of our own with regard to the contents of the talks.

4. I emphasized the need for realism, and stated explicitly that in my view substantial progress had been made through the five drafts from the "Norwegian Channel," but that the Palestinian proposals made during the last meeting in Norway seemed to have deviated from the chain of realistic proposals and constituted a potent threat to the momentum and prospects of the talks. Arafat did not respond directly but listened with keen attention. I underlined, furthermore, that I had recently paid an official visit to Israel and in that connection had an opportunity to discuss the peace process, with some including the Norwegian Channel with key Israeli representatives, including you, so that I was persuaded that the present government in Israel was committed to seeking a negotiated

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settlement, but that the government was subject to constraints. The Knesset did not have a majority and must avoid the likelihood of mobilizing a strong opposition. I also told him that I had spoken privately with Warren Christopher about the Norwegian channel under your eyes only. He had expressed appreciation as well as support. I emphasized that the United States was Norway's principal ally and that we had very good relations with Israel of long standing. It was important for Norway to maintain those relations.

5. On substance I emphasized the need to view the interim arrangements of a first phase agreement realistically. Several issues could not be solved now. Both parties had red lights which must be heeded. Implementation of the first phase would, however, in itself constitute an important confidence-building exercise which could change perspectives and alter expectations concerning long term arrangements. Obviously, any interim agreement must be shaped so as not to prejudice the positions of the parties to issues not regulated by the interim agreement. I challenged him in this connection to explain his approach to the Jenicho-issue and the question of links and access between Gaza and the Jenicho-pocket.

6. Arafat responded by bringing out maps and explaining his position and rationale in great detail. The principal points he made can be summarized as follows: The PLO needs to include a part of the West Bank in any interim arrangement. He insisted that he could not present an interim agreement which only included Gaza. Should he do so

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He would be accused of having "betrayed" the West Bank Palestinians. He had sought to find arrangements which reflected the continuity of Middle-East peace negotiations. In this connection he explicitly referred to the Ailon and Kissinger-plans for disengagement. Jenich had been chosen because it does not comprise recent settlements and because it enables them to include a major Palestinian camp. That way it becomes easier for the PLO to control the Intifada. When questioned he stated that the city of Jenich was not enough. He referred to the Jenich province but indicated a somewhat limited perimeter on the map. He was ready to compromise in negotiations. According to Arafat he had paid attention to proposing an arrangement which took into account Israeli sensitivities and interests, particularly in regard to settlements and the Intifada. He could, however, not accept a two-Palestine solution. With respect to access he stated explicitly when I pressed him on the issue, that he was not proposing any corridor controlled by the PLO or an international authority through Israel. He was looking towards a designated road or roads and Israeli guarantees of access. He stated explicitly that Israel could not be divided in two by a corridor. The road(s) would be under Israeli control "in the beginning". When pressed if that meant through the interim period he was somewhat vague. However, he stated several times that he was ready to strike a compromise. The final and permanent arrangements would have to reflect an interim compromise.

7. I asked Arafat explicitly if he thought he could control Fatah and have an agreement concluded in the Norwegian channel accepted by the PLO with a sufficient majority. He said he had to be honest in

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me and say that there would be some opposition (He mentioned George Habbash and the Syrians) but expressed confidence that he could deal with them. They would constitute but a small minority. When I asked about the ability of the Hamas to torpedo the agreement, he responded that he had personally split the Hizbollah in three in the past and that he could deal with opposition. Arafat sounded determined and confident on this point.

8. I stressed the need to maintain secrecy until the first phase agreement had been concluded. This was not a particular Norwegian interest but rather one which was very important to the Israelis. There were spoilers in Israel who would use leaks to torpedo any agreements before they had been concluded by embarrassing the government. I referred explicitly to recent leaks of direct Israeli-PLO talks reported in the Tunisian Press, The International Herald Tribune, etc. I referred to statements reportedly made by Nabil Chaath. Arafat said that he had personally deflected the rumours by referring to previous attempts which had failed to establish such contact in Washington. I observed that the Norwegian press referred to "anonymous Palestinian sources" when reporting of alleged Norwegian efforts to continue on Israeli-PLO dialogue. We had on our side deflected such rumours by stating that they must refer to possible contacts in the margins of the multilateral workshop on refugees during its Oslo-session. We agreed that secrecy could not be maintained forever, that we had been successful in that regard with the Norwegian Channel, but that we would probably have to go public in connection with the possible signing of a first phase accord.

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9. The Arafat I encountered in the closed session seemed to me a composed, determined and reflective person. He also seemed confident about his authenticity. His vanity is apparent and I suspect that he is determined to play a major rôle when the breakthrough is made. He wants to be an actor, not just a spectator.

10. We have maintained contacts with Abu ~~A~~ before and after my meeting with Yassir Arafat. I am scheduled to meet with Arafat again on July 20th immediately prior to my departure from Tunisia. Mr Larsen and Mrs. Juul have been supplied with speaking notes by me on the conversations we have had in this connection in order to brief your people. I am ready personally to brief your people in Paris on July 21st/22nd. Furthermore, we stand ready to arrange another round in the Norwegian Channel in Norway or Paris. I am also ready to meet with you any time and place of our mutual convenience.

With warm regards



JOHAN JØRGEN
HOLST