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INFO PRIORITY TEL AVIV, JERUSALEM, CAIRO, TUNIS, AMMAN
INFO PRIORITY UKMIS NEW YORK, MOSCOW

ARAB/ISRAEL: PEACE PROCESS

SUMMARY

1. ROSS CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC THAT CURRENT PROCESS WILL RESULT IN AN ISRAELI/PALESTINIAN MEETING. GRATEFUL FOR ANYTHING WE CAN DO TO PERSUADE PLO NOT TO GIVE ISRAEL AN EXCUSE TO WITHDRAW. PREPARED TO ACCEPT SOVIET OBSERVER PRESENCE AT DIALOGUE IF RUSSIANS MEND THEIR FENCES WITH ISRAEL. POSSIBLE UK ROLE HERE TOO.

DETAIL

2. MINISTER CALLED ON ROSS, (DIRECTOR, POLICY PLANNING STAFF, STATE DEPARTMENT) TODAY TO DISCUSS THE PEACE PROCESS IN ADVANCE OF YOUR VISIT. ROSS SAID THAT HE WELCOMED THE OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE US HIS APPRECIATION OF PROGRESS SINCE HIS MEETING WITH MR WALDEGRAVE IN DECEMBER.

3. ROSS OPENED BY SAYING THAT THE ADMINISTRATION HAD HOPED TO MOVE QUICKLY ONCE THEY HAD OBTAINED ACCEPTANCE FROM ISRAEL AND EGYPT OF THE BAKER FIVE POINTS. BUT THE RESPONSES, WHILE FAVOURABLE, HAD NOT BEEN CLEAN AND IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT MORE WORK WAS GOING TO BE REQUIRED IN ADVANCE OF A FOREIGN MINISTERS TRILATERAL. ROSS SAID THAT SECRETARY BAKER SAW IT AS ESSENTIAL THAT THE KEY ISSUES SHOULD BE WORKED UPON TO THE POINT WHERE THEY WERE RIPE FOR POLITICAL DECISION AT THE TRILATERAL. A TRILATERAL WHICH WAS A FAILURE WOULD LEAVE A SENSE OF CHAOS.

4. IN EARLY JANUARY THE ADMINISTRATION SENSED THAT THE PARTIES WERE CONTENT NOT TO MOVE THE PROCESS FORWARD: THE ISRAELIS BECAUSE OF INTERNAL PROBLEMS WITHIN LIKUD, THE EGYPTIANS BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT THAT THE PLO NEEDED MORE TIME TO DEVELOP THEIR POSITION. THE ADMINISTRATION, ON THE OTHER HAND, THOUGHT THAT, IF THE PROCESS WERE LEFT TO SIMMER, MOMENTUM WOULD BE LOST AND IT WOULD FALL APART. IT HAD THEREFORE BEEN DECIDED PUBLICLY TO RESTATE US COMMITMENT TO THE PROCESS, MAKING IT CLEAR THAT, IF IT FAILED, IT WOULD NOT BE FOR LACK OF US EFFORT (MY TELNO 77 REFERS). ROSS SAID THAT,

ON THE BASIS OF LAST WEEK'S MEETINGS, HE THOUGHT THAT THIS MESSAGE HAD HAD THE DESIRED EFFECT AND PROMPTLY. BOTH SIDES WERE FOCUSSED UPON THE CENTRAL PROBLEM OF THE SELECTION AND ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PALESTINIAN DELEGATION. HE WAS ENCOURAGED BY THE FACT THAT BOTH THE ISRAELIS AND THE PLO SEEMED DISPOSED TO AVOID SYMBOLS AND TO ESCHEW ATTITUDES WHICH WOULD BACK THE OTHER INTO A CORNER, THE IMPLICATION BEING THEY WERE TAKING THE POSSIBILITY OF NEGOTIATIONS SERIOUSLY.

5. ROSS THOUGHT THAT THE PARTIES NOW ACCEPTED THE ESSENTIAL CRITERIA FOR SELECTING PALESTINIAN PARTICIPANTS - IF THERE SHOULD BE NO PLO OFFICIALS, NO-ONE WITH A TRACK RECORD IN TERRORISM AND GEOGRAPHICAL DIVERSITY OF PARTICIPANTS. WE ASKED WHETHER THE ISRAELIS YET ACCEPTED THAT GEOGRAPHICAL DIVERSITY HAD TO MEAN REPRESENTATIVES FROM EAST JERUSALEM AND THE DIASPORA. ROSS SAID THAT THEY HAD NOT REJECTED THE IDEA. SINCE THE ISRAELIS WERE NOT NORMALLY SLOW TO SAY WHAT THEY COULD NOT ACCEPT, HE WAS ENCOURAGED TO THINK THAT A SUITABLE FORMULA COULD BE FOUND. HE ADDED THAT HE BELIEVED ISRAEL ACCEPTED THE NEED TO TALK TO QUOTE CREDIBLE UNQUOTE PALESTINIANS. THE ADMINISTRATION HAD LOOKED AT THE CREDENTIALS OF THOSE PALESTINIANS FROM THE TERRITORIES WITH WHOM SHAMIR HAD MET OVER THE LAST YEAR. THEY WERE UNIFORMLY NATIONALIST AND IN SOME CASES HAD GONE TO TUNIS IMMEDIATELY AFTER THEIR MEETING WITH SHAMIR. ROSS THOUGHT THE US WAS MUCH LESS AT RISK NOW, THAN MIGHT EARLIER HAVE APPEARED POSSIBLE, OF HAVING IN EFFECT TO NOMINATE A PALESTINIAN DELEGATION.

6. ROSS'S CONCLUSION WAS THAT IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO FIND NAMES ACCEPTABLE TO ALL PARTIES. THE MAIN PRESENT PROBLEM WAS TO GET THE PROCEDURE RIGHT. IF THE PLO INSISTED ON ANNOUNCING THE PALESTINIAN DELEGATION, OR CLAIMING PUBLICLY THAT THEY HAD CHOSEN IT THEN THE PROCESS WOULD GO NO FURTHER. ROSS SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT PRESSURES WITHIN THE PLO TO MAKE SOME PUBLIC CLAIM OF INVOLVEMENT WOULD INCREASE AS THE PROSPECT OF A DIALOGUE APPROACHED, BUT THIS WAS A TIME FOR MAXIMUM DISCIPLINE. HE SAID THAT THE UK HAD A SPECIAL ABILITY TO REINFORCE THIS POINT WITH THE PLO. THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR ANYTHING WE COULD DO TO PERSUADE THE PLO THAT THEY SHOULD NOT GIVE THE ISRAELIS AN EXCUSE TO WALK AWAY FROM THEIR OWN INITIATIVE. HE ADDED THAT, IN THE ADMINISTRATION'S VIEW, THE PLO WOULD NOT NEED TO HOLD ITS PEACE INDEFINITELY. HE SAW THE CRITICAL THRESHOLD AS BEING THE COMMITMENT BY THE PARTIES TO A DIALOGUE. ONCE THE DIALOGUE HAD BEGUN, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THE ISRAELIS TO PULL OUT.

7. ON THE OTHER ASPECTS OF THE DIALOGUE, ROSS SAID THAT HE WAS CONFIDENT THAT AGREEMENT COULD BE REACHED ON THE AGENDA.

WHAT THE ADMINISTRATION HAD IN MIND WAS OPENING STATEMENTS BY BOTH PARTIES, WHICH WOULD BE UNCONFINED, FOLLOWED BY DETAILED DISCUSSIONS ON THE ELECTIONS PROPOSAL. THIS WOULD COVER HOW TO GET TO ELECTIONS, THE MODALITIES OF ELECTIONS AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ELECTIONS AND THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS WHICH WOULD FOLLOW.

8. ROSS SAW THE OTHER MAJOR UNRESOLVED QUESTION AS BEING OUTSIDE INVOLVEMENT. HE SAID THAT THE EGYPTIANS WOULD LIKE TO HAVE THE US AND SOVIET UNION PRESENT AT THE DIALOGUE AS OBSERVERS, THOUGH THIS WAS NOT A CONDITION FOR THEM. THEIR ARGUMENT IN FAVOUR OF A SOVIET PRESENCE WAS THAT THEY WOULD CAUSE MORE TROUBLE IF THEY WERE EXCLUDED. THE ADMINISTRATION WERE NOT KEEN, BUT HAD NOT RULED THIS OUT, PROVIDED THAT THE SOVIET UNION RE-ESTABLISHED DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL IN ADVANCE. HE SAID THAT THE ISRAELI POSITION WAS TOUGHER, BUT HE DID NOT FEEL IT WAS AN ISSUE ON WHICH THEY WOULD WANT TO QUOTE GO TO THE MAT UNQUOTE. ROSS ADMITTED THAT BAKER WAS NOT ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT A SOVIET PRESENCE, BUT IMPLIED THAT HE WOULD BE PREPARED TO GO ALONG WITH IT.

9. ROSS SAID THAT TARASOV WAS CALLING (AT HIS OWN INITIATIVE) ON HIM TOMORROW. THE LINE THAT HE (ROSS) WOULD TAKE WAS THAT THE ADMINISTRATION BELIEVED THEY WERE GETTING CLOSE TO AGREEMENT ON A DIALOGUE, BUT THAT THERE WAS DISAGREEMENT AMONG THE PARTIES ON THE QUESTION OF A SOVIET PRESENCE. THIS WAS ESSENTIALLY A PROBLEM BETWEEN THE SOVIET UNION AND ISRAEL. SECRETARY BAKER WOULD LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING IN MOSCOW NEXT MONTH WHAT STEPS THE SOVIET UNION HAD TAKEN TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM. ROSS ADDED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION MIGHT BE PREPARED TO ASSIST AT SOME STAGE, BUT THEY WANTED THE RUSSIANS TO ACCEPT THAT THE PROBLEM WAS THEIRS, AND THAT ITS SOLUTION WAS IN THEIR HANDS. ROSS THOUGHT THAT THE SOVIET UNION WOULD WANT TO PICK UP THIS OFFER. IF WE TOO COULD FIND SOME WAY TO REINFORCE THE POINT IT WAS UP TO THE RUSSIANS TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE, THAT WOULD BE ALL TO THE GOOD. (COMMENT: TO JUDGE FROM WHAT VORONTSOV TOLD MR WALDEGRAVE ON 22 JANUARY THE RUSSIANS ARE SOME WAY FROM SEING THINGS IN THIS LIGHT - MOSCOW TELEGRAM NO 106, PARAGRAPH 7).

10. WOOD POINTED OUT THAT THE AMERICANS WERE SOMETIMES SEEN IN PLO CIRCLES AS INTRACTABLE BECAUSE OF THEIR ATTITUDES IN INTERNATIONAL FORA, SUCH AS THE FAO. ROSS SAID HE REALISED THAT. THE PLO HAD, HOWEVER, TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE DISTANCE TRAVELLED BY THE ADMINISTRATION IN THEIR OWN DIALOGUE WITH THE ORGANISATION AND OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S NEED TO RETAIN DOMESTIC CREDIBILITY. IT WAS THE ISRAELI SENSE OF

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THE US PUBLIC SANDS SHIFTING WHICH LAY BEHIND THE
ADMINISTRATION'S ABILITY TO BRING THEM ALONG TOWARDS TALKS.

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