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ACTION EUR-00

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4811
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 08105

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

REFS: A) LONDON 7999 B) LONDON 8028

1. CONFIDENTIAL, ENTIRE TEXT.
2. THE BRITISH DEATHS IN BEIRUT AND THE FOILED EL AL HEATHROW BOMB ATTEMPT PREDICTABLY HAVE FUELED FURTHER CONTROVERSY OVER THE LIBYA RAID. THATCHER FACED A BITTERLY HOSTILE COMMONS THURSDAY AFTERNOON, WITH
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OPPOSITION LEADERS ACCUSING HER OF HAVING ABANDONED
BRITISH HOSTAGES IN LEBANON TO THEIR FATE AND PROVOKING
FURTHER TERRORISM. EVEN TORY SUPPORTERS WERE MADE
UNEASY BY THE DAY'S SHOCKING EVENTS, AND THE GROWING

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3. THATCHER AND GOVERNMENT SPOKEMEN REMAINED CALM AND TENACIOUS UNDER THE GROWING PRESSURE, STRESSING THE UNACCEPTABILITY OF LETTING THE TERRORISTS WIN THROUGH FEAR AND INTIMIDATION. SHE ALSO REITERATED FIRMLY THAT SHE HAS NOT GIVEN THE PRESIDENT CARTE BLANCHE -- HE WOULD HAVE TO GO THROUGH THE SAME CONSULTATION PROCEDURES AGAIN SHOULD HE WISH TO USE THE BASES FOR ANOTHER STRIKE AGAINST LIBYA. HOWEVER, THATCHER STEADFASTLY REFUSED TO AGREE THAT BASES IN THE UK COULD NOT BE USED AGAIN IN A SIMILAR SITUATION.

4. THE DEBATE WILL CONTINUE TODAY IN THE LORDS. WE EXPECT THATCHER IS IN FOR A PARTICULARLY ROUGH COUPLE OF DAYS AS THE "BLOOD ON HER HANDS" THEME ECHOES THROUGHOUT THE OPPOSITION AND THE MEDIA. HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE IT WOULD TAKE A LOT MORE CARNAGE THAN WE HAVE SEEN THUS FAR TO SHAKE THATCHER'S CONFIDENCE IN THE CORRECTNESS OF HER DECISION.

5. THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL COST IS STILL BEING TALLIED, BUT THE SIGNS ARE NOT ENCOURAGING FOR THATCHER. THE MOST RECENT GALLUP POLL, TAKEN JUST BEFORE THE TRIPOLI AIR STRIKE, SHOWED THE PRIME MINISTER'S PERSONAL POPULARITY TO BE AT ITS LOWEST EBB SINCE DECEMBER 1981, WITH 67 PERCENT DISAPPROVING OF HER AND ONLY 28 PERCENT

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IN FAVOR. WITH NATIONWIDE LOCAL ELECTIONS, ALONG WITH ONE AND POSSIBLY TWO PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTIONS, SET FOR MAY 8, THE TORY POSITION IS SUDDENLY SOMEWHAT SHAKIER.

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