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FROM DAMASCUS 191130Z DEC
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 425 OF 19 DECEMBER 1983
INFO IMMEDIATE BEIRUT, JEDDA, WASHINGTON
INFO ROUTINE TEL AVIV, AMMAN, CAIRO, PARIS, ROME, ATHENS

MT

SYRIA/LEBANON/SAUDI ARABIA

1. THE FOREIGN MINISTERS OF SYRIA, LEBANON AND SAUDI ARABIA MET IN DAMASCUS ON 18 DECEMBER AS FORESHADOWED BY PRESIDENT GEMAYEL IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE IN LONDON LAST WEEK. THERE WERE TWO SESSIONS OF TALKS EITHER SIDE OF LUNCH AT THE END OF WHICH LITTLE PROGRESS APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN MADE. KHADDAM SPOKE TO THE PRESS AFTERWARDS AND SAID THE TALKS HAD BEEN AIMED AT PAVING THE WAY FOR THE NEXT ROUND OF LEBANESE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION TALKS BUT THEIR DISCUSSIONS HAD NOT BEEN CONCLUDED AND A FURTHER MEETING WOULD BE HELD IN SAUDI ARABIA IN EARLY JANUARY.

2. CONCERNING THE NEW CEASEFIRE KHADDAM MERELY COMMENTED THAT THE SECURITY COMMITTEE (WHICH HAD MET IN DAMASCUS ON 16 DECEMBER) HAD ARRIVED AT CERTAIN PRINCIPLES AIMED AT REINFORCING THE CEASEFIRE SEMICOLON THESE PRINCIPLES WERE NOW TO BE DISCUSSED BY THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AND THE LEADERSHIPS OF AMAL AND THE NATIONAL SALVATION FRONT. KHADDAM PARRIED OTHER QUESTIONS BY SAYING THAT ALL MATTERS HAD BEEN OPEN TO DISCUSSION.

3. THE SAUDI EMBASSY HAVE PLAYED DOWN PRINCE SAUD'S PART IN THE TALKS ON LEBANON. THE FIRST SECRETARY STRESSED TO US ON 19 DECEMBER THAT THE SAUDI ROLE WAS NO MORE THAN THAT OF A MEDIATOR. THEY WERE NOT PUTTING FORWARD ANY CONCRETE PROPOSALS OF THEIR OWN BUT FELT OBLIGED TO ACT AS INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN BEIRUT AND DAMASCUS GIVEN THE LACK OF ANY OTHER PARTY WILLING AND ABLE TO DO SO. THE SAUDI CONFIRMED THAT THERE WOULD BE A FURTHER MEETING OF THE THREE MINISTERS IN THE FIRST HALF OF JANUARY AND THAT THERE COULD BE NO FURTHER ROUND OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION TALKS BEFORE THEN. HE ADDED THAT PRINCE SAUD'S EARLIER VISIT TO DAMASCUS (MY TELNO 416) HAD BEEN SOLELY CONCERNED WITH THE PROBLEM OF THE PLO IN TRIPOLI IN WHICH THE SAUDIS WERE TAKING A MORE ACTIVE PART.

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4. I HOPE TO GET AN OFFICIAL SYRIAN VIEW OF THESE AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS ON 20 DECEMBER. MEANWHILE, AS SEEN FROM HERE THE PROSPECTS FOR LEBANON LOOK BLEAK INDFED, AND I DETECT NO FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN SYRIAN POSITIONS AS DISTINCT FROM A DEGREE OF TACTICAL FLEXIBILITY. THE LEISURELY APPROACH TO THE RESUMPTION OF RECONCILIATION TALKS MAY SUIT THE SYRIAN GAME BUT CARRIES THE RISK OF COMPLETE BREAKDOWN OR WORSE IN THE CONTINUED FAILURE OF THE AMERICANS TO SUCEED IN PUTTING PRESSURE ON THE SYRIANS OR EVEN TO TRY TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE ISRAELIS.

LUCAS

MIDDLE EAST

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2
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