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FM ATHENS 121450Z SEP 83

TO FLASH FCO.,

TELNO 428 OF 12 SEPTEMBER 1983.,

REPEATED AS FLASH INFO TO UKMIS NEW YORK.,

REPEATED AS IMMEDIATE INFO TO WASHINGTON AND BEIRUT.,

REPEATED AS PRIORITY INFO TO PARIS AND ROME.

FROM PRIVATE SECRETARY

LEBANON/MNF.

1. THE SECRETARY OF STATE HAD A BRIEF MEETING TODAY WITH CHEYSSON AND ANDREOTTI IN THE MARGINS OF THE FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING OF THE TEN TO DISCUSS THE LATEST AMERICAN APPROACH (WASHINGTON TELNO 2553) ABOUT THE THREAT TO THE MNF.
2. THE SECRETARY OF STATE DREW ON THINKING IN LONDON REPORTED TO ME BY HOLMES. SUK AL GHARB WAS STILL HOLDING OUT AND APPARENTLY IN NO IMMEDIATE DANGER. IF IT WERE TO FALL, THE CONSEQUENCES MIGHT BE LESS SERIOUS THAN THE AMERICANS HAD SUGGESTED. IT WOULD NOT OPEN THE MAIN ROUTE TO BEIRUT. IT WAS IN ANY CASE ON THE EDGE OF THE DRUZE AREA. BUT IT WAS ONLY 5 KILOMETRES FROM HQ BRITFORLEB. WE WERE NOT DISPOSED TO CHANGE THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT AS SUGGESTED BY THE UNITED STATES. (INDEED, WE WERE LOOKING AT THEM AGAIN TO ENSURE THAT THEY WERE TIGHTLY DRAWN AND CONTAINED NO AMBIGUITIES). BUT THE POLITICAL ASSUMPTION WAS THAT THE MNF WAS THERE IN SUPPORT OF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT. WE SHOULD ALL GIVE SOME CONTINGENCY THOUGHT TO THE MNF'S SITUATION IF THE POSITION OF THAT GOVERNMENT WERE ITSELF TO CHANGE.
3. ANDREOTTI SAID THAT THE ITALIANS TOO WERE CLOSELY TIED TO THE PRESENT MANDATE. THE LAW ADOPTED BY THE ITALIAN PARLIAMENT TO PERMIT THE DESPATCH OF AN ITALIAN CONTINGENT TO THE MNF HAD SPECIFIED "THE AREA OF BEIRUT". HE WAS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE LARGE NUMBER OF LEBANESE OF VARIOUS FAITHS SAID TO BE ABANDONING THEIR TOWNS AND VILLAGES, THE CHANGES IN THE POPULATION MOSAIC WHICH THESE MOVEMENTS WERE CREATING, AND THE SITUATION OF THE MNF IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THIS.
4. CHEYSSON (WHO HAD BEEN TELEPHONED BY SHULTZ DURING THE NIGHT) SAID THAT FRANCE SHARED THE BRITISH CONCERN "WORD FOR WORD". THEY HAD BEGUN TO CONSIDER THE IMPLICATIONS, BUT IN TOTAL SECRECY. ONE OF THE REASONS WHY THEY THOUGHT THAT UN OBSERVERS IN THE SHOUF COULD BE USEFUL WAS THAT THIS "WOULD BE A GOOD PRECEDENT" IF FRANCE OR OTHER MNF CONTRIBUTORS SHOULD WANT TO PROPOSE A REDUCTION IN ITS MANDATE - "OR, TO SPEAK BLUNTLY, ITS WITHDRAWAL". THE FRENCH HAD APPROACHED A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF UN OBSERVERS IN THE SHOUF, INCLUDING THE SOVIET UNION WHICH

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HAD NOT BEEN COMPLETELY NEGATIVE. THEY HAD ALSO SPOKEN TO THE SYRIANS, WHO HAD IN EFFECT TOLD THEM NOT TO WORRY. CHEYSSON BELIEVED, ALTHOUGH HE COULD NOT BE SURE THAT, IF THE OTHER THREE CONTRIBUTORS DECLINED TO GO ALONG WITH THE AMERICAN PROPOSALS, THE AMERICANS WOULD NOT MAKE A SYSTEMATIC CHANGE IN POLICY, ALTHOUGH THEY MIGHT MOUNT INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS.

5. FCO PLEASE REPEAT FURTHER AS NECESSARY.

R H O D E S

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