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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Prominent Palestinians (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
James A. Baker III, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
Edward Djerejian, Assistant Secretary of
State
Dennis Ross, Director, Policy Planning Staff
Richard Haass, Senior Director for Near East
and South Asian Affairs, Notetaker

Dr. Faisal Husseini, Head of Delegation
Dr. Saib Arigat
Dr. Hanan Mikhail-Ashrawi
Dr. Camille Mansour

DATE, TIME December 18, 1992; 10:10 - 10:30 a.m.
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

The President: I'd like to know your thinking. I'm officially a lame duck with a vow to cooperate with the new Administration. I'm most interested in all this and in your views. (U)

Dr. Husseini: Thank you. I have three points. The first concerns Jerusalem. The Israelis are still trying to neglect our rights saying that Jerusalem will not be negotiated. We can't accept such a thing. If we accepted unjust conditions, it was to bring Shamir to the table and because of our trust in the U.S. We want to re-insist on our position regarding people from Jerusalem in the peace process. We know Israelis say they won't sit with people from Jerusalem, but we would like to see U.S.-Palestinian meetings include Jerusalemites. I appreciated the Secretary of State writing me as the head of the Palestinian negotiating team. The matter of Jerusalem is so important. My grandfather and his father were Mayors of Jerusalem. Now I am a minority. We cannot accept this. This is critical. (Ø)

My second point is regarding the PLO. You say you don't have any intention to divide us. But no relations with the PLO will not help the peace process, especially when Israel has an attitude that helps those who oppose the process. The deportations give Hamas legitimacy inside the occupied territories. Sending 400 Hamas people to Lebanon can change the balance of power inside Lebanon against us also. We're in need of stopping deportations and steps from the U.S. to deal with the PLO and help us versus Israel. (Ø)

Third is deportations. The danger is not limited to the occupied territory or to our community. It could affect Lebanon and other states. It could strengthen fundamentalists around the Middle East. (S)

The President: I'd like to ask a question. Of the 400, what is the makeup? (U)

Dr. Ahsrawi: They arrested 1400 in two days and chose 400. These were not people languishing in jail. They were mainly men in their twenties and thirties. (U)

The President: I had had the sense that they were out of jails. (U)

Dr. Ashrawi: The Israelis deported them before they had a legal basis for doing so, even under their own law. But the most important aspect is that they dealt a serious blow to the peace process. (S)

Dr. Hussein: The deportations will affect the situation in Lebanon and increase the access of Hamas to Syria and Jordan. All this could change the political reality in the area. (S)

The President: Let me ask a different question. I have thought about why Rabin did this. What would you say he should do about the violence? You've got differences with Rabin but less than with the previous government. But how does he protect himself politically? (S)

Dr. Ahsrawi: He should work on human rights in the occupied territories. (S)

The President: But in the face of the killings? (U)

Dr. Ashrawi: He must deal with the real causes including the peace process and occupation. There is a double standard here. There is no parallel outrage with the undercover squads. The only real way to end the violence is to end the occupation. They can deal with any individual in court, but they cannot punish the whole people. (S)

Dr. Arigat: They've been deporting, demolishing, and fighting for 25 years. All have failed. Only engagement in the peace process can break the vicious circle. We are engaging despite the fact that Palestinians are getting killed. Only the moderates will be victimized by deportations. He (Rabin) is giving credibility to Hamas. (S)

Dr. Husseini: He (Rabin) is losing credibility. The confidence-building measures are not much. Releasing 800 prisoners is no big deal if they were due to be released. It doesn't give me anything to work with. Second, the undercover forces are killing Palestinians. This is increasing radicalism and violence. Rabin must respect human rights, release real prisoners and stop the deportations to give the peace process a chance. It would make a big change and give me a weapon to use with my people. (Ø)

Mr. Baker: It won't be productive to try to change the Madrid ground rules. An opportunity exists to accomplish something positive for Palestinians. They will be the ones to benefit most from the peace process. Even though the progress has not reached the point they hoped for, the glass is not empty. Things have been accomplished. Rhetoric is important. Be careful not to say "the peace process is destroyed." Keep the moral high ground. There are instances of excesses of the occupation, and these are reflected in the State Department human rights report. The new Administration will want to deal with all this, but you cannot focus on final status until you focus first on interim arrangements. (Ø)

Dr. Ashrawi: We are focusing on the transitional phase. We want to activate the peace process. We need a real assessment. (Ø)

Mr. Baker: There will be ways found to give vitality to the peace process. I think it would be helpful if you would talk more about progress that has been made as counter to Hamas. Second, it would be helpful to criticize violence. (Ø)

Dr. Arigat: The fate of the 418 people has created a state of chaos in the security zone. (Ø)

Dr. Haass: Don't condition participation in the peace process on a successful resolution of the deportation issue. You may not get it despite our efforts and you will not want to jeopardize your larger interests. (Ø)

Mr. Ross: What Richard is saying is don't put yourself in a box. (U)

Dr. Ashrawi: We need credibility with the people. (U)

The President: I thought you made the best point on that. The key is the peace process. (Ø)

-- End of Conversation --