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DESKBY 202000Z

FM FCO 201710Z SEP 83

TO IMMEDIATE CICC GERMANY

TELEGRAM NUMBER 201710Z OF 20 SEPTEMBER

FOLLOWING FOR COLES, PRIME MINISTER'S PARTY: LEBANON: SITUATION REPORT.

1. ON 19 SEPTEMBER THERE WAS HEAVY FIGHTING AROUND SOUK-EL-GHARB WHICH DRUZE MILITIA AND THEN OTHERS ENTERED. AT ONE POINT THE LEBANESE ARMY APPEARED LIKELY TO BE DRIVEN OUT OF THE TOWN. UNDER THE REVISED RULES OF ENGAGEMENT APPROVED BY PRESIDENT REAGAN, THE US INTERVENED TO SUPPORT THE LAF WITH NAVAL SHELLING OF TARGETS IN THE SOUK-EL-GHARB AREA. OUR LATEST INFORMATION IS THAT ALTHOUGH THERE HAS BEEN SOME FIGHTING TODAY, THE SITUATION IS MUCH QUIETER. THE AMERICANS HAVE NOT BEEN INVOLVED AND THE LEBANESE ARMY HAVE MAINTAINED THEIR POSITIONS IN SOUK-EL-GHARB. HOWEVER, OUR CHARGE IN BEIRUT IS NOT HOPEFUL THAT THE LAF WILL BE ABLE TO HOLD SOUK-EL-GHARB INDEFINITELY, AND ITS LOSS DESPITE AMERICAN INTERVENTION COULD HAVE GRAVE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, THE COHESION OF THE LAF AND FOR US INFLUENCE THERE, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE IT WOULD DEMONSTRATE THE LIMITATIONS OF US POWER.
2. EFFORTS, MAINLY BY THE SAUDIS, TO ARRANGE A CEASEFIRE CONTINUE BUT NEITHER WE, NOR APPARENTLY THE AMERICANS, ARE CLEAR WHETHER AGREEMENT IS IMMINENT, AS LEBANESE REPORTS YESTERDAY AND TODAY SUGGESTED. ALTHOUGH THE AREA OF DISAGREEMENT APPEARS TO HAVE NARROWED, THE MAIN STICKING POINT IS SYRIAN AND DRUZE INSISTENCE THAT THE LEBANESE ARMY IS NOT DEPLOYED IN THE SHOUF. PRINCE BANDAR HAS RETURNED TO DAMASCUS AND MCFARLANE TODAY FLEW TO LARNACA, PRESUMABLY TO CONVEY THE LATEST SYRIAN TEXT TO THE LEBANESE.
3. FOLLOWING THE DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE FOREIGN SECRETARY AND THE ITALIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ON 16 SEPTEMBER TALKS CONTINUED ON 19 SEPTEMBER BETWEEN BRITISH, FRENCH AND ITALIAN OFFICIALS ON A PROGRAMME OF DIPLOMATIC ACTION BY THE THREE EUROPEAN MNF

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CONTRIBUTORS. THIS INVOLVES PARALLEL APPROACHES TO THE AMERICANS AND THE LEBANESE TO STRESS THAT THERE IS NO ADVANTAGE IN THE INTERNATIONAL ISOLATION OF SYRIA, THAT THE PRESENCE OF THE MNF IS INTENDED AS A SUPPORT FOR THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT IN ITS EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE RECONCILIATION, AND THAT A CEASEFIRE AND THE START OF NEGOTIATIONS SHOULD BE FOLLOWED BY SOME VISIBLE DE-ESCALATION. THE PROGRAMME ALSO ENVISAGES JOINT REPRESENTATIONS TO ISRAEL AND TO SYRIA URGING THEM TO RESTRAIN THEIR FRIENDS IN LEBANON AND STRESSING THE MERITS OF A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. IN ADDITION WE WOULD EXPLORE WITH THE SAUDIS AND THE LEAGUE A BROADER ARAB CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE DISCUSSIONS TODAY BETWEEN THE FOREIGN SECRETARY AND CHEYSSON IN BRUSSELS, AGREEMENT WAS REACHED, SUBJECT TO FINAL ITALIAN CONSENT ON HOW TO PROCEED, INCLUDING ON KEEPING THE US INFORMED. ACTION IS LIKELY TO BE TAKEN BY THE THREE IN CAPITALS ON 21 SEPTEMBER.

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MULTINATIONAL FORCE IN LEBANON (MNF)
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