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TO PRIORITY FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE  
TELEGRAM NUMBER 3874 OF 23 NOVEMBER 1979  
INFO PRIORITY TEHRAN, UKMIS NEW YORK, MODUK, UKDEL NATO, ROUTINE  
JEDDA, TEL AVIV, CAIRO ANKARA AND MOSCOW.

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U S MILITARY OPTIONS AGAINST IRAN.

1. YESTERDAY'S NEW YORK TIMES CARRIED TWO ARTICLES ON A POSSIBLE U S MILITARY RESPONSE TO EVENTS IN IRAN, BASED ON BACKGROUND BRIEFING BY U S OFFICIALS.
2. THE FIRST, BY DREW MIDDLETON, OUTLINED THE APPARENT MILITARY OPTIONS OPEN TO THE U S, ON THE BASIS OF PENTAGON AND NATO BRIEFING. THE ARTICLE CLAIMED THAT THE PENTAGON WELL UNDERSTOOD THE OBSTACLES TO SWIFT AND EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION, AND ACKNOWLEDGED THAT ANY OF THE ALTERNATIVES UNDER CONSIDERATION COULD RESULT IN THE DEATH OF MOST OF THE HOSTAGES.
3. THERE WAS GENERAL AGREEMENT IN WASHINGTON THAT ANY RESCUE MISSION TO RELEASE THE HOSTAGES WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE IN STRENGTH. THE GROUND COMBAT FORCE CLOSEST TO IRAN WAS A MARINE BATTALION (ABOUT 1500 MEN) WITH THE SIXTH FLEET OFF THE SOUTH COAST OF TURKEY. THE BATTALION WAS EQUIPPED WITH HELICOPTERS BUT THESE WOULD NEED REFUELING TO MAKE THE OVER 1,000 MILE FLIGHT TO TEHRAN. THE ONLY LIKELY STAGING POINT WAS ISRAEL AND USE OF THIS WOULD INFLAME MUSLIM OPINION. FIGHTER SUPPORT WOULD ALSO BE NECESSARY AND UNITS FROM THE 16TH AIR FORCE IN SPAIN, ITALY AND GREECE, AS WELL AS THE TURKISH BASE AT INCIRLIK, COULD BE USED.
4. BUT AN EFFECTIVE OPERATION WOULD REALLY REQUIRE MORE THAN A SINGLE MARINE BATTALION. OF THE ALTERNATIVES - UNITS OF THE ARMY'S STRATEGIC RESERVE AVAILABLE FOR QUICK REACTION SERVICE, ALL (INCLUDING THE ASSAULT UNITS AT FORT BRAGG AND FORT HOOD) WERE STATIONED IN THE U S. NONE HAD BEEN YET PLACED ON ALERT.



5. ACCORDING TO MIDDLETON, THE OPTION MOST FAVOURED BY U S MILITARY OPINION WAS STILL AN AIRBORNE DROP ON THE EMBASSY, ACCOMPANIED BY ONE ON TEHRAN AIRPORT, BOTH SUPPORTED BY FIGHTER UNITS WHILE THE TEHRAN MOBS DID NOT PRESENT AN INSURMOUNTABLE PROBLEM, IT WAS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SUCH OPERATIONS WOULD PUT THE LIVES OF THE HOSTAGES AT EXTREME RISK. A LESS DANGEROUS ALTERNATIVE WOULD BE THE NAVAL BLOCKADE OF IRAN, SPECIFICALLY THE KHARG OIL TERMINAL. THIS COULD BE CARRIED OUT BY THE TWO CARRIER FORCES NOW APPROACHING THE GULF (MY TELNO 3833) BUT NEITHER FORCE HAD MUCH OF A LANDING OPERATIONS CAPABILITY. NATO SOURCES WERE REPORTED TO BELIEVE THAT THE ULTIMATE MISSION OF THE CARRIER FORCES WAS TO IMPOSE SUCH A BLOCKADE. WHILE SUCH AN OPERATION MIGHT CAUSE TROUBLE WITH THE GERMANS AND JAPANESE, THEY MIGHT ACCEPT THE BLOCKADE AS LONG AS IT LASTED NO MORE THAN TWO WEEKS.

6. FINALLY, MIDDLETON CLAIMED THAT PRECISION AIR-STRIKES AGAINST IRANIAN TARGETS (WHICH HAD FEATURED PROMINENTLY LAST WEEK IN THE U S PRESS AS A POSSIBLE MILITARY OPTION) HAD NOW BEEN RULED OUT BY THE PENTAGON FOR POLITICAL REASONS. THEIR EFFECT ON MUSLIM AND ALLIED OPINION, APART FROM RISKING THE LIVES OF THE HOSTAGES, WOULD HAVE BEEN UNACCEPTABLE.

7. THE SECOND NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE (BY TERENCE SMITH) REPORTED THAT THE CARTER STATEMENT OF 20 NOVEMBER, RAISING THE POSSIBILITY OF MILITARY ACTION (MY TELNO 3834), HAD BEEN ISSUED BECAUSE OF WHITE HOUSE CONCERN THAT KHOMEINI HAD MISREAD THE U S SIGNALS. HIS STATEMENT ABOUT PUTTING THE HOSTAGES ON TRIAL AND THE LACK OF US DETERMINATION - QUOTE THE AMERICANS HAVE NO GUTS UNQUOTE - HAD CONVINCED THE ADMINISTRATION THAT THEY HAD TO RESPOND SWIFTLY AND FORCEFULLY.

8. WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS WERE ALSO REPORTED TO CONCEDE THAT ANY MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAN COULD ONLY BE PURSUED AFTER THE HOSTAGE SITUATION WAS RESOLVED. THEY EXPLAINED THE REINFORCEMENT OF U S NAVAL FORCES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AS MORE A RESPONSE TO INSTABILITY IN THE MUSLIM WORLD (WITH THE PROSPECT OF TURMOIL SPREADING TO NATIONS SUCH AS EGYPT AND TURKEY) RATHER THAN TO THE HOSTAGE SITUATION.

9. SEE MIFT (NOT TO ALL)

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TELEGRAM NUMBER 3882 OF 23 NOVEMBER 1979

INFO TEHRAN UKMIS NEW YORK

MY TELNO 3768: U S REACTIONS TO IRAN CRISIS

1. SENATOR MCGOVERN ENDED HIS STATEMENT ON 21 NOVEMBER (MY TELNO 3857 PARA 2), ATTACKING THE DETENTION OF THE HOSTAGES AND CALLING FOR MILITARY REPRISAL IN THE EVENT OF EXECUTIONS, WITH THE WORDS: QUOTE UNCLE SAM'S BEARD HAS BEEN AROUND A LOT LONGER THAN THE AYATOLLAH'S. ANYONE WHO PULLS THAT BEARD TOO HARD SHOULD BE PREPARED FOR REPRISAL FROM THE MIGHTIEST NATION ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH UNQUOTE.
2. THESE REMARKS, FROM A NOTED DOVE, SUM UP THE REACTION OF MOST AMERICANS TO THE CONTINUING CRISIS. GIVEN THE ENORMOUS MEDIA COVERAGE OF EVENTS IN TEHRAN AND ISLAMABAD, AND THE EMOTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE RETURN OF SOME HOSTAGES TO THE U S, WITH THE ACCOUNTS NOW APPEARING OF THE ORDEAL OF U S PERSONNEL IN PAKISTAN, IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT THE U S PUBLIC HAS SO FAR KEPT ITS COOL. FOR THE MOMENT THERE ARE ALMOST NO SIGNS OF THE CALM AND PATIENT APPROACH OF THE ADMINISTRATION LOSING THE SUPPORT OF MOST OF THE COUNTRY.
3. ON THE CONTRARY, SUPPORT FOR THE PRESIDENT'S ACTIONS ON THE HILL, IN THE MEDIA AND AMONG PUBLIC OPINION, CONTINUES TO BE ALMOST UNANIMOUS. TWO FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THIS ARE THE WIDESPREAD RECOGNITION THAT, WHILE THE HOSTAGES REMAIN IN TEHRAN, OTHER ALTERNATIVES (EG MILITARY ACTION) ARE NOT REALLY FEASIBLE: AND THE SATISFACTION GAINED FROM SUCH OVERT ACTS BY THE PRESIDENT AS THE EARLIER RESTRICTIONS AGAINST IRAN AND NOW THE STEPPING UP OF MILITARY FORCES IN THE VICINITY.
4. EVEN THOSE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES WHO, EITHER OUT OF CONVICTION OR POLITICAL OPPORTUNISM, HAVE BEEN TEMPTED TO OFFER CRITICISM OF THE PRESIDENT'S ACTIONS, HAVE DONE SO DISCREETLY. ON THE WHOLE THESE INTERVENTIONS APPEAR TO HAVE MADE LITTLE IMPACT ON THE COUNTRY AND EDITORIAL OPINION, ALTHOUGH THERE IS A DISCERNIBLE TREND AMONG COMMENTATORS (PARTICULARLY OF THE RIGHT WING) TO STEP UP THE PRESSURE ON THE ADMINISTRATION FOR A MORE RESOLUTE (EVEN

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IF MORE RISKY TO THE HOSTAGES) RESPONSE. IT IS NOTABLE THAT KISSINGER (WHOSE ROLE IN THE SHAH'S ADMITTANCE TO THE U S HAS NOT ESCAPED CRITICISM) HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MOST ACTIVE CRITICS OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S APPROACH, TELLING A MEETING OF REPUBLICAN GOVERNORS THAT AMERICANS WERE QUOTE SICK AND TIRED OF SEEING AMERICANS PUSHED AROUND UNQUOTE. ON THE OTHER HAND GENERAL HAIG HAS ADMITTED THAT THE U S WOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO PUT EVEN ONE DIVISION OF FIGHTING MEN INTO POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST WITHIN 45 DAYS.

5. WHETHER THE PRESIDENT CAN KEEP DOWN THE NATIONAL TEMPERATURE, BY OFFERING PUBLIC AND CONGRESSIONAL OPINION AN OCCASIONAL NEW INCENTIVE TO CONTINUE SUPPORT FOR HIS POLICIES, REMAINS IN DOUBT. THE ENDLESS DIET, PARTICULARLY ON TELEVISION, OF DEMONSTRATIONS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST OF ANTI-AMERICAN FEELING, UNDISGUISED CONTEMPT, AND PURE PROVOCATION, MUST EVENTUALLY HAVE A MORE INFLAMMATORY EFFECT ON THE PUBLIC MOOD THAN IT HAS PRODUCED SO FAR. THE IMPACT ON PUBLIC OPINION OF AN IRANIAN DECISION TO BRING THE HOSTAGES TO TRIAL WOULD BE PARTICULARLY HEAVY (SEE CARTER'S STATEMENT ON THIS POSSIBILITY OF 19 NOVEMBER - MY TELNO 3791). SUCH AN EVENT, CONDUCTED (AS IT PRESUMABLY WOULD BE) IN THE FULL GLARE OF INTERNATIONAL PUBLICITY, WOULD HAVE A DAMAGING EFFECT ON U S SELF-CONTROL. ADMINISTRATION SOURCES ARE QUOTED TODAY AS SAYING THAT THEY WERE TRYING TO PREVENT A TRIAL, BUT ADDED THAT THEY WOULD NOT USE FORCE TO DO SO.

6. THE PRESIDENT HAS ALREADY USED UP A NUMBER OF THE BEST CARDS IN HIS HAND. IF THE CRISIS CONTINUES HE MAY WELL (FOR REASONS OF DOMESTIC AS WELL AS FOREIGN POLICY) BE DRIVEN TO TAKE MORE DRAMATIC MEASURES. THE ADMINISTRATION ARE WELL AWARE OF THIS DANGER, AND OF THE CRISIS ESCALATING EVEN FURTHER OUT OF CONTROL. THEY ARE DETERMINED IF AT ALL POSSIBLE TO MAINTAIN THEIR GRIP ON EVENTS AND TO PURSUE QUIET DIPLOMACY AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. BUT THEY KNOW THAT TIME IS NOT ON THEIR SIDE.

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