

MIDDLE EAST: ADVANCE COPIES

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TELNO 70 OF 5 MARCH

INFO PRIORITY AMMAN, TEL AVIV, WASHINGTON, JEDDA, AND BEIRUT  
INFO SAVING OTHER ME POSTS, MOSCOW, UKMIS NEW YORK.

1. PRESIDENT REAGAN'S PERSONAL ENVOY, PHILIP HABIB, VISITED SYRIA FROM ISRAEL FROM 2 TO 3 MARCH. THE US EMBASSY HERE HAD REQUESTED PERMISSION ON 24 FEBRUARY FOR HABIB TO COME. THE SYRIANS DELAYED A REPLY UNTIL 28 FEBRUARY, BUT EVENTUALLY SAID THAT THEY WOULD RECEIVE HIM TO HEAR REAGAN'S ORAL MESSAGE TO ASAD, ON CONDITION THAT HABIB SAW ASAD ALONE. ON 3 MARCH ASAD RECEIVED HABIB (WHO WAS EXPECTING A COOL HALF-HOUR FORMAL SESSION) FOR TWO HOURS AND FORTY MINUTES. ON THE PREVIOUS EVENING, THE SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM, SAW HABIB FOR TWO HOURS WITH MORRIS DRAPER AND EMBASSY STAFF.

2. BECAUSE OF THE UNEXPECTED LENGTH OF THE TALKS WITH ASAD AND THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR HIS ONWARD JOURNEY, HABIB WAS UNABLE TO BRIEF EMBASSY STAFF ON WHAT HAD TAKEN PLACE. BUT THEY HAVE TOLD US THAT HIS MANDATE ON THIS OCCASION WAS RESTRICTED TO STRENGTHENING AND BROADENING THE CEASEFIRE IN SOUTH LEBANON. THE MISSILE QUESTION WAS NOT INCLUDED. HE AIMED TO ENSURE THAT THE SYRIANS UNDERSTOOD CLEARLY THE POLITICAL MOOD IN ISRAEL, THE FRAGILITY OF THE CEASEFIRE AND THE LOW THRESHOLD WHICH WOULD PROVOKE AN ISRAELI ATTACK. IN THIS WAY HE HOPED THAT A FLAREUP THROUGH MISCALCULATION COULD



FIRE AND THE LOW THRESHOLD WHICH WOULD PROVOKE AN ISRAELI ATTACK. IN THIS WAY HE HOPED THAT A FLAREUP THROUGH MISCALCULATION COULD BE AVOIDED. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SYRIANS AT THIS STAGE LAY IN THE INFLUENCE THEY COULD EXERT ON THE WILDER PALESTINIAN GROUPS. KHADDAM HAD SAID THAT SYRIA WAS OF COURSE NOT A PARTY TO THE CEASEFIRE. BUT THE AMERICANS HAVE THE FIRM IMPRESSION THAT THE SYRIANS ARE ANXIOUS TO SEE THAT THE CEASEFIRE CONTINUES, ARE APPREHENSIVE OF AN ISRAELI ATTACK ON SOUTH LEBANON, AND FEAR THAT THE ARAB DETERRENT FORCE MIGHT BE EMBROILED IN THE FIGHTING. FOR ONCE US AND SYRIAN POLICY SEEMS TO BE WORKING IN PARALLEL, THOUGH FOR DIFFERENT REASONS.

3. HABIB TOLD KHADDAM THAT THE US REGARDED THE PALESTINIAN ATTACK ON THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES FROM JORDAN AS A VIOLATION OF THE CEASEFIRE, SINCE IT ORIGINATED IN LEBANON. CONVERSELY, HE ASSURED HIM THAT THE US WOULD NOT REGARD A PALESTINIAN ATTACK ON A JEWISH TARGET OUTSIDE THE REGION, EG IN EUROPE, AS A CEASEFIRE VIOLATION.

4. HABIB WAS SATISFIED WITH THE OUTCOME OF HIS TALKS IN DAMASCUS. AFTER HIS VISIT TO JORDAN HE WILL VISIT SAUDI ARABIA AND WILL RETURN TO ISRAEL BEFORE GOING HOME.

5. THE US EMBASSY HERE SAY THAT HABIB'S DISCUSSIONS IN ISRAEL WERE HEATED. OUR CONTACT CONSIDERED THAT ISRAEL HAD 40,000 MEN READY FOR AN ATTACK ON SOUTH LEBANON TO FINISH OFF THE PLO MILITARILY, AND THAT BEGIN WAS STILL KEENLY AWAITING A JUSTIFICATION TO SEND THEM IN.

6. THE US EMBASSY ARE UNDER STRICT INSTRUCTIONS TO REVEAL NOTHING ABOUT HABIB'S VISIT TO THEIR COLLEAGUES. I WOULD THEREFORE BE GRATEFULL IF THEIR CONFIDENCE COULD BE RESPECTED.

7. COMMENT. THE SYRIANS MAINTAINED THEIR PATTERN OF RECEIVING HIGH-LEVEL AMERICAN ENVOYS, AND THUS KEEPING OPEN THEIR LINES OF COMMUNICATION. IT IS AT LEAST ARGUABLE THAT THE SYRIANS GRANT GREATER ACCESS AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL TO THE US THAN TO THE SOVIET UNION. THE DELAY IN RESPONDING TO THE AMERICAN REQUEST FOR <sup>HABIB</sup> ~~FOR HIMSELF~~ <sup>HABIB</sup> TO VISIT WAS PROBABLY THE LEAST THEY COULD DO, GIVEN THE <sup>HABIB</sup> ~~CURRENT~~ <sup>HABIB</sup> PRESS CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE UNITED STATES (REPEATED BY ASAD HIMSELF IN AN INTERVIEW WITH LEMONDE) ACCUSING THE US OF BACKING THE MUSLIM BROTHERS IN HAMA. HABIB PRESUMABLY HAD SOME EXPLAINING TO DO ABOUT STATE DEPARTMENT PRESS BRIEFING ON HAMA. THE US EMBASSY BELIEVE THAT ASAD WAS SHAKEN BY THAT EPISODE, AND THAT HE IS NOW CONVINCED THAT THE US IS TRYING TO DESTABILISE HIS REGIME. IN THAT CONTEXT, HIS CONTINUED WILLINGNESS TO SEE HABIB IS ALL THE MORE STRIKING.



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