

GRS 650
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DESKBY 181200Z
FROM DAMASCUS 181120Z FEB
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 93 OF 18 FEBRUARY 1984
INFO IMMEDIATE BEIRUT, TEL AVIV, EC POSTS
INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON
INFO ROUTINE AMMAN, CAIRO, MOSCOW, TRIPOLI MY TELNO 89: LEBANON

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SUMMARY.

1. DISAPPOINTING AND PERHAPS UNWISE SYRIAN REJECTION OF THE 'SAUDI PEACE PLAN'. POSSIBILITY OF EC OR UNILATERAL ACTION TO PERSUADE THE SYRIANS THAT THEIR HITHERTO SUCCESSFUL TACTICS NOW NEED CHANGING.

DETAIL

2. MIFT CONTAINS TRANSLATION OF OFFICIAL SYRIAN STATEMENT ISSUED LAST NIGHT IN REJECTION OF THE 'SAUDI PEACE PLAN'.

3. THIS IS A DISAPPOINTING AND TO SOME EXTENT SURPRISING SYRIAN REACTION. IN THE FIRST PLACE THE SYRIANS HAVE BEHAVED BADLY IN APPARENTLY TURNING DOWN THE PROPOSALS BEFORE PRINCE SAUD HAD EVEN DISCUSSED THEM WITH KHADDAM. THIS MIGHT BE A NEGOTIATING TACTIC BUT ON PAST SYRIAN FORM IT WOULD BE OPTIMISTIC TO ASSUME SO.

*4. SECONDLY, THE SYRIAN OBJECTIONS SEEM EXAGGERATED:-
(A) SECURITY GUARANTEES FOR ISRAEL (AT LEAST IN THE SENSE OF BORDER ARRANGEMENTS) MUST BE PART OF ANY SETTLEMENT AND THE SYRIANS HAVE NOT HITHERTO OBJECTED TO THIS IN PRINCIPLE SEMICOLON
(B) SIMULTANEOUS WITHDRAWAL IS A MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCK BUT OUGHT TO BE NEGOTIABLE.

5. THIRDLY THE SYRIANS SHOULD BE CLEVER ENOUGH TO SEE THAT
(A) BY ACCEPTING THE PLAN AT LEAST AS A BASIS FOR NEGOTIATION THEY COULD WRONG-FOOT THE ISRAELIS BY PUTTING THEM (LAST WORD UNDERLINED) IN THE POSITION OF BEING 'THE OBSTACLE TO PEACE'.
(B) BY REFUSING THE OPPORTUNITY OF FURTHERING THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS THEY RISK THE EMERGENCE OF THE KING OF IMBALANCE ENVISAGED IN MY TUR, THEY PROLONG THE HUMAN AGONY (ADMITTEDLY NOT A POWERFUL CONSIDERATION FOR THIS REGIME) AND THEY LOSE A CHANCE TO IMPROVE THEIR POSTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF A COMPREHENSIVE MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT.

6. IN SHORT IT LOOKS AS THOUGH THE SYRIANS ANY FOR ONCE BE OVERPLAYING THEIR HAND. WHEREAS HITHERTO THEY HAVE CORRECTLY JUDGED THAT THEY HAD ONLY TO SIT TIGHT AND WAIT FOR EVENTS TO UNFOLD IN A WAY FAVOURABLE TO THEM, IF THEY DO NOT TAKE THE PRESENT TIDE AT THE FLOOD IT MAY TURN AGAINST THEM.

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7. MY US AND MOST EC COLLEAGUES BROADLY ACCEPT THIS ANALYSIS (THOUGH IT IS UNSUPPORTED BY A FIRST-HAND SYRIAN VIEW WHICH I AM STILL UNABLE TO OBTAIN). THE US RECHARGE D'AFFAIRES COMMENTED THAT IF THE SYRIANS DO NOT SEE THINGS THE SAME WAY IT MUST BE BECAUSE THEY ASSESS DIFFERENTLY THE POSITION ON THE GROUND IN LEBANON. FOR EXAMPLE THEY MAY BELIEVE THAT FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCE WILL OBLIGE THE ISRAELIS TO WITHDRAW FROM SOUTHERN LEBANON WITHOUT THE NEED FOR ANY SYRIAN CONCESSIONS SEMICOLON THAT THE SYRIANS CAN STILL CONTROL JUMBLATT SEMICOLON AND THAT BERRI WILL NOT LOSE CONTROL OF THE SHIA EXTREMISTS IN THE ABSENCE OF VISIBLE PROGRESS TOWARDS MORE EQUITABLE POWER-SHARING. MY BELGIAN COLLEAGUE BELIEVES THAT THE SYRIANS MIGHT VIEW THE SAUDI PLAN MORE FAVOURABLY IF ABOGATION OF THE 17 MAY AGREEMENT COULD BE CLEARLY SEPARATED FROM IT SO THAT IT DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE CONDITIONAL UPON THE OTHER ELEMENTS IN THE PLAN.

8. WITHIN THIS LIMITED DIPLOMATIC GROUP THERE IS A CONSENSUS THAT THE KINDS OF ARGUMENT SET OUT IN PARA 5 ABOVE SHOULD BE CLEARLY PUT TO THE SYRIANS. MY BELGIAN COLLEAGUE CLAIMS TO HAVE THE AGREEMENT OF THE ITALIAN AND GERMAN AMBASSADORS (BUT NOT THE FRENCH, WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS 'EVASIVE') TO AN EC INITIATIVE TO FILL THE CURRENT VACUUM. HE HAS IN MIND A TROIKA COMPRISING PERHAPS THE FRENCH, THE ITALIANS AND OURSELVES) WHO WOULD UNDERTAKE SEPARATE VISITS TO BEIRUT, DAMASCUS, RIYADH AND TEL AVIV TO FURTHER THE PEACE PROCESS IN LEBANON AND MORE WIDELY.

9. THIS MAY BE RATHER AMBITIOUS AND ANYWAY TOO SLOW. BUT IT MAY BE USEFUL TO HAVE SOME THOUGHTS IN MIND OF EC OR UNILATERAL ACTION ESPECIALLY IN DAMASCUS AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF FORTHCOMING EC MEETINGS BOTH IN THE POLITICAL CO-OPERATION FRAMEWORK AND WITH SHAMIR.

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