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FM CAIRO

TO FLASH FCO

TELNO 129

OF 261120Z FEBRUARY 86

INFO IMMEDIATE MODUK, DTI, HQBFC, AMMAN, KHARTOUM, NICOSIA

INFO IMMEDIATE TEL AVIV, WASHINGTON

MODUK FOR DI ROW 2 SIC U2G AND JOC SIC EAF

DTI FOR OT4

MY TELNO 126: EGYPT INTERNAL SITUATION

SUMMARY

1. SIGNS THAT THE AUTHORITIES HAVE NOT/NOT SO FAR SUCCEEDED IN CONTAINING THE SITUATION FULLY. CURFEW IMPOSED THROUGHOUT CAIRO FROM 1300 HOURS LOCAL TIME BUT IT WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE TO CLEAR THE TRAFFIC JAMMED STREETS BY THEN. NO/NO REPORTS OF HARM TO BRITISH NATIONALS.

DETAIL

2. THE EGYPTIAN STATE RADIO HAS ANNOUNCED A CURFEW COVERING THE WHOLE OF CAIRO STARTING AT 1300 LOCAL (1100Z) IN ORDER TO "PREVENT CERTAIN ELEMENTS FROM TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION" (AN APPARENT REFERENCE TO FUGITIVE CENTRAL SECURITY MUTINEERS).
3. REPORTS CONTINUE TO REACH US OF FURTHER MINOR DISTURBANCES IN OTHER PARTS OF CAIRO. THE AREA AROUND THE EMBASSY IS MAINLY CALM, ALTHOUGH BLOCKED BY TRAFFIC. THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS OF THE BREAKING OF CAR WINDOWS BY DISSIDENT MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY FORCES IN SOME OF THE AREAS WHERE MEMBERS OF THE BRITISH COMMUNITY, INCLUDING EMBASSY STAFF, LIVE.
4. WE HAVE NO (NO) REPORTS OF ANY PERSONAL INJURY TO BRITISH NATIONALS.
5. THE AIRPORT REMAINS CLOSED FOR INBOUND TRAFFIC. BUT DA HOPE THAT THEIR CAIRO-LONDON DAILY FLIGHT, WHICH WAS DUE TO LEAVE AT 0900, WILL BE ALLOWED TO DEPART IN THE EARLY AFTERNOON. THEY ARE CANCELLING THEIR LONDON-CAIRO FLIGHT FOR 26 FEBRUARY.

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6. THE CONSULATE-GENERAL IN ALEXANDRIA CONTINUE TO REPORT THAT ALL REMAINS CALM THERE.

7. IN ORDER TO ALLOW STAFF TO REACH HOME BEFORE THE CURFEW TAKES EFFECT, I HAVE SENT ALL STAFF HOME OTHER THAN THOSE IMMEDIATELY REQUIRED AT 1200 HOURS LOCAL TIME. THE BRITISH COUNCIL AND THE BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL ALSO SHUT EARLY. OUR EARLIER ADVICE (MY TUR, PARA 6) HAS NOW BEEN OVERTAKEN BY THE CURFEW ANNOUNCEMENT. WARDENS ARE BEING TOLD TO ADVISE THE COMMUNITY TO STAY AT HOME AND LISTEN TO RADIO BULLETINS UNTIL THE CURFEW IS LIFTED. TEXT OF SUGGESTED MESSAGE TO BE BROADCAST OVER THE BBC WORLD SERVICE IS IN MIFT (FOR FCO ONLY).

8. FCO PLEASE ADVANCE TO HEAD CONSULAR DEPARTMENT.

URWICK

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POD  
PLANNING STAFF  
ECD(E)  
INFO.D.

PS  
PS/MR. RENTON  
PS/PUS  
CHIEF CLERK  
MR. FERGUSSON  
SIR. D. MIERS  
MR. BARRINGTON

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FM CAIRO

TO DESKBY 261000Z FCO

TELNO 128

OF 260903Z FEBRUARY 86

AND TO IMMEDIATE MODUK

INFO IMMEDIATE HQBFC, AMMAN, KHARTOUM, NICOSIA, TEL AVIV

INFO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON

EGYPT INTERNAL

SUMMARY

1. UNITS OF THE PARAMILITARY CENTRAL SECURITY FORCES MUTINY AND ATTACK SEVERAL HOTELS AROUND THE PYRAMIDS, APPARENTLY PROMPTED BY A RUMOUR THAT COMPULSORY SERVICE IS TO BE EXTENDED. GUN BATTLES BETWEEN THEM AND THE ARMY TAKE PLACE IN AND AROUND THE HOTELS, SEVERAL OF WHICH ARE SET ON FIRE. SOME SIGNS THAT THE DISTURBANCES MAY BE SPREADING: CAIRO AIRPORT CLOSED. NO REPORTS OF ANY BRITISH CASUALTIES.

DETAIL

2. THE DISTURBANCES BEGAN AROUND 2000 HOURS LOCAL TIME (1800 GMT) ON 25 FEBRUARY WHEN A GROUP OF CONSCRIPTS OF THE PARAMILITARY POLICE FORCE RESPONSIBLE FOR INTERNAL SECURITY LEFT THE BARRACKS AND ATTACKED A POLICE KIOSK, AND THEN MOVED ON TO ATTACK THREE HOTELS, USED MAINLY BY TOURISTS, NEAR THE GIZA PYRAMIDS. SOME FIRES WERE STARTED. MORE THAN 2,000 TROOPS WERE CALLED IN AND GUN BATTLES ENSUED. ALL ROADS TO THE AREA WERE BLOCKED. BY 0200 LOCAL EMERGENCY VEHICLES FIGHTING THE FIRES WERE PULLED BACK FROM THE SCENE OF THE INCIDENTS, MANY WITH THEIR WINDOWS SMASHED BY STONES OR BULLETS, AND BY 0300 ARMoured CARS HAD BEEN DEPLOYED IN SUPPORT OF THE TROOPS. EYE-WITNESSES HAVE TOLD US OF INSTANCES OF LOOTING AS THE BATTLES BETWEEN THE ARMY ON THE ONE HAND AND THE POLICE AND CENTRAL SECURITY FORCES ON THE OTHER DEVELOPED. BY DAWN THE SITUATION HAD STILL NOT BEEN BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL, AND THERE WERE INDICATIONS THAT THE DISTURBANCES WERE SPREADING AND OTHER CENTRAL SECURITY UNITS IN CAIRO WERE BECOMING INVOLVED. CENTRAL SECURITY UNITS GUARDING THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE AND MAIN RADIO STATION HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY ARMY UNITS. CAIRO AIRPORT WAS CLOSED AT 0745 ON 26 FEBRUARY UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE, WITH A HEAVY MILITARY PRESENCE IN EVIDENCE AND REPORTS OF GUNFIRE IN THE AIRPORT AREA.

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3. THE DISTURBANCES APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN TRIGGERED BY A RUMOUR THAT COMPULSORY SERVICE IN CENTRAL SECURITY WAS TO BE EXTENDED BY BETWEEN 1 AND 3 YEARS, COUPLED WITH PROTRACTED DELAYS IN PAYING CENTRAL SECURITY WAGES.

4. THE OFFICIAL PRESS TODAY REPORTS DEMONSTRATIONS BY CENTRAL SECURITY POLICE IN THE PYRAMIDS AREA, WITH ATTACKS ON HOUSES AND CARS. RUMOURS OF AN EXTENSION OF COMPULSORY SERVICE ARE DESCRIBED AS BEING WITHOUT FOUNDATION AND THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR IS REPORTED TO HAVE TAKEN PERSONAL CHARGE OF THE OPERATION AND TO BE INVESTIGATING THE INCIDENTS.

5. DESPITE THE EFFORTS OF AN ARMED TEAM OF EGYPTIANS (MAINLY US EMBASSY LOCAL EMPLOYEES) SENT IN US EMBASSY TRANSPORT TO RESCUE ANY FOREIGNERS TRAPPED IN THE HOTELS NEAR THE PYRAMIDS, A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER REMAIN. WE HAVE NOT (NOT) HAD ANY REPORTS OF BRITISH CASUALTIES, ALTHOUGH SOME BRITISH NATIONALS REMAIN IN THE AREA CORDONED OFF BY THE ARMY. SOME BRITISH GUESTS WHO ESCAPED UNHARMED FROM ONE HOTEL HAVE COME TO THE EMBASSY, SEEKING REPLACEMENT PASSPORTS AND OTHER HELP: THEIR POSSESSION HAD BEEN REMOVED FROM THEM BY THE RIOTERS.

6. WE ARE ADVISING ENQUIREES NOT TO GO OUT UNLESS THEY HAVE GOOD REASON TO DO SO AND UNTIL, AS WE ANTICIPATE, THE SITUATION BECOMES CALMER. WE SHALL OF COURSE LET YOU KNOW AS SOON AS THE AIRPORT REOPENS.

COMMENT

7. THESE ARE THE MOST SERIOUS DISTURBANCES TO HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN EGYPT SINCE MUBARAK BECAME PRESIDENT, ALTHOUGH THERE WERE OF COURSE MAJOR TROUBLES INVOLVING SECURITY FORCES IMMEDIATELY AFTER SADAT'S ASSASSINATION. THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE POLICE AND INTERNAL SECURITY UNITS MUST BE PARTICULARLY WORRYING FOR THE REGIME AND POSES THE IMMEDIATE QUESTION OF HOW FAR THEY COULD BE RELIED UPON TO MAINTAIN ORDER IF THE GOVERNMENT WERE TO TAKE THE HARSH ECONOMIC MEASURES WHICH THE IMF AND EGYPT'S PRINCIPAL CREDITORS NOW CONSIDER NECESSARY. FOR THE MOMENT THE ARMY APPEARS TO BE REMAINING LOYAL AND TO BE RE-ESTABLISHING CONTROL: BUT ARMY UNITS ARE REPORTEDLY SHOWING RELUCTANCE TO FIRE ON THE SECURITY FORCES. MUCH WILL DEPEND ON HOW THE POLICE AND INTERNAL SECURITY UNITS REACT AS NEWS OF CASUALTIES AT THE HANDS OF THE ARMY SPREADS. WE HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THE CONSULATE-GENERAL IN ALEXANDRIA AND UNDERSTAND ALL IS QUIET THERE.

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8. FCO ONLY: PLEASE ADVANCE TO HEAD OF CONSULAR DEPARTMENT DESKBY 1000Z AND REPEAT TO OTHER POSTS AS NECESSARY.

9. NEWS DEPARTMENT. SUGGEST YOU DRAW ON PARAGRAPH 6 IN ANSWERING ENQUIRIES ABOUT WHAT ADVICE IS BEING GIVEN TO THE BRITISH COMMUNITY. IT IS TOO SOON TO ADVISE TOURISTS INTENDING TO VISIT EGYPT, BUT WE SHALL DO SO AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

URWICK

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CONS.D  
NEWS.D-  
INFO.D.  
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DEF.D  
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