



MIDDLE EAST: ADVANCE COPIES 16

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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 2598 OF 14 SEPTEMBER

AND TO IMMEDIATE MODUK (FOR PS/S OF SN DUS (POL), AUS D STAFF, DS).

INFO IMMEDIATE BEIRUT, PRIORITY DAMASCUS, ROME, PARIS, BRITFORLEB, JEDDA.

MY TELNO 2581: LEBANON/MNF

1. WHEN THE DEFENCE SECRETARY SAW HIM THIS AFTERNOON, SHULTZ SAID THAT THE SITUATION IN THE LEBANON WAS VERY TOUGH. THE IDEA OF GETTING INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNAL FIGHTING THERE HAD NO APPEAL. BUT THERE WAS NO DOUBT THAT SOME NON-LEBANESE ELEMENTS WERE ALSO INVOLVED - PALESTINIAN AND SOME IRANIANS - UNDER SYRIAN DIRECTION.

2. MR HESELTINE ASKED WHETHER THERE WAS ANY GLIMMER OF HOPE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. SHULTZ SAID THAT HE HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS WERE FOLLOWING EVENTS ON THE GROUND, RATHER THAN VICE VERSA.

THE SYRIANS WERE TRYING TO BRING THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT DOWN, OR UNDER THEIR CONTROL. EACH TIME AGREEMENT SEEMED CLOSE, THE SYRIANS HARDENED THEIR POSITION. THE KILLING IN LEBANON DID NOT SEEM TO MATTER TO ASAD. BUT IT DID TO OTHERS, AND WE HAD TO TRY TO STOP IT.

3. ON THE SAUDI ROLE, SHULTZ SAID THAT PRINCE BANDAR HAD BEEN VERY ACTIVE, ACTING DIRECTLY ON BEHALF OF KING FAHD. THEY HAD TALKED "SOME TURKEY" TO THE SYRIANS, NOT IN TERMS OF WITHOLDING EXISTING FINANCIAL SUPPORT, BUT OF DECLINING SYRIAN REQUESTS TO INCREASE IT. THERE HAD, HOWEVER, TO BE SOME RESISTANCE ON THE GROUND.

4. MR HESELTINE ASKED ABOUT THE PRECISE IMPORT OF THE NEW US RULES OF ENGAGEMENT. OUR OWN WERE RESTRICTED TO ACTION BY THE BRITISH CONTINGENT IN SELF-DEFENCE. SHULTZ SAID THAT THE AMERICANS HAD GONE SLIGHTLY FURTHER. THEY WOULD CONTINUE TO BASE THEMSELVES ON THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF DEFENCE. AS A RESULT OF THE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS AT THE WEEKEND, HOWEVER AS EAGLEBERGER HAD EXPLAINED TO ME, THE AMERICANS HAD DECIDED THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY'S DEFENCE OF SOUQ AL GHARB WAS VITAL TO THE SECURITY OF THE US CONTINGENT IN THE MNF. THE TERRAIN WAS SUCH THAT IF THAT POSITION WERE LOST TO HOSTILE FORCES, THEY WOULD BE SHOOTING DOWN DIRECTLY ON THE US MARINES AND THE AIRPORT. THE MARINE COMMANDER HAD THEREFORE BEEN GIVEN AUTHORITY TO CALL FOR ARTILLERY AND AIR SUPPORT TO HELP DEFEND THAT POSITION, IF THAT WERE NECESSARY. SO FAR IT HAD NOT BEEN NECESSARY AS THE LEBANESE ARMY HAD BEEN ABLE TO DEFEND IT. THE AMERICANS WOULD ALSO DEFEND THEIR COMMAND POST IN THE US RESIDENCE. ONE BRIGHT SPOT IN THE SITUATION WAS THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY HAD BEEN PERFORMING QUITE WELL, NOT ONLY MILITARILY BUT ALSO IN SHOWING SENSITIVITY IN DEALING WITH THE DIFFERENT CONFESSIONAL GROUPS. EVEN THE FRENCH HAD BEEN IMPRESSED.

5. MR HESELTINE ASKED IF SHULTZ FELT THERE WAS ANY ALTERNATIVE TO PROCEEDING ON A DAY BY DAY BASIS, HOPING THE SITUATION WOULD IMPROVE. SHULTZ SAID THAT IF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT COULD STABILISE THE SITUATION, THEY WOULD REGAIN CONFIDENCE AND THE SYRIANS WOULD REALISE THAT THEY WERE ENCOUNTERING SOME RESISTANCE. UNTIL THE LAST FEW DAYS THEY HAD ENCOUNTERED NONE. THE ISRAELIS HAD INSISTED ON WITHDRAWING FROM THE CHOUF KNOWING WHAT THE CONSEQUENCES WOULD BE. THEY WERE NOW FINDING THE PLO COMING STRAIGHT BACK. THIS

WOULD BE. THEY WERE NOW FINDING THE PLO COMING STRAIGHT BACK. THIS WAS SERIOUS FOR THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT, SINCE GETTING THE PLO OUT WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN THE PURPOSE OF THEIR INTERVENTION. THE IMPRESSION THAT THE ISRAELIS HAD LOST THEIR WILL HAD BEEN ONE OF THE FACTORS MAKING THE SYRIANS MORE INTRANSIGENT. BUT AS THE PLO MOVED BACK THE ISRAELIS WERE STARTING TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE INTEREST, WITH OVERFLIGHTS AND PATROLS NORTH OF THE AWALI RIVER YESTERDAY.

6. SHULTZ EMPHASISED THAT THIS WAS 'NOT A SITUATION TO GIVE UP ON'. THERE WAS EXCELLENT COORDINATION BETWEEN MNF CONTINGENTS ON THE GROUND. THERE MUST BE VERY CLOSE CONSULTATION BETWEEN THE CONTRIBUTORS AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL AND IN CAPITALS. I INTERJECTED THAT THE FLOW OF INFORMATION WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING HERE HAD BEEN EXCELLENT.

7. MR HESELTINE ASKED ABOUT PRESS COMMENT SUGGESTING THAT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD NEVER HAVE GOT INVOLVED. HOW MUCH PRESSURE WAS THERE TO GET OUT? SHULTZ SAID THAT SOME OF THE PRESS WERE SAYING THAT THE US SHOULD NEVER HAVE GONE IN; BUT NONE WERE NOW FOR TURNING TAIL AND RUNNING. THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT WAS STILL IN PLACE AND ASKING FOR SUPPORT; THE MNF CONTRIBUTORS SHOULD GO ON DEFENDING THEMSELVES, BUT NOT GETTING DRAWN INTO THE CONFESSIONAL FIGHTING. ADMIRAL HOWE (DIRECTOR FOR POLITICO-MILITARY AFFAIRS) SAID THAT, TESTIFYING YESTERDAY TO THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, HE HAD FOUND THAT GENERAL SUPPORT FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF THE US MARINE PRESENCE. THE ONLY ARGUMENT HAD BEEN ABOUT WHETHER THEY SHOULD BE BROUGHT UNDER THE WAR POWERS ACT.

8. MR HESELTINE SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT SEEMED PRETTY FIRMLY COMMITTED. SHULTZ SAID THAT HE WAS. THE US HAD A RESPONSIBILITY TO TRY TO HELP THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT TRY TO SAVE THEIR COUNTRY; AND A GOOD DEAL OF THEIR OWN PRESTIGE WAS NOW ON THE LINE. MR HESELTINE ASKED IF IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE US WOULD BE EXTREMELY RELUCTANT TO GET INVOLVED IN DIRECT SUPPORT FOR THE LEBANESE ARMY BEYOND THE DEFENCE OF SOUQ AL GHARB. SHULTZ SAID THAT THIS WAS ABSOLUTELY CORRECT. BUT WHAT HAPPENED IN THE LEBANON WAS GOING TO BE OF WIDER IMPORTANCE. IF THE OUTCOME WAS A PRO-WESTERN GOVERNMENT WITH INEVITABLY, A GREAT DEAL OF SYRIAN INFLUENCE OVER MUCH OF LEBANON - AND SOME MODUS VIVENDI WITH ISRAEL, THAT WOULD BE OF BENEFIT TO THE WESTERN POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST GENERALLY. IF, HOWEVER, THE SYRIANS SUCCEEDED IN FORCING OUT THE MULTI NATIONAL FORCE, DISLODGING THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, DENOUNCING THE AGREEMENT ON ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL AND GETTING THE PLO BACK IN FORCE, THIS WOULD HAVE A VERY BAD EFFECT ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST GENERALLY. HOW LONG THE

ISRAELIS WOULD REMAIN ALOOF FROM SUCH A SITUATION, HE DID NOT KNOW.

9. MR HESELTINE NOTED THAT ANY DIRECT SUPPORT FOR THE LEBANESE ARMY WOULD ENTAIL LENGTHY AND COSTLY OPERATIONS. SHULTZ DISMISSED THE IDEA OF ANY ATTEMPT TO ASSERT LEBANESE ARMY RULE WITH US SUPPORT. BUT IF THINGS WENT WRONG, THE DANGERS OF ESCALATION WERE REAL. THE ISRAELIS WOULD START TAKING A MUCH MORE DIRECT INTEREST AND, IF THEY LOST PLANES, WOULD BE LIKELY TO ATTACK THE SAM SITES, MR HESELTINE SAID THAT THESE ANXIETIES WERE FULLY SHARED BY HIS COLLEAGUES.

WRIGHT

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