

FORD DEALS WITH PLO FOR EVACUATION

WASH. (WNS) -- The United States has acknowledged dealing with the Palestine Liberation Organization to assure the safe evacuation of Americans and other foreign nations from strife-torn Lebanon.

President Ford in expressing thanks for the evacuation of some 300 Americans and other foreign nations from Beirut by sea did not mention the PLO directly. White House Press Secretary Rpn Nessen said that Ford in congratulating the American officials involved in the "safe and orderly evacuation" also "wants to express his gratitude and sincere thanks to all others who gave their cooperation to facilitate their departure." The State Department acknowledged that it had been "dealing" with the PLO to assure that the evacuation would be conducted safely.

It was the first time that the United States had acknowledged it had been in direct contact with the PLO. The official U.S. policy is that it will not deal with the PLO unless it recognizes Israel's right to exist. Later the State Department said that the security officer at the American Embassy in Beirut has been in contact with the PLO "for some time." The U.S. Embassy is in the part of Beirut occupied by PLO gunmen and Department spokesman Robert Funseth noted that "Palestine groups have exercised for some time the security function in that section of Beirut." The Israeli Em-

bassy in Washington immediately questioned the U.S. on its contacts with the PLO. "We have expressed our sorrow that it was found necessary because of the situation for America to deal directly with the PLO," Embassy press counsellor Avi Pazner said. "At the same time we have been assured that there is no change in U.S. policy toward the PLO."

In Jerusalem, Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin told the Knesset that U.S.-PLO contacts developed into proper diplomatic ties it would be a serious matter. But this was not the situation now, he stressed, urging MKs and the media not to misrepresent or inflate it. The Foreign Ministry, meanwhile, "noted" that the U.S. government had informed Israel that the contacts with the PLO were purely in a humanitarian context and did not represent any change in the U.S. official position toward the PLO.



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