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DESKBY 141900Z (FCO, WASHINGTON, DAMASCUS AND UKMIS NEW YORK)

FROM TEL AVIV 141815Z DEC 81

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELNO 488 OF 14 DECEMBER 1981

INFO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON, DAMASCUS, UKMIS NEW YORK, AMMAN,  
PRIORITY CAIRO, BEIRUT AND JEDDA

INFO SAVING OTHER MIDDLE EAST POSTS

MIPT: EXTENSION OF ISRAELI LAW TO THE GOLAN.

1. THE GOLAN ISSUE HAS BEEN RELATIVELY QUIESCENT SINCE MARCH WHEN THE KNESSET REJECTED THE TEHIYA (RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST) PRIVATE MEMBER'S BILL TO EXTEND ISRAELI SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE GOLAN HEIGHTS AND TO APPLY ISRAELI LAW THERE. (THE ISRAELI CABINET HAD DECIDED IN DECEMBER, 1980, NOT TO SUPPORT THE BILL BECAUSE THEY CONSIDERED THAT THERE WAS NOT THEN A "NATIONAL CONSENSUS" FOR IT AND BECAUSE THE TIMING WAS INAPPROPRIATE: TEL AVIV TELNO 576 OF 23 DECEMBER REFERS.)

2. IT WAS, HOWEVER, CLEAR THROUGHOUT THE LENGTHY DEBATE IN DECEMBER ON THE TEHIYA BILL, THAT ALTHOUGH BEGIN AND HIS CABINET WERE NOT AT THE TIME WILLING TO TAKE THE FINAL STEP - MAINLY BECAUSE OF THE ADVERSE INTERNATIONAL CONSEQUENCES WHICH WOULD RESULT - THEY FAVOURED SOME KIND OF LEGISLATIVE MOVE TO STRENGTHEN ISRAEL'S LINKS WITH THE GOLAN WHEN THE TIME WAS RIPE. (AS BEGIN REMINDED THE KNESSET THIS EVENING, THE RELEVANT SECTION OF THE POST-ELECTORAL POLICY GUIDELINES ARE CLEAR ON THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT'S INTENTIONS). BEGIN KNEW, AND KNOWS, THAT HE CAN COUNT ON THE ENDORSEMENT OF A SUBSTANTIAL BODY WITHIN THE OPPOSITION FOR SUCH LEGISLATION; AND ON THE SUPPORT OF A MAJORITY OF ISRAELIS, WHO, WHATEVER THEIR RESERVATIONS ABOUT PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF LIKUD POLICY, CAN BE RELIED ON TO BACK THE GOVERNMENT ON THE JERUSALEM AND GOLAN ISSUES.

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3. TODAY'S DECISION HAS NEVERTHELESS SURPRISED EVEN THE MOST DEVOTED STUDENTS OF BEGIN'S PROPENSITY FOR DRAMATIC MOVES MADE WITHOUT PRIOR CONSULTATION. IF THE NEWS REPORTS OF THIS MORNING'S EVENTS ARE ACCURATE, HE CONSULTED ONLY SHARON BEFORE PUTTING THE PROPOSED BILL TO THE REST OF THE CABINET, WHO HAD NO ADVANCE WARNING OF HIS INTENTION AND WERE LEFT WITH LITTLE CHOICE BUT TO ACCEPT A FAIT ACCOMPLI (LAST TWO WORDS UNDERLINED) BOTH ON DRAFTING AND PARLIAMENTARY TACTICS. MANY ISRAELIS, PERHAPS INCLUDING SOME CABINET MEMBERS, WHILE FAVOURING THE EXTENSION OF ISRAELI LAW TO THE GOLAN MAY NEVERTHELESS HAVE RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE APPARENTLY SNAP NATURE OF BEGIN'S DECISION AND ABOUT HIS DETERMINATION TO BULLDOZE HIS BILL THROUGH THE KNESSET, WHATEVER THE DAMAGE TO ISRAEL'S REPUTATION AS A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY.

4. WHY DID BEGIN DECIDE TO MOVE TODAY? THE BEST EXPLANATION AT PRESENT IS THAT PUT TO US INFORMALLY BY THE ISRAEL FOREIGN MINISTRY (WHO HAVE YET TO RECEIVE FIRM GUIDANCE ON THE LINE THEY SHOULD TAKE); THAT BEGIN, HAVING BROODED FOR SOME TIME ON KHADDAM'S SPEECH AT FEZ, WAS ENRAGED BY ASAD'S STATEMENT (AS REPORTED HERE) TO A KUWAITI NEWSPAPER THAT SYRIA WOULD NOT RECOGNISE ISRAEL EVEN IF THE PALESTINIANS DID SO. AS HE EMPHASISED IN THE CLOSING PASSAGES OF HIS SPEECH TONIGHT, BEGIN INTERPRETED ASAD'S COMMENTS AS IMPLYING THE EVENTUAL DESTRUCTION OF ISRAEL. HE APPARENTLY WENT ON TO DRAW THE CONCLUSION THAT SINCE SYRIA WAS EVIDENTLY DETERMINED NEVER TO MAKE PEACE, HE WAS JUSTIFIED IN TAKING TODAY'S ACTION. AND IF THE DEED WERE TO BE DONE, BEST IT WERE DONE QUICKLY BEFORE NASCENT OPPOSITION COULD BE EFFECTIVELY MOBILISED.

5. SOME COMMENTATORS ALSO SUGGEST THAT BEGIN TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY PROVIDED BY THE WEST'S, AND PARTICULARLY THE UNITED STATES'S, PREOCCUPATION WITH EVENTS IN POLAND, TO SPRING HIS SURPRISE. BUT WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS THEORY. (ACCORDING TO THE AMERICAN EMBASSY HERE, THE US AMBASSADOR HAS IN ANY EVENT ALREADY EXPRESSED THE UNITED STATES'S DEEP CONCERN TO SHAMIR AT THE ADVERSE EFFECT THIS MOVE WILL HAVE ON SC242, AND ON THE CAMP DAVID PROCESS.)

6. I SHALL COMMENT FURTHER AFTER THE OUTCOME OF THE KNESSET DEBATE IS KNOWN.

FCO PASS SAVING ADDRESSEES.

MOBERLY

[REPEATED AS REQUESTED]

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