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FM ALGIERS 271530Z FEB 84

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELNO 37 OF 27 FEBRUARY

INFO PRIORITY BAGHDAD, TEHRAN, WASHINGTON, STOCKHOLM, PARIS,
GULF POSTS, UKMIS NEW YORK.

YOUR TELNO 35 OF 24 FEBRUARY

POSSIBLE ALGERIAN MEDIATION IN IRAN/IRAQ WAR

SUMMARY

1. ALGERIANS CLAIM TO BE CONTINUING TO MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH BOTH SIDES. THEY ARE PREPARED TO ENGAGE IN FRESH MEDIATION IF AN OPPORTUNITY EMERGES. EARLY MINISTERIAL CONTACTS WITH BOTH IRAQ AND IRAN ARE IN VIEW. THEY DOUBT WHETHER IRANIANS IN PRESENT MOOD ARE PREPARED TO SHOW RESTRAINT, AND SEE THIS AS IN PART DUE TO DIVISIONS WITHIN KHOMEINI REGIME. MFA WELCOMED OUR CONTACT ON ISSUE AND OFFER OF SUPPORT.

DETAIL

2. AS MINISTER AND SENIOR MFA OFFICIALS ARE AWAY ATTENDING OAU CONFERENCE IN ADDIS I SPOKE TODAY TO BENKOBI, DIRECTOR (UNDER SECRETARY) ARAB AFFAIRS.

3. HE SAID ALGERIANS FULLY SHARED CONCERN AT LATEST INTENSE FIGHTING AND ITS BROADER IMPLICATIONS FOR REGION. DESPITE THE TRAGIC SET-BACK TO THEIR EARLIER MEDIATION EFFORTS WITH THE AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT IN 1982 THEY HAD CONTINUED DISCREET EFFORTS WITH BOTH SIDES TO LOOK FOR A SOLUTION. ALGERIA'S SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY IN IRAQ/IRAN RELATIONS STEMMED FROM THEIR SUCCESSFUL ROLE AS SPONSORS OF 1975 ALGIERS TREATY BETWEEN IRAQIS AND THE SHAH. SINCE SADDAM'S ACTION IN ABROGATING THIS BY HIS ATTACK ON IRAN, (A MAJOR MILITARY AND POLITICAL MISCALCULATION), ALGERIA HAD SOUGHT TO RESTORE STABILITY TO THE AREA WHILE CAREFULLY AVOIDING TAKING SIDES. THIS AT FIRST BROUGHT ACCUSATIONS OF PARTIALITY FROM THE IRANSIANS, AND IN THE LATEST ROUND, WITH IRAN OCCUPYING IRAQI TERRITORY, MEANT ALGERIA WAS NOW BEING ACCUSED BY IRAQIS OF FORESAKING ARAB CAUSE. BY 1982 ALGERIA THOUGHT SHE HAD COME CLOSE TO ACHIEVING BASIS FOR A SETTLEMENT AS (A) KHOMEINI HAD APPEARED READY TO DROP INSISTENCE ON REMOVAL OF SADDAM SEMI COLON (B) IRAQ HAD AGREED TO INDEMNIFY THE IRANIAN EXPELLEES AND (C) ARABIAN STATES HAD AGREED TO PAY SUBSTANTIAL COMPENSATION TO IRAN ON IRAQ'S BEHALF INVOLVING INITIAL PAYMENT OF US DOLLARS 50,000M. BUT IRANIAN POSITION HAD THEN HARDENED, OWING TO INTERNAL STRAINS WITHIN ITS LEADERSHIP BEING DIVERTED BY THE LATEST CAMPAIGN. HE THOUGHT IMMEDIATE IRANIAN MILITARY AIM WAS TO SEVER BAGHDAD'S ROAD ARTERY TO BASRA AND KUWAIT.

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4. BENKOBI SAID THAT IN THEIR MOST RECENT CONTACTS WITH IRANIANS THE ALGERIANS HAD FOUND NO READINESS TO LISTEN TO REASON OR CONSIDER MODERATION. NOR WERE SYRIANS ANY HELP SEMI COLON THEY HAD THEIR OWN SCORES TO SETTLE WITH BAGHDAD. ALGERIANS WERE HOPING HOWEVER TO RECEIVE A VISIT DUE IN ABOUT A FORTNIGHT BY IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER. SO FAR THERE WAS NO SIGN OF IRAN CALLING THIS OFF. VISIT FORMED PART OF A REGULAR PATTERN OF CONSULTATIONS BUT OBVIOUSLY HAD PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE NOW. ALGERIAN LABOUR MINISTER, NABI, WAS ALSO DUE TO VISIT IRAQ EARLY NEXT MONTH SEMI COLON THIS WOULD GIVE A CHANCE FOR CONSULTATION ON THAT FRONT. ALGERIANS HOPED THEY COULD EXERT SOME INFLUENCE THROUGH THESE TWO VISITS. THEY WERE ACTIVELY CONSIDERING WHAT ELSE THEY MIGHT DO BUT IMMEDIATE OUTLOOK WAS DIFFICULT. PERHAPS A CLIMATE COULD BE CREATED TO PERMIT UN SECRETARY GENERAL'S EFFORTS OR ISLAMIC MEDIATION TO RESUME.

5. BENKOBI WELCOMED OUR CONTACT AND WAS GRATEFUL FOR EXPRESSION OF OUR SUPPORT FOR ANYTHING THEY COULD DO. HE WOULD LIKE TO KEEP IN TOUCH. ALGERIA RECOGNISED WE HAD CLOSE RELATIONS WITH GULF STATES WHO WERE FEELING UNDERSTANDABLY NERVOUS AT PRESENT. HE ALSO REMARKED TENSION WAS NOT HELPED BY RUMOURS OF EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE REGION. DRAWING ON MY TELECON WITH HASKELL I ASSURED HIM THERE WAS NO ROYAL NAVAL PRESENCE IN VICINITY OF GULF AREA AT THIS TIME.

6. BENKOBI SAID ALGERIA NEEDED TO AVOID PUBLICITY IN HER MEDIATION EFFORTS, NOT ONLY FOR SAKE OF EXERCISE ITSELF, BUT ALSO BECAUSE SINCE THE AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT THERE REMAINED A LATENT RESENTMENT TOWARDS IRAN IN A NUMBER OF CIRCLES HERE WHICH WAS SOMETIMES DIFFICULT TO CONTROL.

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