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ACTION EUR-00

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H-01 IO-17 NEA-06 NSCE-00 NSAE-00 SSO-00 HA-09
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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4754
INFO NATO COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY
CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK PRIORITY
HQ3AFRAF MILDENHALL UK PRIORITY
USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY
USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AB GE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY RIYADH

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 08028

E.O.12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PREL, PTER, UK, LY, US
SUBJECT: LIBYA - FURTHER UK REACTION

REF: LONDON 7999

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.
2. PRIME MINISTER THATCHER REPEATED FAMILIAR THEMES IN SUPPORT OF U.S. ACTION AGAINST LIBYA IN WEDNESDAY'S PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE. CONSERVATIVES HAD CLOSED RANKS OVERNIGHT, WITH LITTLE OF THE FRIENDLY CHIDING OBVIOUS

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YESTERDAY. EVEN MICHAEL HESELTINE, IN A PRIVATE LUNCHEON SPEECH, GAVE UNQUALIFIED SUPPORT TO THATCHER AND THE PRESIDENT, ARGUING THAT EUROPEAN INACTION AGAINST TERRORISM LEFT THE U.S. NO ALTERNATIVE.

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3. OPPOSITION LEADERS ARGUED THEIR CASE AGAINST THATCHER ON EFFECTIVENESS GROUNDS; A GOVERNMENT BRIEFING FOR THE LEADERS OF THE LABOR PARTY AND THE SDP/LIBERAL ALLIANCE ON THE SENSITIVE INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION SEEMED TO HAVE CONVINCED THEM THERE WAS LITTLE POINT IN QUESTIONING QADHAFI'S COMPLICITY. LABOR PARTY LEADER NEIL KINNOCK, IN AN EFFORT TO OFFER SOME ALTERNATIVE TO THE MILITARY OPTION, CALLED UPON THATCHER TO TAKE THE LEAD IN PRESSING THE EUROPEANS TO AGREE TO COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC SANCTIONS.

4. SOME OF THE INITIAL OUTRAGE SEEMS TO HAVE SPENT ITSELF AFTER TUESDAY'S COUNTLESS RERUNS OF FOOTAGE OF THE SAME WOUNDED CIVILIANS IN TRIPOLI HOSPITALS, AND DEMONSTRATIONS AND ARRESTS AT WHITEHALL. THE SPIRIT OF THE 50-100 DEMONSTRATORS OUTSIDE THE EMBASSY SEEMED DAMPENED BY THE RAINY WEATHER, BUT WAS NOT LACKING IN ANTI-AMERICAN FEELING. WHILE HEADLINES IN THE MORNING PAPERS WERE LARGELY NEGATIVE, BY LUNCHTIME THE MEDIA FOCUS HAD SHIFTED TO RUMORS OF INTERNAL PROBLEMS IN TRIPOLI AND A POSSIBLE COUP ATTEMPT AGAINST QADHAFI.

5. COMMENT: WHILE MANY OF OUR BRITISH FRIENDS HAVE CONVEYED THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE U.S. ACTION, OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT THE MAJORITY OF BRITONS CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THE U.S. (AND THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT) DID THE WRONG THING. THIS HAS BEEN FUELED BY MEDIA COVERAGE THAT HAS BEEN ANYTHING BUT EVENHANDED. THE PASSAGE OF

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TIME AND ATTENTION TO OTHER ISSUES WILL OBVIOUSLY DIMINISH THE CRITICISM OF MRS. THATCHER, BUT IT WILL BE THE EFFECT OF THE U.S. ACTION ON TERRORISM--AND ON QADHAFI'S LEADERSHIP--THAT WILL LARGELY DETERMINE THE FINAL VERDICT IN THE JUDGMENT OF THE BRITISH PUBLIC. END COMMENT. PRICE

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