

MIDDLE EAST: ADVANCE COPIES # 21

IMMEDIATE

PS (6)
PS/MR LUCE
PS/FUS
SIR J LEAHY
MR EBERTON
SIR J BULLARD
ED/NENAD
ED/ED
ED/UND

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CABINET OFFICE D10

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FUSD (2)
NEWS D
RESIDENT CLERK

Prime Minister

Worrying.

A.S.C. 2/12

CONFIDENTIAL

FM BEIRUT 021315Z DEC 83
TO IMMEDIATE F C O
TELEGRAM NUMBER 691 OF 2 DECEMBER 1983
INFO PRIORITY DAMASCUS AND TEL AVIV

MS

LEBANON INTERNAL

1. THE PAST WEEK HAS SEEN A TURN FOR THE WORSE HERE, IN BOTH SECURITY AND POLITICAL TERMS AND THERE IS A DEFINITE AIR OF ANXIETY IN BEIRUT.

2. ON THE SECURITY FRONT, PSP SHELLING OF EAST BEIRUT HAS EASED OFF IN THE PAST 48 HOURS (AFTER SEVERAL BAD NIGHTS IN A ROW). BUT THE ASSASSINATION ON 1 DECEMBER (MY TELNO 688) WAS THE FIRST MAJOR SUCH INCIDENT FOR SEVERAL MONTHS AND HAS HAD A BAD EFFECT. JUMBLATT HAS ACCUSED THE PHALANGE OF RESPONSIBILITY. BEIRUT IS BRACED FOR POSSIBLE REPRISALS. BEIRUT'S MAIN LINK WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD, THE AIRPORT, HAS BEEN SHUT SINCE EARLY 30 NOVEMBER, WITH NO INDICATION WHEN IT WILL BE RE-OPENED. THE PSP HAVE LAID DOWN CERTAIN CONDITIONS, BUT A WIDESPREAD VIEW IS THAT THEY WANT TO SHOW THEIR MUSCLE BY COMPLICATING THE PRESIDENT'S RETURN (THERE ARE PLENTY OF PRECEDENTS), AND WILL NOT LET IT BE REOPENED AT LEAST UNTIL GEMAYEL IS BACK.

i.e. of the Druze leader

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GEMAYEL IS BACK.~~

3. ON 30 NOV AMAL KIDNAPPED WORKERS RETURNING FROM THE AIRPORT IN REPRISAL FOR KATAEB KIDNAPPINGS IN THE MOUNTIAN. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER ALL THE VICTIMS HAVE BEEN RELEASED. EARLY ON 1 DECEMBER, 3 KM FROM THE AIRPORT, A MEMBER OF THE FRENCH MNF CONTINGENT WAS SHOT DEAD BY A SNIPER OPERATING FROM THE SHIA "NO GO" SOUTHERN AREAS. IT IS TOO EARLY TO KNOW WHETHER THIS MEANS THE MILITIAS THERE ARE ADOPTING A MORE AGGRESSIVE ROLE INSTEAD OF SIMPLY DEFENDING THEIR AREA PROPER. IF THE FORMER, THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS (INCLUDING THE AIRPORT AREA) AND FOR SECURITY GENERALLY ARE SERIOUS. THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR TOLD ME ON 30 NOVEMBER THAT THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF ATTACKS ON FRENCH PATROLS: HE HOPES THEIR PRESENCE WILL CONTINUE TO BUTTRESS LAW AND ORDER AND NOT SIMPLY PROVIDE TARGETS FOR DISSIDENTS.

4. MEANWHILE IN TRIPOLI, ALTHOUGH THE FRAGILE CEASEFIRE HOLDS, THE UNCERTAINTY OVER DEADLINES FOR PLO WITHDRAWAL, OVER FUTURE MOVES GENERALLY, AND THE FACT THAT LEBANON HAS NO PART IN THE ACT, ADDS TO THE SENSE OF DRIFT, AND WORSE. THE NEWS FROM THE SOUTH IS NO BETTER (MY TELNO 686).

5. POLITICALLY, THE NEWS IS GENERALLY GLOOMY. THE MEETING OF THE SECURITY COMMITTEE UNDER THE PRESIDENT'S CHAIRMANSHIP IN ROME HAS APPARENTLY ACHIEVED LITTLE. FEW PEOPLE PIN MANY HOPES ON THE MEETING WHICH, IT HAS JUST BEEN ANNOUNCED, IS TO TAKE PLACE NEXT WEEK IN DAMASCUS. SPECULATION, FED BY THE REAGAN/SHAMIR SUMMIT, CONTINUES THAT THE ISRAELIS MAY BE PLANNING, WITH U.S. ACQUIESCENCE OR BACKING, SOME ACTION AGAINST SYRIA. ALTHOUGH NOBODY HAS SERIOUSLY SOUGHT TO UNRAVEL THE GENEVA ACQUIS, MUCH OF THE MOMENTUM BEHIND "RECONCILIATION" HAS BEEN DISSAPATED. MANY LEBANESE HOPED FOR NEWS ON WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN FORCES FROM THE GEMAYEL/REAGAN MEETING WHICH WOULD GIVE IT A FILLIP. BUT GEMAYEL IS NOT SEEN TO HAVE MADE MUCH IMPRESSION ON THE AMERICANS SO FAR. THE POLITICAL MOOD IS LIKELY TO REMAIN GLOOMY, IF NOT APPREHENSIVE, UNLESS THE PRESIDENT CAN CONVINCHE PEOPLE ON RETURN THAT HIS VISIT TO WASHINGTON HAS HAD RESULTS.

MIERS

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