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FM WASHINGTON 230255Z FEB 84
TO IMMEDIATE F C O
TELEGRAM NUMBER 611 OF 22 FEBRUARY

PRESIDENTIAL PRESS CONFERENCE 22 FEBRUARY

1. SUMMARY: TOUGH QUESTIONS ON LEBANON ANSWERED STOICALLY. CONFIDENCE IN SHULTZ REAFFIRMED. RENEWED PLEDGE TO KEEP OPEN STRAITS OF HORMUZ.
2. THE PRESIDENT GAVE THIS EVENING HIS FIRST PRESS CONFERENCE OF THE YEAR AND HIS FIRST AS A CANDIDATE. DESPITE AN OPENING STATEMENT ON CRIME, SCHOOL PRAYER AND THE BUDGET DEFICIT, MOST QUESTIONS WERE ON THE LEBANON.
3. HE WAS PRESSED TO SAY WHETHER AMERICA HAD LOST CREDIBILITY, WHETHER THE MARINES HAD DIED IN VAIN AND WHERE THE ADMINISTRATION GOES FROM HERE. IN REPLY, THE PRESIDENT LAUNCHED INTO A LENGTHY HISTORICAL SURVEY STRESSING THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE ANF HAD BEEN TO CONTRIBUTE TO PEACE. HE SEEMED, RATHER SURPRISINGLY, TO IMPLY THAT IT WAS TERRORIST ATTACKS WHICH HAD MADE THEIR MISSION IMPOSSIBLE. HE EMPHASISED AGAIN THAT THE TROOPS HAD ONLY REDEPLOYED, THE FLEET WOULD STAY, AS WOULD THE TRAINING TEAMS. THE MARINES WERE NOT QUOTE BUGGING OUT UNQUOTE ONLY MOVING TO MORE DEFENSIBLE POSITIONS. HE HAD NO REGRETS FOR HAVING TRIED TO ACHIEVE PEACE. HIS AMBASSADOR AT LARGE WAS STILL IN THE AREA. AS LONG AS THERE WAS A CHANCE FOR PEACE AMERICA WOULD TRY TO CONTRIBUTE. THE PRESIDENT DEFENDED EARLIER NAVAL SHELLING WHILE EVADING A QUESTION ABOUT FUTURE USE OF NAVAL FIREPOWER. THE US WAS NOW BEHAVING WITH RESTRAINT SEMI COLON THEY HAD NOT REACTED TO RECENT FIRING ON THEIR RECONNAISSANCE MISSIONS.
4. THE PRESIDENT WAS ASKED WHETHER SHULTZ WAS DISCOURAGED AND WHETHER HE WOULD ACCEPT HIS RESIGNATION. HE REAFFIRMED HIS CONFIDENCE IN SHULTZ ADDING THAT QUOTE HE HOPED HE HAD NO THOUGHT OF LEAVING AT THIS POINT UNQUOTE.

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5. ON THE PERSIAN GULF, THE PRESIDENT REPEATED THAT THERE WAS QUOTE NO WAY HE WOULD ALLOW THE STRAITS OF HORMUZ TO BE CLOSED UNQUOTE. A US NAVAL TASK FORCE HAD BEEN IN THE REGION FOR SOME TIME, AS HAD SOME ALLIES (SIC).

6. COMMENT. THE PRESIDENT WAS EVIDENTLY EXPECTING TOUGH QUESTIONS ON THE LEBANON AND PLAYED A VERY DIFFICULT HAND QUITE WELL SEMI COLON HIS ADVISERS MAY HOPE THAT THIS CONFERENCE WILL HELP DEFLATE MEDIA INTEREST. HE DEALT IN A DIGNIFIED MANNER WITH CRITICISMS OF HIS PRESIDENTIAL STYLE.

WRIGHT

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MULTINATIONAL FORCE IN LEBANON (MNF)
PS
LIMITED PS/LADY YOUNG
NENAD PS/MR LUCE
MED PS/PUS
DEFENCE DEPT SIR J BULLARD
PUSD SIR J LEAHY
NEWS DEPT SIR W HARDING
UND MR WRIGHT
NAD MR CARTLEDGE
WED MR MACINNES
SED MR ADAMS
ECD(E) MR JENKINS
FINANCE DEPT MR EGERTON
PROTOCOL DEPT
PLANNING STAFF
NED

COPIES TO:
MOD DS11
MR GOODALL)CABINET
SIR R ARMSTRONG)OFFICE
SIR P MOORE
BUCKINGHAM PALACE

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LEBANON: SITREP AT 0900Z 22 FEBRUARY

Military Developments

1 Lebanese Army (LAF) positions at Souq Al-Gharb on the Shouf mountain ridge (the only remaining LAF position outside East Beirut) have come under heavy shelling from Druze, though no serious attempt to take the town has yet been made. The Israelis have confirmed that IDF armoured columns have been operating as far north as Druze/Amal militia positions near Damour (8 miles south of Beirut) in recent days and Defence Minister Arens has talked about establishing "semi permanent" positions on the coast north of the Awali. Main purpose of Israeli patrolling is to warn the Druze and Amal not to allow PLO reinfiltration. Israeli planes bombed alleged Palestinian positions around Damour, Bhamdoun and Aley on 19 February and positions south of Bhamdoun on Beirut-Damascus road on 21 February.

MNF

2 Bulk of the Italian contingent withdrew on 20 February, leaving only a token force (100 men) on land and a further group (270 men) offshore. The Italian hospital will remain but the Italians have removed their presence from the Palestinian refugee camps. Redeployment of the US contingent began on 21 February and will probably be completed by 26 February. The operational part of BRITFORLEB remains on board RFA Reliant, which returns to Cyprus on 23 February for 48 hours for restocking and maintenance.

Political Developments

3 The Syrians predictably rejected the "Saudi" peace plan (from which the Saudis have distanced themselves, claiming they have produced no plan but are only working to bring the parties together), and have repeated their demands for abrogation of 17 May agreement, with no conditions such as simultaneous Syrian/Israel withdrawal. Saudi peace efforts continue: Crown Prince Abdullah (First Deputy Prime Minister and Commander of the National Guard) visited Damascus on 20-22 February to discuss Lebanon. Outcome not

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yet known, but talks described by Saudis in public as "very positive and very fruitful". In Lebanon, however, the Commander of the Lebanese Forces (Phalange) and Chamoun (Liberal Party leader, with Israeli links) have both made public statements opposing abrogation of the 17 May agreement.

UN

4 Informal consultations of the Security Council will resume on 22 February. The French have tabled a revised draft resolution, authorising the replacement of the MNF in Beirut by a UN Force. Both the Soviet Union and Syria want removal of the remainder of the MNF and all warships as a precondition of wider UN deployment, to which the US remain firmly opposed. If the French proposal fails, the Non-Aligned members may take up the UK suggestion of a statement by the President of the Security Council, embodying UK ideas for greater use of UN observers in Beirut, and of the good offices of the UN Secretary General. We have also suggested wider use in Southern Lebanon of UNIFIL, whose mandate is due to be renewed on 19 April.

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LEBANON: SITREP AT 0900Z 21 FEBRUARY

Military Developments

1. Lebanese Army (LAF) positions at Souq Al-Gharb on the Shouf mountain ridge (the only remaining LAF position outside East Beirut) have come under heavy shelling from Druze, though no serious attempt to take the town has yet been made. The Israelis have denied reports that their armoured columns have advanced as far north as Druze/Amal militia positions near Damour (8 miles south of Beirut) though such patrols came well north of the Awali river on 15/16 February, as a warning to the Druze and Amal not to allow PLO reinfiltration. Israeli planes again bombed alleged Palestinian positions around Damour, Bhamdoun and Aley on 19 February and positions south of Bhamdoun and at Ain al-Jdideh on Beirut-Damascus highway on 21 February.

MNF

2. Bulk of the Italian contingent has withdrawn with only a token force (100 men) left on land and a further group (270 men) off shore. The Italian hospital will remain but the Italians have removed their presence from the Palestinian refugee camps. Redeployment of the US contingent is due to be completed by 15 March. Despite press reports to the contrary, the operational part of BRITFORLEB remains on board RFA Reliant.

Political Developments

3. The Syrians have predictably rejected the 'Saudi' peace plan (from which the Saudis have distanced themselves, claiming they have produced no plan but are only working to bring the parties together). Syrians have repeated their demands for abrogation of 17 May agreement, with no conditions such as simultaneous Syrian/Israel withdrawal. Saudi mediator Hariri went to Beirut on 20 February with Syrian counter proposals. Crown Prince Abdullah (First Deputy Prime Minister and Commander of the National Guard) also visited Damascus on 20 February to discuss Lebanon.

4. Informal consultations of the Security Council will resume on 22/23 February. The French intend to table a revised draft resolution, authorising the replacement of the MNF in Beirut by a UN Force, but with some amendments designed to meet Soviet objections. Both the Soviet Union and Syria want removal of the remainder of the MNF and all warships as a precondition of wider UN deployment. If the French proposal fails, the Non-Aligned members may take up the UK suggestion of a statement by the President of the Security Council, embodying UK ideas for greater use of UN observers in Beirut, and of the good offices of the UN Secretary-General. We have also suggested wider use in Southern Lebanon of UNIFIL, whose mandate is due to be renewed on 19 April.