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FM TUNIS

TO DESKBY 271200Z FCO

TELNO 166

OF 271145Z MAY 90

INFO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON, TEL AVIV, AMMAN, CAIRO, BAGHDAD

INFO IMMEDIATE UKMIS NEW YORK

INFO PRIORITY OTHER MIDDLE EAST POSTS, DUBLIN, PARIS, MOSCOW

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*ms*TELECON WITH RESIDENT CLERK: PLO AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL

SUMMARY

1. ARAFAT ANGRY WITH AMERICANS. ACCUSING THE US ADMINISTRATION OF RENEGING ON A DEAL STRUCK BEFORE THE UNSC DEBATE AT GENEVA HE THREATENS TO REPLY PUBLICLY TO THEM AT THE ARAB SUMMIT (CONVENING TODAY, 27/5). HE DESCRIBES WITH RESIGNATION A POPULAR MOOD OF ANTI-ISRAELI AND ANTI-AMERICAN FEELING IN THE ARAB WORLD THAT HE CANNOT RESIST MUCH LONGER. I URGE HIM TO GIVE DIPLOMACY A CHANCE AND TO KEEP THE SUMMIT FOCUSSED ON PRACTICAL MEASURES, STRESSING THE POINT THAT AN ANTI-AMERICAN ARAB SUMMIT WOULD DELIGHT ISRAELI HARDLINERS.

DETAIL

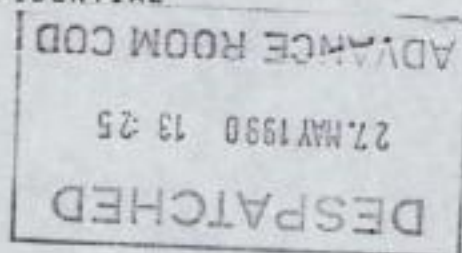
2. ARAFAT ASKED ME TO CALL AT SHORT NOTICE LATE IN THE EVENING OF 26/5. WE HAD 50 MINS TOGETHER, MOST WITH ONLY NOTE-TAKERS, BUT YASIR ABDERROBH JOINED TOWARDS THE END. ARAFAT WAS REFLECTIVE: THOUGH SPEAKING WITH DEEP EMOTION HE PICKED HIS WORDS CAREFULLY AND AVOIDED HISTORICALS.

3. HE BAGAN BY SAYING HE HAD AN URGENT MESSAGE FOR HMG. HE WAS SORRY TO INFORM US THAT THE AMERICANS WERE PLAYING A 'VERY DIRTY ROLE' OVER THE UNSC DEBATE. THEY HAD BETRAYED HIM PERSONALLY - NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME.

4. HE THEN GAVE HIS ACCOUNT OF RECENT US/PLO NEGOTIATIONS: AT SEVERAL POINTS HE STRESSED THAT THE INITIATIVE HAD COME FROM THE AMERICANS. THIS HAD PLEASED HIM, ESPECIALLY THE FACT THAT US AND PLO MISSIONS IN NEW YORK WERE FOR THE FIRST TIME WORKING SERIOUSLY TOGETHER. THEY HAD FIRST CONTACTED HIM IN TUNIS THROUGH BASSAM ABU SHARIF AND BELAWI TO SAY THAT THEY DID NOT WISH HIM TO APPLY FOR A US VISA BUT THEY WOULD NOT OPPOSE A MOVE TO GENEVA AND WOULD WORK FOR A CONSTRUCTIVE OUTCOME TO THE DEBATE. THERE HAD BEEN PROFESSIONS - APPARENTLY SINCERE - OF CONCERN ABOUT

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THE RECENT COURSE OF EVENTS IN ISRAEL AND OTS.

5. NEGOTIATIONS, HE CLAIMED, THEN BEGAN BETWEEN THE TWO PERMANENT MISSIONS. THE AMERICANS MADE A PROPOSAL - A MISSION TO INSPECT AND REPORT HEADED BY THE FINNISH PRESIDENTS OF THE COUNCIL AND INCLUDING OTHER UNSC REPRESENTATIVES AND A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SG.. THEN THEY RETURNED TO SAY THIS WAS NOT SELLABLE TO THE ISRAELIS

THE CANADIANS WERE SUBSTITUTED FOR THE FINNS: ARAFAT ACCEPTED. THEN, IN THE COURSE OF THE DAY, THE AMERICANS HAD BACKED OFF ALTOGETHER: THE ISRAELIS WOULD NOT ACCEPT A MISSION, SO THE AMERICANS WOULD 'BETRAY' THE PALESTINIANS. HAD THEY NO SELF-RESPECT? HE WOULD NOT BE TREATED IN THIS WAY.

6. ARAFAT THEN SPOKE AT SOME LENGTH ABOUT THE SITUATION OF THE PALESTINIANS UNDER ISRAELI CONTROL AND THE MOOD IN THE ARAB WORLD. HE CLAIMED THAT IN THE PAST SIX DAYS 29 PALESTINIANS HAD BEEN KILLED AND OVER 2000 WOUNDED. THIS PUT THE MASSACRES OF PEKING AND BUCHAREST INTO PERSPECTIVE. WAS THE WEST, AND CONSEQUENTLY THE SECURITY COUNCIL, CONTENT TO DO NOTHING?

7. I TRIED, WITH LITTLE SUCCESS, TO LEAD HIM ON SPECIFICS. THOUGH I WAS NOT UP TO DATE ON EVENTS IN GENEVA I HAD UNDERSTOOD THAT NEGOTIATIONS HAD MOVED BACK TO NEW YORK AND THE DEBATE SET TO RESUME ON TUESDAY. HMG AND ITS EUROPEAN PARTNERS WERE COMMITTED TO WORKING FOR A PRACTICAL OUTCOME AND WERE USING SUCH INFLUENCE AS THEY HAD IN WASHINGTON. I SAID THAT WE EUROPEANS IN TUNIS HAD JUST BEEN BRIEFED ON HIS, ARAFAT'S, LUNCH A FEW HOURS EARLIER WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL OF FOREIGN MINISTERS: THE MOOD THERE HAD SEEMED RATHER GOOD. JUST WHAT HAD CHANGED THE SITUATION SO DRAMATICALLY? ARAFAT EXPLAINED THAT HE HAD BEEN RECEIVING A SERIES OF MESSAGES ADDRESSED TO HIM PERSONALLY BY THE AMERICANS: AT GENEVA, FOR EXAMPLE, HE HAD BEEN CONTACTED FOUR TIMES BY THE EGYPTIANS ON THEIR BEHALF, EACH TIME ASSURING HIM THAT THERE WOULD BE A GOOD OUTCOME OF THE DEBATE. BUT HE HAD JUST LEARNED THAT HE HAD BEEN TRICKED. HE WOULD NOT SAY WHAT MESSAGE HAD JUST COME THROUGH, NOR HOW. I ADVISED HIM NOT TO REACT HURRIEDLY: WE, THE BRITISH, WERE CONSCIOUS OF THE VOLATILE MOOD IN THE ARAB WORLD: FEELINGS WERE RUNNING HIGH: IT WAS ALL THE MORE IMPORTANT THAT DIPLOMACY SHOULD BE USED: HE SHOULD NOT PUT AT RISK THE SUBSTANTIAL GAINS OF THE PAST TWO YEARS.

8. ARAFAT TOOK THIS WELL BUT WENT ON TO EXPLAIN CALMLY AND FRANKLY THE DIFFICULTY OF HIS SITUATION. HE WAS THE LEADER

OF HIS PEOPLE, INDEED ARGUABLY THE NEAREST THE ARAB WORLD HAD TO A POPULAR FIGUREHEAD. HE WOULD NEVER BETRAY HIS PEOPLE AND HE WOULD NOT MISLEAD THEM. HE HAD GONE A VERY LONG WAY DOWN THE AMERICAN ROAD BUT HE COULD SEE A POINT QUITE SOON BEYOND WHICH NO ARAB WOULD FOLLOW HIM. HE WAS UNDER INTENSE PRESSURE FROM THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF THE INTIFADHA TO PERMIT A HIGHER LEVEL OF VIOLENCE: HE WAS USING ALL HIS INFLUENCE TO STOP THEM. WERE WE FOLLOWING EVENTS IN THE ARAB WORLD: DID WE NOT KNOW HOW DANGEROUS THE PUBLIC MOOD WAS? I SAID WE DID AND REFERRED HIM TO YOUR RECENT SPEECH TO THE ANGO- SAUDI SOCIETY AND THE EUROPEAN STATEMENT ON A RECENT PALESTINIAN CASUALTIES: IT WAS BECAUSE OF OUR CONCERN THAT WE HAD ADVISED ARAB GOVERNMENTS TO WORK FOR A CONSTRUCTIVE SUMMIT AND NOT TO RETURN TO THE TIRED RHETORIC OF BLAMING EVERYTHING ON THE AMERICANS. THE PLO HAD GONE A LONG WAY IN OPENING UP DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND TEL AVIV: OF COURSE WE ALL WISHED FOR EARLIER PROGRESS BUT THE GAINS OF THE PAST TWO YEARS SHOULD NOT BE SACRIFICED FOR SHORT-TERM POPULARITY. AN ANTI-WESTERN ARAB SUMMIT WOULD BE A RETREAT TO THE BAD OLD DAYS. ARAFAT QUICKLY INTERJECTED THAT IT WOULD NOT BE ANTI-WESTERN - THE ARABS HAD NO PROBLEMS WITH EUROPE: THE ISSUE WAS AMERICA.

9. SEE MY MIFT .

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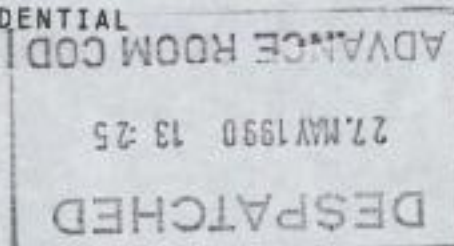
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9. HE HAD TO SHOW THE ARAB WORLD HE WAS NOT IN WASHINGTON'S POCKET. THE SUMMIT WAS HIS SUMMIT: HE HAD REQUESTED IT AND IT WAS BEING HELD ON HIS TERMS. THE SITUATION FACING HIM TODAY WAS ENTIRELY UNEXPECTED. HE HAD TO REPLY TO THE AMERICANS: THEY HAVE LOST THEIR OWN SELF-RESPECT, BUT THEY MUST RESPECT HIM. HE WOULD USE THE PLATFORM OF THE SUMMIT TO TEACH THEM WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THE ARAB WORLD AND MAKE THEM TAKE THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE SERIOUSLY. DID THEY WANT A FIRE TO CONSUME THEIR ARABS ALLIES - THE CINDERS WERE NOW BEING FANNED AND IF THEY DID NOT CHANGE COURSE, THEY WOULD SOON FIND A SITUATION BEYOND ANYONE'S CONTROL.

10. ARAFAT WENT ON TO STRESS THAT HE WAS NOT MAKING THREATS. BUT HE HAD TO REFLECT POPULAR FEELINGS. RECENT EVENTS IN JORDAN, EG EGYPT, ALGERIA - 'EVEN SAUDI ARABIA' (HE CITED A RECENT CONGRONTATION BETWEEN THE PEOPLE OF KASEEM AND THE KING) - WERE WARNINGS. HE BROUGH YASIR ABDERROBH INTO THE CONVERSATION - HE HAD DESPATCHED HIM FROM BAGHDAD TO AMMAN TO BRING THE SITUATION IN THE CAMPS UNDER CONTROL: IT HAD BEEN A DIFFICULT AND DANGEROUS PROCESS: FOR TWO OR THREE DAYS THE YOUNG PEOPLE WERE IGNORING ORDERS OF THE JORDANIAN AND PALESTINIAN LEADERS. IT WAS NOT SIMPLY A SITUATION STIRRED UP BY ISLAMISTS: THEY WERE EXPLOITING DEEP POPULAR FEELINGS. THE NEXT TIME ROUND, PLO LEADERS WOULD BE BRUSHED ASIDE. ABDERROBH COMMENTED THAT HIS SPELL IN AMMAN HAD BEEN ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT OF ANY TASK HE HAD UNDERTAKEN. ARAFAT ADDED THAT EGYPT WAS ALSO A GREAT CONCERN: SEVERAL NASTY INCIDENTS HAD TAKEN PLACE: MUBARAK HAD ASKED HIM TO CALL IN AT CAIRO ON HIS WAY TO BAGHDAD, BUT HE COULD NOT HELP HIM. (THE IMPLICATION OF THIS REMARK I TOOK TO BE - SAUVE

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QUI PEUT: HE COULD DO NOTHING FOR MUBARAK AND MUBARAK COULD NOT HELP HIM EITHER.)

11. I LED HIM BACK TO THE BASIC ISSUES, STRESSING THAT HE SHOULD NOT REACT IN A PRICIPITATE MANNER TO UNSC ACTIVITY: THE THREADS WOULD BE PICKED UP IN NEW YORK AND HE WOULD BE WELL ADVISED TO CONCENTRATE ON PRIVATE DIPLOMACY. AS FOR THE SUMMIT, HE KNEW OUR VIEWS: THE MORE PRECISELY IT WAS TARGETTED THE MORE IT WOULD HAVE AN EFFECT: THE ISSUE WAS SOVIET JEWISH EMIGRATION AND THE SITUATION IN THE TERRITORIES: ANTI-AMERICAN RHETORIC WOULD PLEASE ONLY THE ISRAELIS AND NEWSPAPER EDITORS. I REMINDED HIM OF HIS REMARKS ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND HIS (REGULAR) CRITICISMS OF HIS FELLOW ARAB LEADERS: NOW WAS THE TIME TO SHOW REAL LEADERSHIP, FORMING, NOT FOLLOWING, PUBLIC OPINION.

COMMENT

12. I HAVE REPORTED THIS CONVERSATION AT SOME LENGTH, TO GIVE THE FLAVOUR AND BECAUSE I FOUND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO SUMMARISE WITH CONFIDENCE WHAT ARAFAT'S REAL INTENTIONS WERE.

13. HE HAD SPENT TWO HOURS EARLIER IN THE DAY WITH MR COLLINS, SPEAKING FAIRLY POSITIVELY ABOUT THE AMERICANS, CERTAINLY PREDICTING ''CATASTROPHE'' IN THE REGION (HE USUALLY DOES) BUT GIVING AN IMPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE AND SUCCESSFUL PLO DIPLOMACY (THE SUMMIT AND THE UNSC DEBATE).

14. I AM SURE HIS WORST FEAR IS THAT THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE WILL BE FORGOTTEN. THE FACT THAT HE IS FOR THE TIME BEING CENTRE STAGE AND MAKING THE NEWS IS SATISFYING - HE LOOKS IN GOOD FORM. AT THE SAME TIME HE IS A VERY EMOTIONAL MAN AND I AM SURE HIS FEELINGS FOR ORDINARY PALESTINIANS IN GAZA ETC ARE GENUINE.

15. HE IS CAUGHT IN A TRAP. UNLESS CASUALTIES RISE AND THE MOOD IN THE ARAB WORLD DETERIORATES, HE FEARS THE WEST WILL QUIETLY ABANDON HIS CAUSE, AT THE SAME TIME HE KNOWS THAT THE PRICE IN HUMAN TERMS GETS HIGHER EACH TIME ROUND. AND I BELIEVE HE IS ENTIRELY GENUINE IN FORESEEING A SITUATION THAT HE CAN NO LONGER CONTROL. HE DESPAIRS OF COMMUNICATING HIS FEARS TO WASHINGTON AND THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THIS MEETING WAS TO ASK HMG TO COMMUNICATE FOR HIM. HE IS CLEARLY CONFUSED AND WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK THINGS OVER.

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