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FM WASHINGTON 181925Z FEB 84

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 587 OF 18 FEBRUARY

INFO IMMEDIATE MODUK BEIRUT DAMASCUS JEDDA PRIORITY TEL AVIV
UKMIS NEW YORK PARIS ROME AMMAN CAIRO THE HAGUE TRIPOLI MOSCOW

BEIRUT TELEGRAM NUMBER 134: LEBANON

1. IN SUCH A FAST MOVING SITUATION IT IS DIFFICULT TO MAKE ANY HELPFUL CONTRIBUTION FROM HERE OTHER THAN WHAT WE CAN COAX OUT OF U.S. OFFICIALS ABOUT THEIR THINKING. IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, WITH THE INITIATIVE TAKEN OUT OF THEIR HANDS, THEIR POLICIES IN COLLAPSE, AND THE MARINES ALMOST SURROUNDED, THEIR THOUGHTS ARE ANYTHING BUT CLEAR OR PLEASANT.

2. AS OF THIS MORNING, MURPHY'S BEST JUDGEMENT IS THAT DESPITE THE FLATNESS OF THE SYRIAN REJECTION, THE SAUDI PLAN IS STILL JUST ABOUT IN PLAY. HARIRI IS REPORTED TO BE GOING BACK TO BEIRUT FROM DAMASCUS (PRESUMABLY WITHOUT PRINCE SAUD) TO SEE WHAT MORE CAN BE DONE. MURPHY SEES THIS AS AN INDICATION THAT THE SYRIANS MAY WANT TO KEEP THE SAUDIS ENGAGED (THOUGH PERHAPS BECAUSE THEY FEEL THEY CANNOT AFFORD LITERALLY, TO TREAT THEM TOO HIGH HANDEDLY).

3. MURPHY TOLD MINISTER THIS MORNING THAT HE HAD NO MEANS OF KNOWING FOR CERTAIN WHETHER THE SYRIANS WERE BEHIND JUMBLATT'S PRESSURE FOR GEMAYEL'S RESIGNATION OR NOT. ON BALANCE HE WAS INCLINED TO THINK THE SYRIANS WOULD SEE SOME MILEAGE IN KEEPING ON GEMAYEL AS A WEAK, CRIPPLED LEADER, SUBJECT TO THEIR INFLUENCE. BUT HE ADMITTED THAT THIS WAS CRYSTAL-BALL-GAZING: THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE.

4. MURPHY'S LATEST INFORMATION ABOUT THE FIGHTING WAS THAT THINGS SEEMED TO HAVE QUIETENED DOWN TODAY AROUND SUQ AL GHARB, WHETHER BECAUSE THE PSP HAD THEMSELVES DECIDED TO HOLD BACK OR WHETHER ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM DAMASCUS ONE COULD ONLY GUESS. IF THEY DECIDED TO PRESS HOME THEIR ADVANTAGE (STILL WORSE, IF THEY BROKE OUT AND FOR EXAMPLE ATTACKED THE PALACE) THE POSITION WOULD BE VERY BAD. REDEPLOYMENT OF THE MARINES WOULD IN THE MEANTIME BE GOING AHEAD. IF SUQ AL GARB LOOKED LIKE FALLING, MURPHY THOUGHT THAT THE IMMEDIATE THREAT TO THE SECURITY OF THE MARINES WOULD BRING INTO PLAY THE SAME CONSIDERATIONS AS BEFORE. THE SHIPS WERE

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STILL THERE. BUT THERE WOULD BE NO REPEAT NO QUESTION OF MOVING
THE MARINES FROM THE AIRPORT TO BETTER POSITIONS ON SHORE.
THAT OPTION HAD BEEN STUDIED TO DEATH IN JANUARY AND REJECTED.

WRIGHT

mf

MULTINATIONAL FORCE IN LEBANON (MNF)
LIMITED PS
NENAD PS/LADY YOUNG
MED PS/MR LUCE
DEFENCE DEPT PS/PUS
PUSD SIR J BULLARD
NEWS DEPT SIR J LEAHY
UND SIR W HARDING
NAD MR WRIGHT
WED MR CARTLEDGE
SED MR MACINNES
ECD(E) MR ADAMS
FINANCE DEPT MR JENKINS
PROTOCOL DEPT MR EGERTON
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