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00 MODUK

00 WASHINGTON

00 PARIS

00 ROME

PP DAMASCUS

PP TEL AVIV

PP CAIRO

PP JEDDA

PP AMMAN

PP UKMIS NEW YORK

PP MOSCOW

PP CBFC

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IMM/PRI

270830Z JAN 84

FROM COMMCEN HSP

TO MODUK

INFO CBFC

CONFIDENTIAL UK COMMS ONLY

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FM BEIRUT 270830Z JAN 84

TO IMMEDIATE F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 43 OF 27 JANUARY 1984

INFO IMMEDIATE MODUK, WASHINGTON, PARIS AND ROME

INFO PRIORITY DAMASCUS, TEL AVIV, CAIRO, JEDDA, AMMAN, UKMIS  
NEW YORK, MOSCOW AND CBFC

INFO SAVING BRITFORLEB

MY TELNO 42: LEBANON

1. WHEN I SAID THAT ACTION BY THE LAF TO CLOSE THE SHUWEYFAT GAP WOULD LEAD TO A BREAKDOWN OF THE CEASEFIRE, A CHANGE IN THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE MNF OPERATED, AND TO RECONSIDERATION OF OUR READINESS TO MAINTAIN OUR CONTINGENT HERE, HADDAD'S REACTION WAS PREDICTABLY SHARP.

2. HE SAID THAT THE CEASEFIRE HAD ALREADY BEEN RENDERED INOPERATIVE BY THE BUILD-UP OF WAR MATERIAL IN THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS AND BY AMAL'S USURPATION, SINCE THE CEASEFIRE, OF THE GOVERNMENT'S AUTHORITY IN CERTAIN AREAS THERE, EG AL MASSOURIEN. OF COURSE THE GOVERNMENT WANTED TO PROCEED BY AGREEMENT, IF THIS WAS POSSIBLE. BUT THE SYRIAN POSITION SEEMED TO HAVE HARDENED AGAIN. THE SITUATION IN THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS WAS NOW VERY GRAVE. THE GOVERNMENT WAS BEING PRESSED VERY HARD TO ACT BEFORE IT WAS TOO LATE. IT WAS INTOLERABLE FOR IT TO HAVE ITS HANDS TIED. IT WAS SOLELY THE FEAR OF FORCIBLE INTERVENTION BY THE ARMY THAT HAD PREVENTED, HITHERTO, HOSTILE ELEMENTS FROM SEEKING TO EXTEND THEIR AUTHORITY FROM THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS UP INTO WEST BEIRUT. MNF CONTRIBUTORS WERE ON THE ONE HAND PRESSING THE GOVERNMENT TO BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE: ON THE OTHER DISCOURAGING IT FROM EFFECTIVE ACTION WHEN ITS VERY SURVIVAL WAS AT STAKE. IF BEIRUT WAS ONCE AGAIN TO FIND ITSELF IN THE HANDS OF RIVAL MILITIAS IT WAS DOUBTFUL IF THE GOVERNMENT WOULD SURVIVE. WERE WE SERIOUSLY SUGGESTING THAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD STAND BY AND DO NOTHING WHILE ITS OPPONENTS BUILT UP THEIR STRENGTH FOR A TAKEOVER? THAT WAS THE IMPLICATION OF WHAT I HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO SAY. THE GOVERNMENT WAS IN THE LAST RESORT CONTEMPLATING ACTION AGAINST THE SUPPLY ROUTE RATHER THAN IN GREATER BEIRUT ITSELF SINCE THIS WAS THE LEAST CONFRONTATIONAL TACTIC. BUT IT WAS IN THE CITY THAT THE DANGER LAY. WHAT WOULD BE THE UK REACTION IF TROUBLE SPILLED OVER AND THE ARMY HAD ONCE AGAIN TO RESTORE CONTROL IN WEST BEIRUT? HE NEEDED TO KNOW.

3. I SAID THAT MY INSTRUCTIONS RELATED TO POSSIBLE ACTION BY THE LAF TO CLOSE THE SHUWEYFAT GAP IN CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE THIS WOULD LEAD TO A BREAKDOWN OF THE CEASEFIRE. IT SEEMED TO ME THAT ACTION BY THE LAF IN THE SHOUF NOW WOULD BE BOUND TO SPILL OVER INTO OTHER AREAS, INCLUDING THE CITY. WE HAD ASSUMED THAT IT WAS THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY TO SEEK TO MAKE PROGRESS BY AGREEMENT WITH THE OTHER PARTIES. WE BACKED IT IN ITS EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE RECONCILIATION. IF THE FIGHTING WAS TO BREAK OUT AGAIN IN A WAY WHICH MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE CEASEFIRE HAD BROKEN DOWN THIS WOULD ATTRACT MUCH ATTENTION IN THE UK AND LEAD TO QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE PEACE PROCESS WAS ACHIEVING ITS OBJECTIVE.

4. AFTER CONSIDERABLE FURTHER DISCUSSION I DISSUADED HIM FROM PRESSING FOR AN ANSWER TO HIS QUESTION ABOUT OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS FIGHTING IN BEIRUT. I SAID THAT MINISTERS MIGHT BE RELUCTANT TO ADDRESS A HYPOTHETICAL QUESTION AND THAT HE MIGHT NOT THEREFORE GET A HELPFUL ANSWER.

5. OBVIOUSLY IT WOULD BE PREFERABLE IF THE MNF COUNTRIES COULD SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE ON THIS (PARA 2 OF WASHINGTON TELNO 274). PENDING THE OUTCOME OF FURTHER DISCUSSION BETWEEN CONTRIBUTORS, I PROPOSE TO TAKE THE LINE, IF I AM PRESSED ON THIS, THAT OUR CONTINGENT IS SMALL AND HAS NO MANDATE TO BECOME INVOLVED IN FIGHTING BETWEEN PARTIES TO THE CEASEFIRE. IT IS HERE TO PLAY A PEACEKEEPING ROLE. IT STANDS READY TO DO THAT IF THERE IS A PEACE TO KEEP. IF PEACE BREAKS DOWN, WE SHALL OBVIOUSLY HAVE TO RECONSIDER ITS PRESENCE HERE.

MIERS  
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1/27