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FM TEL AVIV 010830Z MAY 81

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 192 OF 1 MAY.

INFO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON

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ROUTINE UKMIS NEW YORK BEIRUT AND DAMASCUS

MY TEL NO 191: ISRAEL/LEBANON

1. SEEN FROM HERE, THE EVENTS OF THE LAST WEEK CAN ONLY BE EXPLAINED ON THE BASIS OF AN IRRESPONSIBLE FAILURE BY THE AMERICANS DURING AND SINCE HAIG'S VISIT HERE TO MAKE CLEAR TO THE ISRAELIS WHERE US LIMITS LIE. RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY, THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT WAS ABLE TO CONCLUDE THAT THE US WOULD NOT OBJECT TO ISRAELI ACTION OF THE KIND TAKEN THIS WEEK AGAINST SYRIA, AND IF THE AMERICANS NOW ACQUIESCE, HOWEVER TACITLY, IN ISRAELI USE OF AMERICAN WEAPONS, AS IN THE SHOOTING DOWN OF THE SYRIAN HELICOPTERS, IN CENTRAL AND NORTH LEBANON, THE LINE WILL BE DANGEROUSLY FUZZY FOR THE FUTURE.

2. IT WOULD BE TEMPTING TO CONCLUDE THAT STOESEL'S APPEAL TO DOBRYNIN TO RESTRAIN THE SYRIANS NEEDED TO BE BALANCED BY SOMETHING ON THE ISRAELI SIDE WHICH THE AMERICANS COULD UNDERTAKE TO RESTRAIN, BUT THE TRUE EXPLANATION SEEMS MORE LIKELY TO BE CLUMSY AND DANGEROUS IMPRECISION ON THE AMERICAN'S PART COUPLED WITH A

BUT THE TRUE EXPLANATION SEEMS MORE LIKELY TO BE CLUMSY AND DANGEROUS IMPRECISION ON THE AMERICAN'S PART COUPLED WITH A RELUCTANCE TO STAND UP TO THE ISRAELIS AT LEAST UP TO AND INCLUDING 27 APRIL. (COMPARE HAIG'S FAILURE TO EVEN MENTION SETTLEMENTS IN HIS TALKS HERE IN APRIL.)

3. IN EXTRICATING ISRAEL FROM HER PUBLIC COMMITMENTS IN CENTRAL/NORTH LEBANON AND IN ANTICIPATION OF WHAT COULD BE A MORE DANGEROUS PERIOD IN THE ISRAEL/LEBANON/SYRIA CONTEXT IN JULY (MY TELEGRAM NUMBER 179) IT IS GOING TO BE IMPORTANT THAT THE AMERICANS SHOULD SET THE CLEAREST POSSIBLE LIMITS TO ISRAELI ACTION BEYOND ISRAEL'S FRONTIERS.

ROBINSON

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FM TEL AVIV 010650Z MAY 81

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 191 OF 1ST MAY

INFO IMMEDIATE MODUK (FOR DI4), WASHINGTON, BEIRUT, DAMASCUS

INFO ROUTINE AMMAN

MY TELEGRAM NO 186. LEBANON.

1. MY US COLLEAGUE SAW BEGIN AGAIN LAST NIGHT. I DO NOT KNOW WHAT HAPPENED, BUT THERE ARE SUGGESTIONS THAT THE USE OF US WEAPONS BY ISRAEL MAY HAVE BEEN RAISED. IN ANY CASE THE SIGNS ARE THAT ISRAEL IS BACKING AWAY FROM CONFRONTATION AND DOING SO IN A NOT VERY WELL ORDERED WAY.

2. BEGIN BRIEFED THE KNESSET FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE COMMITTEE YESTERDAY AFTERNOON AND REFERRED TO AN EXCHANGE OF MESSAGES BETWEEN SHAMIR AND HAIG. OPPOSITION COMPLAINTS SEEM TO HAVE CONCENTRATED MORE ON THEIR NOT BEING KEPT INFORMED THAN ON BEGIN'S POLICY SO FAR. BUT ON LEAVING THE COMMITTEE BEGIN TOLD JOURNALISTS THAT ISRAEL DID NOT HAVE ANY OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION THAT SAM MISSILES WERE ALREADY ON LEBANESE SOIL. THE REPORT HAD COME FROM RADIO MONTE CARLO, AND ISRAEL WAS STILL LOOKING INTO IT. ASKED ABOUT WAR WITH SYRIA BEGIN REPLIED THAT ISRAEL DID NOT WANT WAR WITH SYRIA AND HE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT SYRIA WANTED WAR WITH ISRAEL. ISRAEL WANTED TO SEE AN INDEPENDENT LEBANON. WAS THERE A RISK OF WAR? THERE WERE SOME RISKS BECAUSE THERE WERE SO MANY TROOPS IN LEBANON.

3. ABOUT THE SAME TIME KIMCHE, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE ISRAELI FOREIGN MINISTRY, TOLD BBC'S MICHAEL ELKINS THAT HE RECOGNISED THAT SYRIA REGARDED CONTROL OVER THE BEKAA VALLEY AS A STRATEGIC NECESSITY. BUT THIS DID NOT MEAN CONTROLLING THE MOUNTAIN RANGE, AND ISRAEL HAD INTENDED BY SHOOTING DOWN THE HELICOPTERS TO DRAW A RED LINE THERE. ZAHLE DOMINATED THE BEKAA VALLEY BUT THE SYRIANS COULD OCCUPY POSITIONS AROUND ZAHLE WITHOUT BEING UP IN THE MOUNTAINS AND THERE WAS NO NEED FOR

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THEM TO USE AIR POWER AND SHELL CIVILIANS. ISRAEL DID NOT AGREE THAT SYRIA SHOULD ANNEX THE BEKAA VALLEY BUT THAT DID NOT NECESSARILY MEAN GOING TO WAR ABOUT IT.

KIMCHE SAID THAT THE PROBLEM OF THE SYRIAN MISSILES REMAINED A CRITICAL ISSUE. ISRAEL WOULD HAVE TO CONSIDER CAREFULLY HOW TO REACT, BUT ADDED AGAIN WITHOUT BRINGING ABOUT A TOTAL CONFLICT.

4. KIMCHE'S REMARKS ON THE PRESENCE OF SYRIAN MISSILES, A PRESENCE WHICH SEEMS NOW TO HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED FROM A NUMBER OF OTHER SOURCES, UNDERLINES THE RETREAT IMPLIED IN BEGIN'S REMARKS ON MISSILES QUOTED IN PARA 2 ABOVE . (SEE ALSO PARA. 4 OF MY TUR.)

ROBINSON

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