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FROM TEL AVIV 051315Z JUL 83

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELNO 186 OF 5 JULY 1983

INFO BEIRUT, DAMASCUS, AMMAN, CAIRO, JEDDA, WASHINGTON, UKMIS  
NEW YORK, MODUK.

INFO SAVING JERUSALEM, PARIS AND ROME.

*Head in hell.*

MY TELNO 177: ISRAEL/LEBANON

1. HOW BADLY ARE THE ISRAELIS STUCK IN LEBANON?

2. OF COURSE THEIR POSITION LOOKS THOROUGHLY UNCOMFORTABLE. THE GAINS FROM THEIR INVASION OF LEBANON A YEAR AGO REMAIN TANTALISINGLY OUT OF REACH. THE CASUALTY FIGURES DEEPLY TROUBLE EVERYONE FROM RESERVISTS TO MR BEGIN HIMSELF. IF THERE WAS A CONSENSUS TO CLEAR THE PLO OUT OF SOUTHERN LEBANON IN THE FIRST PLACE, NOW THERE IS A CONSENSUS TO BRING THE BOYS HOME - IF ONLY SECURITY FOR NORTHERN ISRAEL COULD BE ASSURED. THE ISRAEL/LEBANON AGREEMENT SEEMED THE WAY TO SQUARE THAT CIRCLE, ONLY TO BE BLOCKED BY DAMASCUS.

3. HENCE THE GOVERNMENT'S DETERMINATION TO RE-DRAW ISRAELI FORWARD POSITIONS AS A STOPGAP. DEFENCE MINISTER ARENS TOLD ME YESTERDAY THAT ISRAEL IS NOT PREPARED INDEFINITELY TO DO PRESIDENT GEMAYEL'S WORK FOR HIM, MEANING THAT THE ISRAELIS FEEL THEY ARE STAYING IN THE THANKLESS SURROUNDINGS OF THE SHOUF AREA BECAUSE THE LEBANESE (AND AMERICANS) ARE UNWILLING TO EXERT THEMSELVES.

4. WOULD ISRAEL SAVE ON CASUALTIES AND ON THE COSTS OF OCCUPATION BY PULLING BACK SOME MILES? ARENS WAS CONFIDENT THAT THIS WOULD BE SO. HE RECOGNISED THE NEED OF COURSE FOR SOME EFFECTIVE FILL-IN AS THE IDF WITHDRAWS TO AVOID THE SYRIANS AND THEIR ALLIES MOVING IN BEHIND. WOULD IT SOLVE ANYTHING IN THE LONG RUN? THE ANSWER TO THIS IS ONE STEP AT A TIME. IDF REDEPLOYMENT IS BEING PRESENTED HERE AS A PHASED PULL-BACK (MOST LIKELY NEW LINES: DAMOUR OR AWALI). IN MY VIEW THIS IS DESIGNED TO LEAVE LONGER-TERM OPTIONS OPEN. THE LEBANESE ARMY MAY GAIN IN STRENGTH AND EFFECTIVENESS, ALTHOUGH THE ISRAELIS ARE LESS OPTIMISTIC THAN THE AMERICANS ABOUT THAT PROCESS. ASSAD, FOR WHOM THE ISRAELIS HAVE CONSIDERABLE RESPECT AS A POLITICAL OPERATOR, MAY EVENTUALLY NEGOTIATE. ONLY TIME WILL SHOW THE ISRAELIS. MEANWHILE THEY ARE WILLING TO WAIT AND NOT BURN THEIR BOATS OVER TOTAL WITHDRAWAL.

5. PLENTY OF ISRAELIS CRITICISE THE GOVERNMENT. A FEW ADVOCATE UNCONDITIONAL WITHDRAWAL. BUT I BELIEVE MOST STILL PREFER TO HANG ON UNTIL A DEAL IS TO BE HAD. THE GOVERNMENT CAN PROBABLY SURVIVE THE DOMESTIC PRESSURES OVER LEBANON ON ITS PRESENT COURSE. ITS UNPOPULARITY OWES MORE TO ITS ECONOMIC POLICIES.

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6. THE RISE IN ISRAEL'S STOCK ABROAD, PARTICULARLY IN THE UNITED STATES, AFTER SIGNING THE LEBANON AGREEMENT WAS WELCOMED WITH RELIEF HERE. I SUSPECT IT MAY REPRESENT A PLATEAU. A DRIFT INTO APPARENTLY INDEFINITE OCCUPATION OF SOUTHERN LEBANON COULD WELL FRAY TEMPERS AGAIN IN WASHINGTON, NOT TO MENTION THE COMMUNITY CAPITALS.

7. NOT ALL IS GLOOM FROM ISRAEL'S POINT OF VIEW:-

(A) ARAFAT. THE ISRAELIS CAN SCARCELY CONCEAL THEIR GLEE AT HIS DISCOMFORTURE. THIS MAY SEEM SHORTSIGHTED. BUT AS ARENS PUT IT TO ME, ISRAEL'S WORST FEAR IS A COALITION OF ARAB ENEMIES AND ANYTHING WHICH UNDERMINES THAT PROSPECT IS GOOD FOR ISRAEL. ARENS ADDED THAT IT ALSO SUITS ISRAEL FOR THE PLO TO BE BROUGHT UNDER THE CONTROL OF A SOVEREIGN STATE SINCE ITS ACTIONS ARE PREDICTABLE AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEM CAN BE PINPOINTED. INDEED THE PRESS IS HAILING CUM-UPPANCE FOR THE PLO AS AN INDIRECT RESULT OF ISRAEL'S ACTIONS IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE WAR SEMICOLON

(B) WEST BANK. THE SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME CONTINUES APACE WHILE THEIR EYES OF THE WORLD REMAIN ON LEBANON. THIS MAY NOT HAVE BEEN A DETERMINING FACTOR FOR ISRAELI POLICY IN LEBANON, BUT IT CERTAINLY SUITS MR BEGIN. PEACE IN LEBANON WOULD SHIFT THE SPOTLIGHT AGAIN TO THE WEST BANK. IF THE ISRAELIS ARE BREWING UP SOME NEW INITIATIVE TO NEGOTIATE ARAB AUTONOMY IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, TAKING ADVANTAGE PERHAPS OF CURRENT PLO WEAKNESS, THEY ARE KEEPING QUIET ABOUT IT SEMICOLON

(C) SHARON. THE ARCHITECT OF THE LEBANESE CAMPAIGN STAYS RELEGATED TO THE SIDELINES. ALTHOUGH STILL IN THE CABINET, FEW PEOPLE BELIEVE HE NOW EXERCISES REAL INFLUENCE AND FEWER STILL AMONG THOSE WHO COUNT WOULD WELCOME HIS RETURN. THIS WAS ONE CLEAR GAIN FROM THE REFUGEE MASSACRE INQUIRY. SHARON'S SUCCESSOR IS TOUGH BUT LEVEL-HEADED AND LESS LIABLE TO DRAG ISRAEL INTO WILD VENTURES.

8. THE LESSON OF LEBANON HAS BEEN HARD BUT I BELIEVE IT IS SINKING IN: THAT COMPLEX POLITICAL CHALLENGES CANNOT EASILY BE RESOLVED BY MILITARY MEANS. MY IMPRESSION IS THAT ISRAEL'S PRESENT LEADERS ARE MORE CALCULATING AND HAVE A FIRMER GRASP OF REALITY THAN THE STOCK PUNCH AND JUDY FIGURES THEY ARE SOMETIMES PORTRAYED AS. IT IS IRONIC THAT OPERATION 'PEACE FOR GALILEE', WHICH AT ITS OUTSET CARRIED OVERTONES OF MUCH WIDER ISRAELI OBJECTIVES, SHOULD NOW HAVE COME DOWN TO ITS ORIGINALLY DECLARED AIMS FOR LEADERS AND LED ALIKE. IF THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD ACTUALLY GET PEACE FOR GALILEE THEY WOULD LEAVE LEBANON TOMORROW.

9. FCO PASS SAVING PARIS AND ROME.

MORERLY

REPEATED AS REQUESTED

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