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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TEL AVIV

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: PREL, PTER, LE, IS, SY, US

SUBJ: CONGRESSMAN O'BRIEN'S REQUEST TO PRESIDENT

- ASAD FOR HELP WITH HOSTAGE RELEASE

REF: A. DAMASCUS 4952, B. DAMASCUS 4965

1. ~~(SECRET)~~ - ENTIRE TEXT)

2. SUMMARY: IN AN UNEXPECTED AND WELCOME INTERVIEW OF ONE HOUR TODAY, 12 AUGUST, CONGRESSMAN GEORGE O'BRIEN (REP-ILLINOIS), ASKED PRESIDENT ASAD FOR HELP IN SECURING THE RELEASE OF THE AMERICAN AND FRENCH HOSTAGES IN LEBANON DWELLING IN PARTICULAR ON THE PERSONALITY AND WORK OF FATHER MARTIN JENCO, A CONSTITUENT OF O'BRIEN'S. CONGRESSMAN O'BRIEN NOTED THAT ONE OF THE TWO HOSTAGES WHO HAD EARLIER BEEN FREED WAS ALSO FROM HIS DISTRICT AND HE EXPRESSED THE GRATITUDE OF HIS CONSTITUENTS FOR SYRIAN HELP. O'BRIEN

BY CAS NLS
NARA, DATE 2/6/03
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SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THAT ALTHOUGH THE SITUATION WAS NOT OF SYRIAN MAKING. THE HOSTAGES WILL NEVER BE RELEASED WITHOUT THE STRONG HELP OF SYRIA. ASAD REPLIED HE FOUND KIDNAPPING "LOATHESOME" AND NOTED THAT SUCH ACTS EMBARRASSED THE LEBANESE AS WELL AS THE SYRIANS IN THE TASK OF LEBANESE DIALOGUE AND REFORM. ASAD SAID HE WAS HAPPY THAT THE "MAJOR GROUPS" IN LEBANON WERE NOW TALKING TO EACH OTHER BUT LAMENTED THE ROLE OF CERTAIN "MINOR GROUPS." NOTING SYRIA HAD VERY LIMITED CONTACTS AND INFORMATION ABOUT THESE MINOR GROUPS, HE SAID HE AND HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD DO "ALL THEY COULD" TO SECURE THE RELEASE OF THE HOSTAGES AND POINTED TO THE AID SYRIA HAD GIVEN EARLIER IN THE CASE OF DAVID DODGE. HE LAMENTED THAT THE FAILURE OF AMERICAN ASSURANCES GIVEN IN THE TWA CRISIS AND IN OTHER EARLIER PROBLEMS HAMPERED SYRIAN EFFORTS, BUT DID NOT RAISE -- EXCEPT BY IMPLICATION -- ATLIT OR THE EARLIER THREAT BY KHADDAM TO PUBLISH THE RECORD OF U.S. "GUARANTEES" IN THE NEAR FUTURE. O'BRIEN CLOSED THE DISCUSSION OF THE HOSTAGE ISSUE WITH THANKS AND DEEP APPRECIATION FOR PRESIDENT ASAD'S ROLE IN THE TWA CRISIS.

END SUMMARY

3. IN AN UNEXPECTED MEETING TODAY, 12 AUGUST, PRESIDENT ASAD RECEIVED CONGRESSMAN GEORGE O'BRIEN, REPUBLICAN REPRESENTATIVE FROM ILLINOIS AND AMBASSADOR EAGLETON. STATE ESCORT DON BOUCHARD AND DCM RANSOM ALSO ATTENDED THE DISCUSSION, WHICH LASTED AN HOUR. ON THE SYRIAN SIDE, ADNAN BARNEA TRANSLATED AND ISKANDER

LUKAH TOOK NOTES.



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4. O'BRIEN BEGAN BY SAYING THAT HE DEPENDED ON THE STRENGTH AND STABILITY OF SYRIA TO ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING WHICH IN HIS EARLIER EFFORTS WITH OTHERS, HAD PROVEN IMPOSSIBLE: THE RELEASE OF THE SEVEN AMERICAN AND FOUR FRENCH HOSTAGES HELD IN LEBANON. HE NOTED THAT CONSTITUENTS IN HIS DISTRICT AND ILLINOIS GAVE PRESIDENT ASAD FULL CREDIT FOR THE RELEASE OF THE TWA HOSTAGES, ONE OF WHOM CAME FROM THE CONGRESSMAN'S DISTRICT. HE EXPRESSED HIS GRATITUDE AND THAT OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE FOR THE SYRIAN ROLE AND ASKED FOR CONTINUED EFFORTS FOR THE OTHER HOSTAGES. HE EMPHASIZED THAT HE DID NOT SEE HOW THE RELEASE COULD BE ACHIEVED WITHOUT THE STRONG HELP OF SYRIA.

5. CONGRESSMAN O'BRIEN DWELT AT LENGTH ON THE DILEMMA OF FATHER JENCO WHOSE FAMILY WERE NOT ONLY FROM THE CONGRESSMAN'S DISTRICT BUT GOOD FRIENDS. HE THANKED THE PRESIDENT FOR THE WARM RECEPTION PROVIDED BY BOTH VICE PRESIDENT KHADDAM AND FOREIGN MINISTER SHARA' THE DAY BEFORE AND PROMISED TO CONVEY SYRIAN VIEWS TO U.S. OFFICIALS UPON THE CONGRESSMAN'S RETURN TO WASHINGTON. HE SAID JENCO WAS A PRIEST WHOSE CONCERN WITH THE DISADVANTAGED HAD LED HIM, BEFORE BEIRUT, TO CALCUTTA AND AMERICAN

INDIAN RESERVATIONS.

6. ASAD SAID THAT HE WELCOMED O'BRIEN'S VISIT AND APPRECIATED HIS CONCERN FOR JENCO'S IMPRISONMENT. HE NOTED THAT THE SITUATION

IN LEBANON WAS COMPLEX. IT WAS AN "ARMED COUNTRY." SYRIA WAS SATISFIED WITH THE CONTACTS IT HAD WITH THE "BIG GROUPS" IN LEBANON. HE THOUGHT



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THE PROCESS OF DIALOGUE AND REFORM WHICH SYRIA HAD HELPED TO START MIGHT LEAD TO IMPROVEMENT IN SECURITY THERE. HE SAID IN PASSING THAT WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS A GUARANTEED CEASE-FIRE BY ALL WITH EVERYONE BUT GOVERNMENT FORCES LAYING DOWN THEIR ARMS. THERE WAS NOW A GENERAL AGREEMENT AMONG THE LARGE GROUPS AND WHILE DIFFERENCES MIGHT SURFACE IN THE FUTURE, WHAT WAS NEEDED NOW WOULD NOT REQUIRE "A MIRACLE."

7. LEBANON WAS NEVERTHELESS TAKING MORE TIME THAN SYRIA WANTED TO SPEND SINCE TO ENCOURAGE THE DIALOGUE IN QUESTION IT WAS NECESSARY TO TALK TO "TENS OF PEOPLE." ASAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT SYRIA DID NOT HAVE ROUTINE CONTACTS WITH "THE MINOR GROUPS," WHOSE KIDNAPPINGS AND OTHER ACTS EMBARRASSED SYRIA AS WELL AS LEBANON. THESE GROUPS, HE SAID FIRMLY, CAN SLOW DOWN BUT NOT STOP AN OVERALL AGREEMENT. HE WENT ON TO NOTE THAT IN THE TWA CRISIS, SYRIA DID HAVE CONTACTS WITH THESE MINOR GROUPS AND IT WAS SYRIAN INTERVENTION AT THE LAST MINUTE THAT ENDED THE 24-HOUR DELAY IN RELEASE OF THE HOSTAGES. WHILE ASAD MADE CLEAR THAT HE HAD NO "POLITICAL DEALS" WITH SUCH GROUPS, HE SAID HE HAD PASSED ON CERTAIN GUARANTEES TO THEM "IN THE LIGHT OF GUARANTEES WE GOT FROM PRESIDENT REAGAN."

8. ASAD LAMENTED THAT U.S. GUARANTEES

IN THIS CASE AND IN THE PAST HAD NOT ALWAYS BEEN RESPECTED. AND MENTIONED IN PARTICULAR GUARANTEES PASSED ON BY AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE HABIB. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT IN THE CASE OF THE HOSTAGES IN LEBANON, SYRIA WOULD "DO ALL WE CAN" ALTHOUGH THE MATTER WAS COMPLICATED



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AND SYRIA HAD LIMITED INFORMATION. HE SAID
KIDNAPPING WAS "LOATHESOME" AND THAT SYRIA
HAD TOLD LEBANESE LEADERS AND OTHERS THAT
SUCH ACTS DO GREAT HARM TO THE LEBANESE CAUSE.
MOST PEOPLE ARE "REVULSED". HE SAID BY
KIDNAPPING PARTICULARLY WHEN IT INVOLVES
PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT SOLDIERS OR IN SECURITY
WORK. ASAD POINTED TO THE HELP SYRIA HAD
BEEN ABLE TO GIVE IN THE CASE OF THE SAUDI
CHARGE' AND IN THE CASE OF DAVID DODGE, BUT RE-
GRETTE THE SITUATION HAD BECOME MUCH MORE
COMPLICATED RECENTLY.

9. ASAD TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE VISIT OF
CONGRESSMAN O'BRIEN, A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE, TO DEPLORE THE
MAGNITUDE OF U. S. AID TO ISRAEL, CLAIMING
THE SUM GIVEN TO EACH ISRAELI WAS MORE THAN
THE PER CAPITA GNP OF SYRIA. HE WONDERED
RHETORICALLY IF THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
WAS ACTING IN ITS OWN INTERESTS IN ALL SITU-
ATIONS OR IN THE INTERESTS OF "ZIONISTS."
HE SPOKE AT LENGTH OF ISRAELI "EXPANSIONISM"
AND QUESTIONED AN AMERICAN ROLE AS GUARANTOR
OF THE PEACE PROCESS IN THE AREA. HE SAID
NEVERTHELESS HE ACCEPTED THE U. S. ROLE IN
THESE MATTERS. IF THE U. S. JOINED A CONFERENCE
WHICH INCLUDED OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES IN
THE AREA AND OUTSIDE, AND HE SAID REPEATEDLY
TO THE CONGRESSMAN THAT HE WANTED A CLOSE
RELATIONSHIP WITH THE USG.

11. THE DISCUSSION ENDED WITH CONGRESSMAN
O'BRIEN ONCE AGAIN THANKING ASAD FOR SYRIA'S
HELP IN THE RELEASE OF PREVIOUS HOSTAGES
AND URGING HIM TO CONTINUE HIS EFFORTS ON



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BEHALF OF THOSE STILL IN CAPTIVITY.

12. COMMENT: WHILE ASAD DID NOT MENTION ATLIT BY NAME, HIS CRITICISM OF U.S. "GUARANTEES" REFLECTED HIS IRRITATION THAT THE DETAINEES IN ATLIT PRISON HAVE NOT YET BEEN RELEASED. HE IMPLIED THAT THE SYRIAN ROLE IN SECURING THE RELEASE OF THE REMAINING HOSTAGES HAD BEEN COMPLICATED BY THE U.S. ROLE IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE RELEASE OF TWA HOSTAGES. HE NEVERTHELESS PROMISED TO DO WHAT HE COULD TO HELP. HIS WARMTH TOWARD THE CONGRESSMAN WAS EVIDENT THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION, PARTICULARLY WHEN O'BRIEN OFFERED THANKS FOR SYRIAN AID.

13. BEIRUT MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.
EAGLETON