

Lebanon

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A curious episode.

LEBANON

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1. DE GROSSOUVRE, PRESIDENT MITTERRAND'S COUNSELLOR FOR SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE QUESTIONS, ASKED ME TO CALL TODAY. HE SAID HE WANTED TO LET ME KNOW VERY INFORMALLY ABOUT A REMARK MADE BY AMIN GEMAYEL WHOM HE HAD SEEN IN BEIRUT LAST WEEK. GEMAYEL HAD EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT WHAT HE INTERPRETED AS AN UNFAVOURABLE DRIFT IN BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS THE LEBANON. HE HAD PREVIOUSLY UNDERSTOOD THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WAS DOING ITS BEST TO WORK FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN FORCES AND THE RESTORATION OF THE UNITY OF THE LEBANON, IN PARTICULAR BY EXERCISING PRESSURE IN WASHINGTON. BUT IT NOW SEEMED TO HIM THAT BRITISH EFFORTS HAD STOPPED AND THAT BRITAIN WAS GOING ALONG WITH THOSE WHO WANTED THE LONG TERM DIVISION OF THE COUNTRY.

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2. GROSSOUVRE ADDED BY WAY OF BACKGROUND THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD AUTHORISED HIM TO MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH VARIOUS HEADS OF GOVERNMENT WHOM HE HAD PREVIOUSLY KNOWN AND TO ACT AS AN UNOFFICIAL PRESIDENTIAL EMISSARY TO THEM. HE SAID HE WAS IN ALMOST DAILY CONTACT WITH GEMAYEL BY TELEPHONE. HE EMPHASISED THAT HE WAS NOT MAKING AN OFFICIAL COMMUNICATION TO ME; HE SIMPLY THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE HELPFUL TO LET US KNOW WHAT HAD BEEN SAID.

3. I THANKED HIM FOR PASSING THIS ON AND SAID THAT WE WERE INDEED CONCERNED THAT BRITISH POLICY SHOULD BE PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD. I SAID I WAS NOT AWARE OF ANY CHANGE IN THAT POLICY; WE HAD CONSISTENTLY FAVOURED THE INDEPENDENCE AND UNOTY OF THE LEBANON. I WAS NOT SURE THAT IT WAS RIGHT TO TALK OF EXERCISING PRESSURE ON THE US GOVERNMENT, BUT WE WERE IN REGULAR CONTACT WITH THE AMERICANS AND IT WAS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT THEY TOO WERE WORKING TO SECURE THE WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN FORCES AND HAD RECENTLY BEEN PUTTING PRESSURE ON ISRAEL FOR THAT PURPOSE. I THOUGHT THEREFORE THAT BRITISH, AMERICAN AND FRENCH EFFORTS WERE ALL DIRECTED TO THE SAME END. GROSSOUVRE SAID HE WAS VERY GLAD TO HEAR THIS AND THAT WHEN HE NEXT SPOKE TO GEMAYEL HE WOULD ALLUDE TO HIS CONVERSATION WITH ME AND SAY THERE HAD BEEN NO CHANGE IN BRITISH POLICY.

4. GROSSOUVRE CLAIMED CREDIT FOR HAVING IN THE COURSE OF HIS VISIT TO BEIRUT ALERTED THE FRENCH COMMANDER TO THE FACT THAT THE BRITISH CONTINGENT IN THE MULTI-NATIONAL FORCE WAS BEING PLACED IN AN ISOLATED AND EXPOSED POSITION. HE BELIEVED THAT ACTION WAS NOW BEING TAKEN TO REMEDY THIS.

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5. GROSSOUVRE IS A PECULIAR OPERATOR WHO AROUSES MUCH DISTRUST IN THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT MACHINE. THIS AND THE ODDNESS OF HIS TALE MAKE IT HARD TO AVOID THE SUSPICION THAT HE HAS SOME ULTERIOR MOTIVE, PERHAPS TO SHOW GEMAYEL THAT THE FRENCH HAVE INFLUENCE OVER THE BRITISH. IT CANNOT HOWEVER BE RULED OUT THAT ON THIS OCCASION GROSSOUVRE WAS GENUINELY TRYING TO BE HELPFUL.

FRETWELL

MIDDLE EAST

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