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TO PRIORITY CERTAIN MISSIONS AND DEPENDENT TERRITORIES
GUIDANCE TELEGRAM NUMBER 232 OF 9 DECEMBER

CANCELLATION OF ARAB LEAGUE DELEGATION VISIT

1. THE MOROCCAN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED ON 28 NOVEMBER THAT THE DATES FOR THE ARAB LEAGUE DELEGATION'S VISIT TO LONDON (FIXED FOR 1-2 DECEMBER) HAD BEEN CANCELLED (ANNULEES). PUBLIC STATEMENTS IN THE ARAB WORLD HAVE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE ARABS ARE OFFENDED BY THE BRITISH REFUSAL TO HOLD HIGH LEVEL TALKS WITH A DELEGATION INCLUDING A PLO REPRESENTATIVE EXCEPT ON CONDITIONS WHICH ARE UNACCEPTABLE TO THE ARABS.
2. THIS GUIDANCE IS PRIMARILY FOR YOUR BACKGROUND INFORMATION, BUT PARAS 4-6 MAY BE DRAWN ON IN DISCUSSION WITH CONTACTS. YOU SHOULD NOT VOLUNTEER THE DETAILS GIVEN IN PARA 3.

BUILD-UP TO THE VISIT

3. WE WERE IN CONTACT WITH THE MOROCCANS (KING HASSAN IS CHAIRMAN OF THE SEVEN-MEMBER COMMITTEE CHARGED BY THE FEZ SUMMIT WITH VISITING THE FIVE PERMANENT MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL) FROM MID-OCTOBER ONWARDS ABOUT ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE DELEGATION'S VISIT TO LONDON. THE MOROCCANS CHANGED THE DATES FIVE TIMES BEFORE 1-2 DECEMBER WAS FIXED. THEY RAISED AT AN EARLY STAGE, AND IN A TENTATIVE MANNER, THE QUESTION OF PLO PARTICIPATION AND WERE AT ONCE GIVEN A CLEAR STEER THAT IT WOULD RAISE VERY SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES. ON 25 OCTOBER WE WERE GIVEN A PRIVATE ASSURANCE BY THE MOROCCAN AMBASSADOR THAT THE PLO ISSUE WAS 'CLOSED' AND THAT THE DELEGATION WOULD COMPRISE KING HASSAN, THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF MOROCCO, ALGERIA, TUNISIA, SAUDI ARABIA, SYRIA AND JORDAN AND THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ARAB LEAGUE. ON 9 NOVEMBER A MINISTERIAL EMISSARY FROM KING HASSAN MADE NO MENTION OF THE PLO. ON 22 NOVEMBER, HOWEVER, A

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FURTHER EMISSARY PUT A FORMAL REQUEST FOR US TO RECEIVE A PLO DELEGATE WITH THE OTHERS. THIS CAME AS AN UNWELCOME SURPRISE, AND WAS FOLLOWED BY STRONG REPRESENTATIONS FROM OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS. IN AN ATTEMPT TO AVOID AN OUTRIGHT REJECTION WE PUT FORWARD A COMPROMISE WHICH WAS INTENDED TO PROVIDE A BASIS CONSISTENT WITH OUR OWN POLICY FOR THE VISIT TO GO AHEAD. UNDER THE PRESSURE OF TIME AND SWELLING INDIGNATION ON THE ARAB SIDE, THE PROPOSAL FAILED. WE HAVE NOT MADE PUBLIC THE DETAILS OF OUR PROPOSAL. BUT FOR YOUR OWN INFORMATION WE INVITED THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE DELEGATION TO AGREE THAT WE WOULD PUBLISH A STATEMENT IN ADVANCE OF THE VISIT MAKING CLEAR AMONGST OTHER THINGS ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST AND THAT ALL CONCERNED REJECTED TERRORISM. THE STATEMENT WOULD HAVE INDICATED THAT ALL THOSE INVOLVED AGREED WITH ITS TERMS.

THE UK VIEWPOINT

4. THE ARABS HAVE REPRESENTED THE EPISODE AS A BRITISH REFUSAL TO RECEIVE A TOP LEVEL ARAB DELEGATION EAGER TO DISCUSS PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. KING HASSAN HAS IN ADDITION TAKEN OFFENCE AT ALLEGED SLIGHTS OF A PROCEDURAL AND PROTOCOL NATURE. OUR POSITION IS THAT

(A) THE DELEGATION WOULD HAVE BEEN WARMLY WELCOMED IF COMPOSED AS THE MOROCCANS HAD INDICATED. WE HAD PUT OURSELVES OUT TO ARRANGE TOP LEVEL DISCUSSIONS ON EACH OF THE DATES PUT FORWARD BY THE ARAB LEAGUE.

(B) OUR LONGSTANDING POLICY ON CONTACTS WITH THE PLO WAS WELL-KNOWN TO THE ARAB SIDE BEFORE THE VISIT. MINISTERS HAVE FREQUENTLY SAID THAT THEY WILL ONLY SEE PLO REPRESENTATIVES PROVIDED THIS ADVANCES THE CAUSE OF PEACE: AND HAVE MADE CLEAR THAT A PLO STATEMENT ACCEPTING ISRAEL'S RIGHTS AND RENOUNCING TERRORISM WAS WHAT WE REQUIRED. THERE WAS NO PROSPECT OF A CHANGE IN OUR POLICY AT SHORT NOTICE.

(C) THAT POLICY REFLECTS OUR CONVICTION THAT NO

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REALISTIC PROGRESS TOWARDS PEACE IS POSSIBLE UNLESS THE PLO CAN ESTABLISH THEMSELVES UNIVERSALLY AS ACCEPTABLE NEGOTIATORS. THERE IS NO POINT IN ENCOURAGING THE ILLUSION THAT THE PLO CAN ACHIEVE A BETTER FUTURE FOR THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE WITHOUT TAKING THE STEP WE HAVE URGED ON THEM. THE UK WOULD NOT BE A FRIEND TO THE ARABS IF SHE DID SO. OUR AIM WAS TO HELP THE PLO TAKE A SIGNIFICANT STEP FORWARD, WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN OF PRACTICAL BENEFIT TO THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE.

(D) CONTRARY TO WHAT SOME OF THE ARABS HAVE CLAIMED, WE WERE NOT ASKING THE PARTICIPANTS TO MAKE A JOINT DECLARATION ON ANY POINT, NOR TO RENOUNCE TERRORISM (ONLY TO ALLOW US TO CONFIRM THEIR REJECTION OF TERRORISM). WE WANTED ARAB SUPPORT FOR A BRITISH STATEMENT WHICH WOULD SERVE TO COUNTER AN ARGUMENT FREQUENTLY USED BY ISRAELIS AND OTHERS TO DISCREDIT THE PLO

(E) WE ARE KEEN THAT A WAY SHOULD BE FOUND TO REINSTATE THE DELEGATION'S VISIT THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH THE PRINCIPLES AND POLICIES OF BOTH SIDES.

REMEDIAL ACTION

5. WE ARE NOW CONSIDERING HOW BEST TO RE-START DISCUSSIONS WITH THE ARAB SIDE ON SOLVING THE PROBLEM. A PERSONAL EMISSARY FROM THE PRIME MINISTER (LORD CHALFONT) IS TRAVELLING TO MOROCCO ON 8 DECEMBER ACCOMPANIED BY EGERTON. OTHER CONTACTS ARE LIKELY TO FOLLOW. WE ARE FULLY AWARE THAT A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF STEAM HAS BUILT UP ABOUT THE CANCELLATION, PARTICULARLY IN THE ARAB PRESS, AND THAT UNSPECIFIC THREATS HAVE BEEN MADE ABOUT THE EFFECT ON ANGLO-ARAB TRADE. IF QUESTIONED ON JOHN DICKIE'S PIECE IN THE DAILY MAIL OF 6 DECEMBER, CLAIMING THAT LORD CARRINGTON HAD BEEN TOLD DURING A (BUSINESS) VISIT TO SAUDI ARABIA THAT THE DAMAGE COULD AMOUNT TO POUNDS STERLING 1000 M IN ORDERS, NEWS DEPARTMENT ARE SAYING THAT WE HAVE

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RECEIVED NO SPECIFIC THREATS.

6. WE ARE NOT INCLINED TO TAKE TOO DEFENSIVE A LINE. OUR POLICY WAS CLEAR: WE HAD SENSIBLE AND COURTEOUS EXCHANGES WITH THE MOROCCANS: THE DELEGATION WAS WELCOME ON THE BASIS AGREED: THE PROPOSED CHANGE WAS MADE TOO LATE. WE RECOGNISE, HOWEVER, THAT OFFENCE HAS BEEN TAKEN AND THAT STEPS ARE NECESSARY TO RESTORE RELATIONS TO THEIR PREVIOUS SATISFACTORY STATE. WE WOULD HOPE THAT THE ARAB SIDE ALSO WILL SEE THE POINTLESSNESS OF A CONTINUING ROW AND WILL RESPOND TO OUR WILLINGNESS TO SET MATTERS STRAIGHT.

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