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TELEGRAM NUMBER 480 OF 25 AUG

REPEATED FOR INFO TO ROUTINE BEIRUT DAMASCUS AMMAN CAIRO JEDDA

TEL AVIV WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK, PARIS, ROME, BONN

LEBANON

1. THE TERMS OF PALESTINIAN WITHDRAWAL FROM BEIRUT, AND IN PARTICULAR THE PARTICIPATION OF US TROOPS, HAVE PRODUCED A RATHER MUTED SOVIET REACTION. THERE HAS BEEN NO HARKING BACK TO BREZHNEV'S WARNING TO REAGAN (MY TELNO 392 OF 8 JULY) THAT IF US TROOPS WERE INTRODUCED THE SOVIET UNION WOULD "BUILD ITS POLICY WITH DUE CONSIDERATION OF THIS FACT". THE FIRST SOVIET COMMENT, IN PRAVDA TODAY, MERELY SPOKE IN STANDARD TERMS OF THE US EXPLOITING ISRAELI AGGRESSION TO EXPAND ITS MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE REGION.

2. THE SOVIET PRESS HAS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT, "BY-PASSING THE UN", THE DISENGAGEMENT FORCE HAS BEEN CREATED AT THE REQUEST OF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, WITH PLO AND ISRAELI AGREEMENT. IT HAS NOT SOUGHT TO ALLEGE THAT THIS WAS THE RESULT OF US/ISRAELI PRESSURE AND COVERAGE OF FRENCH PARTICIPATION HAS BEEN ALMOST SYMPATHETIC. INSTEAD THE PRESS HAS SOUGHT TO DISTRACT ATTENTION BY CONCENTRATING ON:

- A) THE PLO'S MORAL, POLITICAL AND EVEN MILITARY VICTORY:
- B) THE THREAT OF A LEBANESE SECOND CAMP DAVID RESULTING FROM ISRAELI PRESSURE AND US CONNIVANCE:
- C) THE VERY DANGEROUS SITUATION ARISING FROM ISRAEL'S CONTINUING PRESENCE IN LEBANON AND GROWING PRESSURE ON SYRIAN FORCES IN THE BEKAA VALLEY:
- D) THE NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT, REACHED THROUGH AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE (CALLED FOR MOST RECENTLY IN BREZHNEV'S MEETING WITH MONGOLIAN PRIME MINISTER TSEDENBAL ON 20 AUGUST).

THESE POINTS ABOVE REFLECT THE CHIEF SOVIET CONCERNS. IN THE SHORT TERM THE RUSSIANS WILL BE PARTICULARLY WORRIED AT THE RISK OF AN ESCALATING CONFRONTATION BETWEEN ISRAEL AND SYRIA, REQUIRING A CONVINCING DEMONSTRATION OF SOVIET SUPPORT FOR SYRIA. THOUGH PROCLAIMING TO THE LAST SYRIA'S RIGHT TO BE IN LEBANON, THE RUSSIANS WOULD PROBABLY BE RELIEVED TO SEE MUTUAL SYRIAN/ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. THE RUSSIANS WILL ALSO BE ANXIOUS ABOUT US AND ISRAELI MANIPULATION OF LEBANESE POLITICS FOLLOWING GEMAYEL'S ELECTION, THOUGH THEY ARE NOT IN PRINCIPLE OPPOSED TO A STRONG CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN LEBANON.

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3. FOR THE LONGER TERM THE SOVIET UNION WILL BE CONCERNED THAT THE PLO SHOULD SURVIVE AS AN EFFECTIVE POLITICAL FORCE (THOUGH NOT NECESSARILY WITHOUT ALTERATIONS: THE LEADER OF THE DEMOCRATIC FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE, HAWATMEH, WHO HAS RECEIVED NOTICEABLY MORE SOVIET PRESS SPACE THAN OTHER PLO FIGURES, IS QUOTED BY TASS (21 AUGUST) AS SAYING THAT THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLES' STRUGGLE WILL ASSUME NEW POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL FORMS). THE RUSSIANS CONTINUE TO SEE THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM AS THEIR BEST MEANS OF INFLUENCING MIDDLE EAST AFFAIRS, BY MAKING NECESSARY A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT REQUIRING SOVIET INVOLVEMENT. THE CHIEF SOVIET DIPLOMATIC EFFORT WILL THEREFORE CONTINUE TO BE CONCENTRATED ON BUILDING SUPPORT, PARTICULARLY AMONG MODERATE ARAB STATES, FOR AN INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE EAST CONFERENCE.

KEEBLE

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