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FROM DAMASCUS 171130Z FEB
TO PRIORITY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 89 OF 17 FEBRUARY 1984

INFO PRIORITY BEIRUT, WASHINGTON, JEDDA, MODUK
INFO ROUTINE PARIS, ROME, UKHIS NEW YORK, TEL AV-IV, AMMAN,
CAIRO, MOSCOW, TRIPOLI, THE HAGUE.

BEIRUT TELNO 134

LEBANON

1. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO UP-TO-DATE FIRST HAND PRONOUNCEMENTS TO GO ON WE BELIEVE THAT SYRIAN ATTITUDES TO THE LATEST FAST-MOVING DEVELOPMENTS ARE DICTATED BY THEIR PERCEPTION OF THE BALANCE OF POWER CONSIDERATIONS IN LEBANON (PARA 5 OF MY TELNO 79). THEY WILL BE CONCERNED THAT THE UNPREDICTABLE JUMBLATT IS GAINING GROUND MILITARILY AND THE MORE RELIABLE (BUT LESS SYRIAN-INFLUENCED) BERRI IS EMERGING AS THE POLITICAL LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, WHILE THIS MOVE EASILY INFLUENCED LEBANESE CLIENTS ARE REDUCED TO THE LEVEL OF INTERMEDIARIES.
2. WE BELIEVE THAT THESE FACTORS ARE LIKELY TO WEIGH MORE HEAVILY WITH THE SYRIANS THAN ANY PRESSURE THE SAUDIS MAY REPEAT MAY PUT ON THEM. THEY POINT AMONG OTHER THINGS TO CONTINUED SUPPORT OF GEMAYEL AS THE LEGITIMATE (IF UNREPRESENTATIVE) PRESIDENT (PARA 2 OF BEIRUT TELNO 133). THIS ATTITUDE IS PROBABLY REINFORCED BY THE CONSIDERATIONS THAT TO REPLACE GEMAYEL AT THIS STAGE MIGHT OPEN A CAN OF WORMS, AND THAT GEMAYEL HAS PROBABLY NOT YET EXHAUSTED HIS POTENTIAL USEFULNESS FROM THE SYRIAN POINT OF VIEW. MY FRENCH COLLEAGUE HAS HAD INDICATIONS FROM JUMBLATT THAT WHILE HE DOES NOT INTEND TO MODIFY HIS DEMAND OF GEMAYEL'S RESIGNATION (OR WORSE), HE MIGHT STILL BOW TO A MAJORITY OPPOSITION VIEW THAT GEMAYEL SHOULD STAY AS PART OF A PACKAGE DEAL.
3. IF THIS ASSESSMENT IS CORRECT, THE PRINCIPLE OF "SIMULTANEOUS WITHDRAWAL" MIGHT NOT BE SUCH A STUMBLING BLOCK NOW AS THE
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AMERICANS FEAR (PARA 1 OF WASHINGTON TELNO 558). AT LEAST IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO FUDGE THE ISSUE IN PRACTICE, PROVIDED THAT OTHER ELEMENTS IN THE PACKAGE HAD SUFFICIENT APPEAL TO THE SYRIANS. BUT THIS IS A LONG SHOT GOING WAY BEYOND WHAT THE SYRIANS HAVE SO FAR BEEN SAYING.

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4. INCIDENTALLY, WE AGREE WITH THE CONCLUSION DRAWN IN PARA 5 OF PALMER'S TELELETTER 020/5 OF 15 FEBRUARY TO NIXON (NOT TO ALL), THAT THE SYRIANS DO NOT WANT A RESURGENCE OF PLO ACTIVITY IN SOUTH LEBANON AND ARE IN A POSITION TO PREVENT THIS.

LUCAS
BT

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