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FROM TEL AVIV 131410Z FEB 84

Prime Minister

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELNO 37 OF 13 FEBRUARY 1984

INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, BEIRUT, DAMASCUS, UKRMS NEW YORK,
PARIS AND ROME. *mt*

MY TELNO 35: ISRAEL/LEBANON

1. THE ISRAELIS ARE STICKING FIRMLY TO THE 17 MAY AGREEMENT.
DESPITE ITS WANING PROSPECTS THEY HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THEY ARE
NOT GOING TO LET THE LEBANESE OR AMERICANS OFF THE HOOK BY
ALLOWING IT TO APPEAR THAT THE ISRAELI LINE IS SOFTENING.

2. SHAMIR HAS SPOKEN TWICE IN THE PAST FEW DAYS ABOUT THE
SEVERE VIEW ISRAEL WOULD TAKE OF THE AGREEMENT BEING ABROGATED.
AT A MEETING YESTERDAY OF YOUNG PARTY ACTIVISTS HE SAID THAT
ABROGATION BY THE LEBANESE WOULD BE AN EXPRESSION OF THEIR
ABANDONING THEIR OWN INDEPENDENCE. IN THAT EVENT SHAMIR ADDED
QUOTE WE SHALL CONSIDER OURSELVES FREE OF THE OBLIGATIONS WE
UNDERTOOK IN THAT AGREEMENT AND WE MAY HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE
SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS IN SOUTH LEBANON IN A UNILATERAL MANNER
UNQUOTE. HIS REFERENCE TO POSSIBLE UNILATERAL ACTION IS PICKED
UP IN THE PRESS BY UNATTRIBUTABLE SOURCES WHO SAY THAT ISRAELI
TROOPS ARE LIKELY ANYWAY TO REMAIN IN LEBANON INDEFINITELY BECAUSE
OF THE WEAKNESS OF THE GEMAYEL REGIME.

3. SHAMIR'S REMARKS SEEMED DIRECTED AS MUCH AT WASHINGTON AS
BEIRUT. THERE ARE REPORTS THAT THE AMERICANS HAVE BEEN ADVISING
ISRAEL NOT TO MAKE TOO MUCH OF A FUSS SHOULD GEMAYEL ABROGATE
THE 17 MAY AGREEMENT. THE ISRAELI AMBASSADOR AT WASHINGTON CALLED
ON EAGLEBURGER ON INSTRUCTIONS ON 10 FEBRUARY TO URGE THE
ADMINISTRATION TO MAINTAIN FULL SUPPORT FOR IT, ARGUING THAT IF
THE GEMAYEL GOVERNMENT CAVED IN TO SYRIAN INSPIRED PRESSURE THEY
WOULD MERELY INVITE FURTHER DEMANDS.

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4. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THE ISRAELIS SHOULD BE DOING ALL THEY CAN TO FEND OFF ABROGATION, EVEN IF THEY MAY HAVE PRIVATELY CONCLUDED THAT THE AGREEMENT IS BEYOND REDEMPTION. OFFICIALS SUCH AS LUBRANI AND BAR-ON (MY TELEGRAMS NOS 34 AND 35) TAKE A RELATIVELY DETACHED VIEW OF THE REALITIES, THOUGH EVEN BAR-ON ARGUED THAT GEMAYEL DID NOT NEED TO DAMAGE HIMSELF WITH THE CHRISTIANS BY CAVING IN COMPLETELY TO SYRIAN PRESSURE. BUT THE ISRAELIS NEVER WANT TO DISCARD A LOSING CARD FOR NOTHING. HANGING ON TO IT MAY, THEY HOPE, ENABLE THEM AT LEAST TO SECURE SOMETHING IN RETURN IF AND WHEN THEY EVENTUALLY HAVE TO ADMIT THAT THE AGREEMENT CAN NO LONGER BE SALVAGED. ABOVE ALL, LIKUD MINISTERS HAVE A STRONG DOMESTIC POLITICAL INTEREST IN PRESERVING EVEN A DORMANT 17 MAY AGREEMENT, AS ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING JUSTIFICATIONS TO THE ISRAELI PUBLIC FOR THE LONG AND COSTLY WAR IN LEBANON. THIS ALONE WOULD ACCOUNT FOR THE STRIDENT TONE OF SHAMIR'S REMARKS.

5. THE ARGUMENTS WHICH THE ISRAELIS DEPLOY AGAINST ABROGATION CAN BE SUMMARISED AS FOLLOWS:

(A) EVEN THOUGH GEMAYEL IS INCAPABLE OF CARRYING OUT THE TERMS OF THE AGREEMENT, ABROGATION IS FAR MORE HARMFUL TO ISRAEL THAN LETTING IT LIE ON THE TABLE SEMICOLON

(B) ITS PROVISIONS WOULD TERMINATE THE STATE OF WAR BETWEEN ISRAEL AND LEBANON AS WELL AS RECOGNISING THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. AS SUCH, IT HAS A CERTAIN INTRINSIC VALUE EVEN WHILE UNIMPLEMENTED SEMICOLON

(C) ABROGATION WOULD SET A DEPLORABLE PRECEDENT. IT WOULD SIGNAL TO ALL AND SUNDRY THAT SYRIA CALLS THE SHOTS IN THE ARAB WORLD. NO MODERATE ARAB STATE WOULD IN FUTURE DARE TO SIGN ANY AGREEMENT LET ALONE A PEACE TREATY WITH ISRAEL SEMICOLON

(D) ESPECIALLY IF THE UNITED STATES ACQUESCED IN SUCH BACKSLIDING, ABROGATION MIGHT ALSO ENCOURAGE THE EGYPTIANS TO BELIEVE THAT THEY TOO COULD BACK AWAY FROM THEIR OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE PEACE TREATY WITH ISRAEL.

6. I SUSPECT THAT THERE IS ALSO AN ELEMENT IN ALL THIS OF THE ISRAELIS PREPARING THE GROUND FOR A SITUATION IN WHICH THE AGREEMENT IS ABROGATED. THEY DO NOT WANT TO STAY LOCKED INTO

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LEBANON. BUT INCREASINGLY IT LOOKS AS IF THEY MAY SEE NO EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE BUT TO RELY LARGELY ON THEIR OWN RESOURCES FOR MAINTAINING SECURITY. IF THEY DO DECIDE ON A REDUCED MILITARY PRESENCE FOR THE INDEFINITE FUTURE, ABROGATION OF THE ISRAELI-LEBANON WITHDRAWAL AGREEMENT WILL CERTAINLY BE PLAYED UP BY THEM IN JUSTIFICATION.

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