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FM THE WHITE HOUSE  
TO CABINET OFFICE  
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NLRR M07-045 #31673  
BY CU NARADATE 3/5/08

~~TOP SECRET~~ VIA CABINET OFFICE CHANNELS SENSITIVE WHO1119  
TO PRIME MINISTER THATCHER

BEGIN TEXT:

FEBRUARY 6, 1984

DEAR MARGARET:

I KNOW THE SITUATION IN LEBANON, OUR ATTEMPTS TO BRING PEACE AND STABILITY TO THAT NATION, AND THE SAFETY OF OUR PERSONNEL THERE REMAIN IN THE FOREFRONT OF OUR CONCERNS. I, THEREFORE, WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU SOME FURTHER THOUGHTS ON HOW BEST TO PROCEED. THE SECURITY PLAN WHICH WAS PROMISED HAS NOT YET BEEN IMPLEMENTED, AND CRIES OF VIOLENCE ONCE MORE DROWN OUT THE VOICES OF REASON. NEVERTHELESS, I BELIEVE WE MUST PERSEVERE. I AM CONVINCED OF THE JUSTICE OF OUR OBJECTIVES IN LEBANON AND I AM COMMITTED TO THE COURSE WE HAVE CHOSEN.

UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE MANY WHO NEITHER UNDERSTAND NOR APPRECIATE THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR JOINT COMMITMENT TO LEBANON, NOR THE REAL CAUSE OF THE CONTINUING LEBANESE TRAGEDY. SYRIA REMAINS THE PRIMARY OBSTACLE, NOT ONLY TO THE SECURITY PLAN, BUT ALSO TO THE WIDER GOALS OF A BROADENED LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AND NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. SYRIA HARBORS THE TERRORISTS WHO INFILTRATE INTO BEIRUT TO ATTACK OUR TROOPS AND NOW EVEN OUR CIVILIANS. IT IS SYRIAN ARTILLERY OVERLOOKING BEIRUT WHICH CONTINUES TO INTIMIDATE THE LEBANESE PEOPLE AND THEIR GOVERNMENT AND WOULD INTIMIDATE US AS WELL. AND IT IS SYRIAN-SUPPLIED SHELLS THAT RAIN DOWN UPON LEBANESE CIVILIANS AND THE MULTINATIONAL FORCE ALIKE.

BEHIND SYRIA STANDS THE SOVIET UNION, WITH ITS THOUSANDS OF ADVISERS ON SYRIAN SOIL AND ITS UNENDING SUPPLY OF ARMS. ALONGSIDE SYRIA STAND IRAN AND LIBYA AND THEIR FANATICS AND TERRORISTS WHO FREELY ROAM LEBANESE TERRITORY. ALTHOUGH SYRIA AND HER FRIENDS STAND IN THE WAY OF PROGRESS TOWARD PEACE, THE WESTERN ROLE IN LEBANON AND THE ROLE OF OUR MULTINATIONAL FORCE, IN PARTICULAR, HAVE UNJUSTLY BECOME THE ISSUE FOR MANY. AS WE KNOW SO WELL, THE PATH TO PEACE IN LEBANON IS NOT BLOCKED BY THE MNF. I KNOW WE SHARE THE SAME CONCERN THAT TO LEAVE THE FIELD TO SYRIA AND TO RETREAT IN THE FACE OF TERRORISM WILL

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ONLY EMBOLDEN THOSE WHO WISH TO DO US HARM.

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NEVERTHELESS, ALL THE MNF CONTRIBUTORS ARE NOW CONFRONTED WITH A SYRIAN PERCEPTION THAT DOMESTIC CONCERNS IN OUR COUNTRIES WILL ULTIMATELY FORCE US TO WITHDRAW THE MNF FROM LEBANON, IF DAMASCUS ONLY WAITS. THIS PROBLEM OF SYRIAN PERCEPTION IS ONLY COMPOUNDED BY THE PERCEPTION IN THE UNITED STATES THAT AN ELITE AMERICAN FORCE IS TIED DOWN AT BEIRUT AIRPORT, REDUCED TO PASSIVITY AND ACCOMPLISHING LITTLE OR NOTHING. OUR MARINES HAVE, IN FACT, BEEN LITERALLY FORCED UNDERGROUND FOR PROTECTION. STILL, THE CASUALTIES AMONG ALL MNF CONTINGENTS CONTINUES.

UNLESS BOTH THESE PERCEPTIONS ARE ALTERED, OUR JOINT ABILITY TO INFLUENCE THE COURSE OF EVENTS IN LEBANON WILL REMAIN CIRCUMSCRIBED AT BEST. YET, I KNOW YOU SHARE MY BELIEF THAT WE MUST NOT ACCEPT SYRIA'S CHOSEN ALTERNATIVE: THAT THE MNF CUT AND RUN.

AFTER CONSIDERABLE DELIBERATION AND DISCUSSIONS WITH SECRETARIES SHULTZ, WEINBERGER AND AMBASSADOR RUMSFELD, I BELIEVE WE SHOULD PURSUE SEVERAL NEW MEASURES THAT WILL HELP THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT TO MEET ITS CHALLENGES WHILE AT THE SAME TIME CHANGING THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE MNF ROLE IN LEBANON AND THE PERCEPTION IN SYRIA OF MNF RESOLVE AND STAYING POWER. IN DEVELOPING THESE MEASURES, I HAVE DRAWN ON YOUR OWN WISE COUNSEL TO ME IN THE PAST.

I HAVE DECIDED, AT PRESIDENT GEMAYEL'S REQUEST, TO MODIFY THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE U.S. CONTINGENT TO THE MNF. FOLLOWING CLOSE COORDINATION AMONG OUR MNF MILITARY COMMANDERS AND THE LEBANESE ARMED FORCES, THE UNITED STATES WILL BEGIN A PHASED REDEPLOYMENT OF THE MARINES ON SHORE AT BEIRUT AIRPORT BACK TO THEIR SHIPS OFFSHORE. THIS REDEPLOYMENT WILL BE IN STAGES BASED ON AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION. THIS FORCE WILL REMAIN OFF THE LEBANESE COAST AS A MOBILE RESERVE READY FOR RENEWED OPERATIONS ASHORE IF NECESSARY. A CONTINGENT OF THE MARINES WILL MAINTAIN DEFENSIVE POSITIONS NEAR THE BRITISH CHANCERY AND THE OTHER BUILDINGS USED BY U.S. DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL.

THIS REDUCTION OF OUR MEN ON THE GROUND WILL BE BALANCED BY EVEN STRONGER SUPPORT FOR THE LEBANESE ARMY. I WANT TO STRESS THAT WHILE OUR FORCES ASHORE WILL BE SMALLER, OUR COMMITMENT TO THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT REMAINS UNDIMINISHED. I HAVE THEREFORE ORDERED A NUMBER OF ACTIONS DESIGNED TO IMPROVE EVEN FURTHER THE STRENGTH AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LEBANESE ARMY WHICH HAS ALREADY MADE SO MUCH PROGRESS. WE WILL ACCELERATE AND INCREASE OUR CURRENT MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING FOR THE ARMY, AND PROVIDE A SPECIAL UNIT FOR NEW COUNTER-TERRORISM TRAINING. WE WILL ALSO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INTELLIGENCE SUPPORT AND TRAINING. FINALLY, WE WILL IMPROVE LAF COUNTER-ARTILLERY CAPABILITY SO THAT THE LAF WILL BE BETTER ABLE TO DEAL WITH THE

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ARTILLERY OF THE LEBANESE OPPOSITION.

SYRIAN ARTILLERY, HOWEVER, WILL REMAIN A THREAT TO THE BEIRUT AREA. IN ORDER, THEREFORE, TO ENHANCE THE SAFETY OF MNF PERSONNEL,  
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AUTHORITY WILL BE GIVEN TO U.S. NAVAL FORCES OFFSHORE TO PROVIDE NAVAL GUNFIRE AND AIR SUPPORT AGAINST ANY UNITS IN SYRIAN-CONTROLLED TERRITORY FIRING INTO THE GREATER BEIRUT AREA, AS WELL AS AGAINST ANY UNIT CONDUCTING A HOSTILE ATTACK DIRECTLY AGAINST THE MNF OR U.S. PERSONNEL AND FACILITIES.

I BELIEVE THESE MODIFICATIONS IN THE ROLE OF OUR FORCES IN THE MNF WILL LEAD TO AN ENHANCED LAF CAPABILITY AS WELL AS DECREASED EXPOSURE FOR OUR MNF PERSONNEL. MORE IMPORTANT, THE SYRIANS WILL NOW BE FACED WITH AN ENTIRELY NEW SITUATION INDICATING GREATER MNF ACTIVE SUPPORT AND A CONTINUING STRONG COMMITMENT TO THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT. WE WILL, IN FACT, BE SUBSTANTIALLY IMPROVING THE LAF'S ABILITY TO CONTROL BEIRUT AND TO EXTEND THE GOL'S AUTHORITY OUTSIDE THE CITY AND ULTIMATELY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

WHILE THESE CHANGES ARE UNDERWAY AND ONCE THEY ARE COMPLETED, WE WILL ALSO CONTINUE OUR INTENSIVE EFFORTS TO BRING ALL SIDES TO THE BARGAINING TABLE. WE WILL CONTINUE TO PRESS THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION ALIKE TO MOVE TOWARD NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. LIKE YOU, I AM FIRMLY CONVINCED THAT ONLY A PEACEFUL, NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT CAN ULTIMATELY STAUNCH THE FRATRICIDAL SPILLING OF LEBANESE BLOOD.

I BELIEVE THE COURSE I HAVE OUTLINED OFFERS THE BEST MEANS TO ACHIEVE OUR SHARED ULTIMATE OBJECTIVES OF A UNITED, SOVEREIGN AND FREE LEBANON. I HOPE I WILL HAVE YOUR SUPPORT NOW AS IN THE PAST. IN THE COMING DAYS, OUR EXPERTS WILL BE ABLE TO COORDINATE THE DETAILS OF THE STRATEGY I AM PROPOSING AND TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE ROLES YOUR FORCES AND THOSE OF OUR MNF PARTNERS MIGHT USEFULLY PLAY IN CONJUNCTION WITH AMERICAN FORCES, KEEPING IN MIND THE IMPORTANT OBJECTIVE OF MAINTAINING SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON. THE CHALLENGE WE FACE IN LEBANON IS GREAT, BUT IT IS A CHALLENGE WE, THE LEADERS OF THE FREE WORLD, MUST MEET. OUR COOPERATION AND STEADFASTNESS REMAIN ESSENTIAL. I HAVE ASKED AMBASSADOR MURPHY TO VISIT YOU IN THE NEXT DAY OR SO TO GIVE YOU MORE COMPLETE DETAILS OF OUR THINKING.

SINCERELY,

RON

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