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TO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON

TELEGRAM NUMBER 1478 OF 10 SEPTEMBER

INFO PRIORITY PARIS, ROME

LEBANON/MNF

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF MESSAGE:

BEGINS. YOU MAY LIKE TO HAVE AN IDEA OF HOW OUR THOUGHTS ARE DEVELOPING HERE ON THE FUTURE OF OUR MNF CONTINGENT, HOW TO TRY TO HANDLE SYRIA, AND RELATED QUESTIONS. I AM SORRY I HAD TO MISS THE MEETING ON 8 SEPTEMBER WHICH COVERED THIS GROUND AND THAT WE HAD NO OTHER CHANCE TO TALK ABOUT IT IN MADRID.

WHILE THE PRESENT FIGHTING CONTINUES IN LEBANON WE WOULD BE EXTREMELY RELUCTANT TO SEE OUR MNF CONTINGENT MOVE INTO ANY PART OF THE SHOUF, EVEN THE FOOTHILLS. WE DO NOT (NOT) ACCEPT THAT THE MNF DETACHMENTS HAVE NO ROLE AT PRESENT. WE BELIEVE THAT THEIR PRESENCE AT THIS CRITICAL TIME IS BOTH A USEFUL GESTURE OF SUPPORT FOR THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, AND INHIBITS THE ANTI-GOVERNMENTAL FACTIONS TO SOME EXTENT. THUS THEY DO SOMETHING TO CURB THE TENDENCY TO ALL-OUT CIVIL WAR. BY THE TIME YOU GET THIS MESSAGE, WE SHALL HAVE BUCCANEER STRIKE AIRCRAFT IN PLACE IN CYPRUS TO GIVE OUR TROOPS PROTECTION SHOULD THEY BE FIRED ON BY ANY ENEMY. I AGREE WITH YOUR VIEW THAT IT IS DESIRABLE THAT PEOPLE ROUND AND ABOUT BEIRUT SHOULD NOTE THAT WE INTEND TO PROTECT OUR CONTINGENTS AS FAR AS IS POSSIBLE.

ON THE OTHER HAND I THINK WE SHOULD COMPARE NOTES URGENTLY WITH MNF PARTNERS ON WHAT SHOULD BE OUR REACTION IF THE LAF DID DISINTEGRATE AND THE GEMAYEL GOVERNMENT BECOMES UNABLE TO CARRY OUT ANY OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF OFFICE. WE SEE THIS SIMPLY AS A PART OF SENSIBLE CONTINGENCY PLANNING.

I SHOULD BE GRATEFUL TO HAVE YOUR THOUGHTS ON WHAT ARE THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH CONTINUANCE OF THE MNF IN LEBANON BECOMES

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POINTLESS. PERHAPS I SHOULD ADD THAT BECAUSE OF OTHER COMMITMENT WE CANNOT IN ANY CIRCUMSTANCES INCREASE THE NUMERICAL STRENGTH OF OUR PRESENT FORCE.

AS REGARDS SYRIA, I FIND IT PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO MAKE ANY CONVINCING ANALYSIS OF SYRIAN AIMS IN THE PRESENT SITUATION. IT MUST BE EXTRAORDINARILY FRUSTRATING TO DEAL WITH PEOPLE LIKE ASAD AND FIND THAT THE TERMS OF EVERY PEACE FORMULA ARE CHANGED BY DAMASCUS EVEN AS THEY APPEAR ON THE POINT OF BEING AGREED. BUT I THINK THAT ONLY A POLITICAL DEAL WHICH SYRIA CAN PRESENT AS MEETING HER INTERESTS, AS WELL AS THOSE OF LEBANON, HAS ANY CHANCE OF STICKING. IT MAY PROVE IMPOSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE. IN ANY CASE, I BELIEVE THAT WE WOULD NEED TO THINK VERY CAREFULLY ABOUT ANY PUBLIC MOVE WHICH APPEARED TO PILLORY SYRIA FOR THE LACK OF PROGRESS OR, IN PARTICULAR, THREATEN HER WITH FORCE. ANY SUCH THREAT WOULD RISK POLARISING THE ARAB WORLD AROUND SYRIA.

RICHARD LUCE PLANS TO TRAVEL TO LEBANON ABOUT 14 SEPTEMBER TO SEE OUR TROOPS, VISIT THE EMBASSY AND HAVE TALKS WITH PRESIDENT GEMAYEL.

THIS WILL BE A FURTHER DEMONSTRATION OF SUPPORT FOR THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AND ALSO OF OUR CONCERN THAT TIME MAY NOT BE ON ITS SIDE.

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