



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD BETWEEN MR. BERNIE GRANT M.P. AND MR. AFIF SAFIEH OF THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANISATION ON 10TH JANUARY 1991

1. Baghdad Trip

The main purpose of Mr. Grant's trip to Iraq was to establish the Iraqi position. This was of particular importance due to biased media accounts of the situation.

Mr. Safieh wondered about the elasticity of the Iraqi bargaining position. Mr. Grant said that he believed this to be quite sound and felt that their demands were quite reasonable. He also felt that they were keen to negotiate. He stressed the importance of linkage with the Palestinian situation especially in view of the fact that the Palestinian struggle had been going on for forty-two years and the Iraqi situation for only five months. He also felt that it was significant that the Iraqis had stood firm against the powerful American empire and that there was support among Third World countries for this initiative. In saying this Mr. Grant stressed that he does not support what Saddam Hussein has done and is very much aware of the atrocities that he has carried out.

2. Current situation

Both Mr. Grant and Mr. Safieh were in agreement that the Switzerland negotiations looked at the outset quite hopeful and that it looked as if a breakthrough might have occurred. If this had been the case, this would have meant an acceptance of the linkage between the Palestinian and Iraqi situations. The media are slow to admit the possibility of this linkage.

Mr. Grant feels that although it is commonly held that oil is the most important issue in this crisis, he sees this as being secondary. He sees the real issue as being military power. In his view, the United States will not be satisfied with merely ousting Saddam Hussein from Iraq, they will want to position a government favourable to American interests there to protect these interests.

3. Change in Public Opinion?

Mr. Grant felt that attitudes were changing gradually and that public opinion is now shifting towards peace. Mr. Safieh expressed approval at the change in the attitude of the Labour Party. Mr. Grant said that this was very positive as it displayed a marked difference between the attitudes of the two main parties.



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Mr. Safieh expressed concern that the American Congress debate might change attitudes once again. Mr. Grant does not think his concern is justified as he feels that a large body of opinion in the United States is opposed to war. He feels that Congress is probably quite evenly split on the issue.

Mr. Grant feels that public opinion polls here in the U.K. have shown that public opinion here is also quite evenly split but feels that Mr. Bush's "war-like rhetoric" is limiting support for the war option. The anti-war meeting scheduled for Saturday 12th January in Trafalgar Square will, in his view influence many people towards the peaceful option. Mr. Safieh asked if Mr. Edward Heath would be involved in this meeting. He apparently has been invited to speak but has not responded yet.

4. Possibility of War?

Mr. Safieh does not think that there will be a war in the Gulf. Mr. Grant feels that even if Mr. Bush does not act, Israel may take some action.

4. Palestine Liberation Organisation

Mr. Grant asked Mr. Safieh about the activities of the PLO. Mr. Safieh said that the group was quite active, held regular meetings has a large pool of speakers and a community of approximately ten thousand. He felt that one of their main problems was that they needed improved interaction with the British community and lobbying on a ministerial level.

Mr. Grant offered to represent them at a parliamentary level. He was recently elected Chair of The Socialist Campaign Group and he asked Mr. Safieh to join the group. Mr. Safieh agreed.

A discussion followed on the nature of Palestinian political parties.

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