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Prime Minister
(Change in the US Change in Tehran)

IMMEDIATE

ADVANCE COPY

CONFIDENTIAL
 FM TEHRAN 221415Z NOV 79
 TO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON
 TELEGRAM NUMBER 34 OF 22 NOVEMBER
 INFO IMMEDIATE FCO (FOR MED)

FOLLOWING IS MESSAGE FROM LAINGEN ADDRESSED TO SECRETARY VANCE, WHICH HE HANDED TO THE NORWEGIAN AMBASSADOR WHEN THE LATTER VISITED HIM TO-DAY. AS NORWEGIANS HAVE ONLY LIMITED FACILITIES WE HAVE BEEN ASKED TO TRANSMIT IT. I SHOULD BE GRATEFUL IF TEXT COULD BE CONVEYED URGENTLY TO MR VANCE.

BEGINS: FOR THE SECRETARY.

1. WE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEND A MESSAGE SEVERAL DAYS AGO VIA THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR WITH SOME SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS ON THE SITUATION HERE AND WHICH WE HOPE YOU HAVE SEEN. THIS MORNING THE AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR WAS ALLOWED TO SEE US AND WE ASKED HIM ORALLY TO CONVEY VIA HIS EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON SOME OF OUR CONCERNS ABOUT THE PERIOD IMMEDIATELY AHEAD. WE REITERATE THEM BELOW, HOPING WE WILL HAVE SOME MEANS LATER TODAY TO COMMUNICATE THEM ON THE RECORD.
2. BEFORE DOING SO, I MUST NOTE WITH REGRET THAT ASIDE FROM THESE OCCASIONAL AMBASSADORIAL CONTACTS AND ACCESS TO A PORTION OF THE MEDIA, OUR ABILITY TO KNOW WHAT IS UNDERWAY IN THE BACKGROUND IS EXTREMELY LIMITED. I HAVE HAD NO SUBSTANTIVE CONTACT WITH IRANIAN AUTHORITIES FOR THE PAST TEN DAYS.
3. THE PUBLIC ATMOSPHERE HERE IS ONE OF DANGEROUS EMOTIONAL

3. THE PUBLIC ATMOSPHERE HERE IS ONE OF DANGEROUS EMOTIONAL FRENZY. YESTERDAY'S DEMONSTRATIONS AROUND OUR EMBASSY WERE ALMOST UNPRECEDENTED IN SIZE AND VENOM AND WERE SUPPLEMENTED BY SIMILAR AFFAIRS IN CITIES ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. KHOMEINI AND HIS ENTOURAGE OF CLERICS HAVE SKILLFULLY USED THE SEIZURE OF OUR EMBASSY, CHARGES THAT OUR DIPLOMATS ARE SPIES, AND OUR REFUSAL TO HAND OVER THE SHAH, TO DEVELOP A MASS PSYCHOLOGY OF HATE THAT MAY HAVE FEW PARALLELS IN HISTORY. THE FEW IRANIANS WHO RECOGNISE THE DISASTROUS IMPLICATIONS OF THE COURSE KHOMEINI HAS SET FOR HIS COUNTRY ARE TOO FRIGHTENED TO SPEAK OUT.

4. WORSE, WE ARE NOW ENTERING THE MOURNING MONTH OF MOHARRAM, A PERIOD WHEN EVEN DURING NORMAL TIMES EMOTIONS RUN HIGH. HENCE THE NEXT WEEK TO TEN DAYS WILL BE EXCEEDINGLY DANGEROUS FOR THE HOSTAGES. WE CANNOT EMPHASIZE TOO MUCH THE IMPORTANCE OF AVOIDING AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE ANY ACTIONS AND STATEMENTS ON OUR SIDE DURING THIS PERIOD THAT RISK EXACERBATING THE SITUATION HERE, NO MATTER HOW COMPELLING THEY MAY APPEAR IN TERMS OF PUBLIC OPINION AT HOME. IT IS IN ANY EVENT VITAL THAT WE AVOID ANY ACTION THAT RISKS VITIATING IN ANY WAY THE OVERWHELMING SUPPORT WE NOW HOLD WITH WORLD PUBLIC OPINION ON THE SEIZURE OF OUR EMBASSY AND THE TREATMENT OF OUR HOSTAGES.

5. WE ARE DEALING WITH A POPULACE FOR WHOM DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE BECOME A WAY OF LIFE, A RELIGIOUS PERIOD (MOHARRAM) THAT GLOFIFIES MARTYRDOM, A REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP THAT SEES ITS SUCCESS IN OVERTHROWING THE SHAH AS ASSURANCE THAT MASS DEMONSTRATIONS WILL AGAIN SUCCEED, AND A SINGLE LEADER WHOSE WHOLE LIFE HAS BEEN ONE OF REFUSING TO BROOK COMPROMISE. REGRETTABLY, BECAUSE OF THIS MENTALITY AND BECAUSE OF THE WAY KHOMEINI'S ACTIONS AND STATEMENTS HAVE IN THEMSELVES RESTRICTED IRAN'S OPTIONS, THERE MAY REMAIN VERY FEW COURSES OF ACTION THAT HE CAN TAKE (AND THAT WOULD BE TOLERABLE FOR US) WITHOUT RISK OF GREAT LOSS OF FACE FOR IRAN INTERNATIONALLY AND FOR KHOMEINI DOMESTICALLY. IT SEEMS TO US THERE ARE ESSENTIALLY ONLY TWO BROAD OPTIONS IN TERMS OF COURSES OF ACTION THAT KHOMEINI WILL OR COULD TAKE.

6. THE FIRST IS THAT HE MAY HIMSELF DECIDE TO HOLD THE LINE IN TERMS OF FURTHER THREATS AND ACTIONS UNTIL AT LEAST THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM PROCESS IS COMPLETE ON DECEMBER 2. WITH THE OVERWHELMING ENDORSEMENT THAT THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST US HELPS ASSURE HIM IN THAT VOTE IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT HE MIGHT THEN BE PREPARED EITHER A) SIMPLY TO ANNOUNCE A FULL RUPTURE OF RELATIONS AND AN EXPULSION OF THE HOSTAGES (WITHOUT TRIAL) AS SPIES OR B) TO CONTINUE HOLDING AT LEAST SOME OF THE HOSTAGES WHILE CARRYING ON A

EXPULSION OF THE HOSTAGES (WITHOUT TRIAL) AS SPIES OR B) TO CONTINUE HOLDING AT LEAST SOME OF THE HOSTAGES WHILE SIGNALING A WILLINGNESS TO BEGIN TALKS THROUGH SOME UN ARRANGEMENT OR THIRD PARTY INTERMEDIARY.

7. THE FIRST OF THESE IS AT LEAST FEASIBLE, GIVEN KHOMEINI'S OVERWHELMING AUTHORITY, BUT IT WOULD NOT BE EASY GIVEN THE HEADY TALK OF TRIALS HERE. THE SECOND IS ALSO FEASIBLE BUT ONLY IF OFFERED PROMISE OF MEETING AT LEAST SOME OF IRANS DEMANDS VIS A VIS THE SHAH.

8. BUT MORE LIKELY THAN EITHER OF THESE MAY WELL BE THAT KHOMEINI WILL GO AHEAD WITH TRIALS OF SOME SORT, FOR ALL OR A SELECTED NUMBER OF THE HOSTAGES, FOLLOWED BY THEIR TOTAL EXPULSION FROM IRAN. THE CALL BY THE STUDENT OCCUPIERS OF THE EMBASSY ON NOVEMBER 21 FOR TRIALS AND BANI SADR'S ALMOST DESPERATE APPEAL TO THE US VIA HIS TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW WITH NBC'S "TODAY" PROGRAM THE SAME DAY NOT TO BE "TOO AFRAID" OF THE "EVENTUALITY" OF TRIALS, SUGGESTS THAT THIS OPTION IS UNDER ACTIVE CONSIDERATION.

9. THERE IS OBVIOUSLY GREAT RISK IN SUCH A COURSE, BOTH IN PRACTICAL TERMS AND IN TERMS OF PRINCIPLE. THERE IS THE DANGER THAT THE "SENTENCES" HANDED DOWN WOULD GO BEYOND MERE EXPULSION. AND FOR US TO ACQUIESCE IN SUCH TRIALS WOULD MEAN ACCEPTING A PROCESS THAT FLIES IN THE FACE OF ALL INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION AND PRACTICE AND CIVILIZED BEHAVIOUR AND UNDERMINES THE VERY PRINCIPLE ON WHICH WE NOW STAND. WE BELIEVE OUR PREFERED COURSE MUST REMAIN THAT OF STRENUOUS OPPOSITION TO SUCH TRIALS, WHILE BUYING TIME TO SECURE THE HOSTAGES' RELEASE (OR SIMPLE EXPULSION) BY DIPLOMATIC MEANS.

10. BUT ACQUIESCENCE IN TRIALS MAY YET PROVE THE ONLY MEANS OF SECURING THE RELEASE OF THE HOSTAGES UNHARMED. IF WE ARE REDUCED TO THAT OPTION, WE WOULD NEED TO CONTINUE TO HOLD FIRMLY TO OUR PUBLIC POSITION THAT SUCH TRIALS ARE TOTALLY CONTRARY TO INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THAT THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT REMAINS FULLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SAFETY OF OUR DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL. IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT BY TAKING THIS POSITION, WHILE THE REGIME HERE GOES AHEAD WITH THE SPECTACLE OF SUCH TRIALS, THAT IRAN IS HUMILIATED MORE THAN WE. BUT THAT IS A JUDGEMENT THAT AFFECTS BOTH PRINCIPLE AND PUBLIC OPINION AT HOME THAT WE CANNOT AND SHOULD NOT MAKE FROM HERE.

11. WE WISH YOU AND ALL OUR COLLEAGUES IN WASHINGTON A VERY BLESSED THANKSGIVING DAY.