

SECRET *ABEDIP*

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M DAMASCUS
TO FLASH FCO
TELNO 381
OF 011255Z MAY 90
INFO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON, BEIRUT, JIS CYPRUS

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RELEASE OF REED

SUMMARY

1. REED HELD WITH KEENAN AND MCCARTHY UP TO 29 APRIL. DYNAMIC STILL OPAQUE BUT SYRIA PLAYING A SIGNIFICANT ROLE.

TEXT

2. DHM AND I WERE GIVEN THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT IN STRICT CONFIDENCE BY A US EMBASSY OFFICIAL WHO FORMED PART OF THE INITIAL DEBRIEFING TEAM FOR FRANK REED, THE AMERICAN HOSTAGE RELEASED IN BEIRUT ON 30 APRIL.

3. REED TOLD EMBASSY OFFICIALS AT HIS INITIAL DEBRIEFING IN DAMASCUS THAT HE HAD BEEN HELD SINCE OCTOBER 1989 IN A BUILDING, NEAR THE HAY AL SALAAM MOSQUE IN THE SOUTHERN BEIRUTI SUBURB OF BURJ AL BARAJINAH. HE HAD BEEN BLINDFOLDED FOR MOST OF THE TIME, STRAPPED TO HIS BED. HE HAD SHARED CAPTIVITY IN THIS BUILDING WITH JOHN MCCARTHY AND BRIAN KEENAN, BOTH WITH WHOM HE HAD SPOKEN, UP UNTIL HIS DEPARTURE FROM THAT LOCATION ON THE EVENING OF 29 APRIL. ACCORDING TO REED, BOTH KEENAN AND MCCARTHY HAD BEEN BEATEN BUT WERE NOT IN BAD PHYSICAL CONDITION. HE HAD LAST SEEN THESE TWO BRITISH HOSTAGES ON 29 APRIL. KEENAN'S TOUGHNESS AND RESILIENCE HAD IMPRESSED REED. KEENAN WAS INSISTENT THAT HE WANTED NOTHING TO DO WITH ANY HOSTAGE DEALS THAT MIGHT INVOLVE THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT; HE WAS AN IRISHMAN FROM THE REPUBLIC AND PROUD OF IT.

4. KEENAN AND MCCARTHY WERE AT THIS LOCATION WHEN REED ARRIVED THERE IN OCTOBER 1989. REED HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN HELD IN A SUBTERRANEAN PRISON, WHICH HE TERMED THE PIT AND HE PRESUMED TO BE IN THE BIQA VALLEY. THE PIT FORMED PART OF A PRISON HOUSE IN WHICH, AT VARIOUS TIMES, REED CLAIMS HE WAS HELD WITH THE FOLLOWING: A SOUTH KOREAN, FATHER JENKO AND A FRENCHMAN (ALL NOW RELEASED) AND SUTHERLAND AND ANDERSON (STILL HELD).

5. IN ALL REED SAYS HE WAS MOVED 16 TIMES TO AND OUT OF THESE LOCATIONS DURING HIS 3 YEARS AND 3 MONTHS OF CAPTIVITY. NEVERTHELESS, HE EMERGED FROM HIS ORDEAL IN GOOD MENTAL AND PHYSICAL SHAPE INSPITE OF LOOKING A BIT PALE AND HAVING LOST WEIGHT. HIS DEBRIEFERS FOUND HIS VOICE FRAIL BUT THAT HE WAS EAGER TO TALK. HOWEVER HIS TESTIMONY BORE SIGNS OF SOME INCONSISTENCIES, AND HIS DEBRIEFERS WERE SURPRISED THAT HE SAW SO MANY OTHER FOREIGN HOSTAGES WHEN HE SPENT SO MUCH OF HIS TIME BLINDFOLDED. HE THOUGHT HE WAS THE LAST HOSTAGE TO BE RELEASED AND YET HE SPOKE OF TERRY WAITE STILL BEING HELD (IN HIS VIEW) IN THE OLD IRANIAN EMBASSY BUILDING IN BEIRUT. HIS DEBRIEFERS AT WIESBADEN WILL FORM A MORE CONSIDERED VIEW OF HIS RELIABILITY.

6. REED EMERGED WITH NO WRITTEN MESSAGE FROM THE CAPTORS, ONLY VERBAL AND OFT-REPEATED VIBES THAT ALL THE CAPTORS WANTED WAS SOMEONE FROM THE US AND OTHER FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS INVOLVED TO TALK TO.

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7. US EMBASSY IS STILL UNSURE EXACTLY WHAT THE DYNAMIC AT WORK HERE IS. BUT IT BELIEVES THAT THE RELEASE COULD NOT HAVE TAKEN PLACE WITHOUT STRONG IRANIAN COMMITMENT AND PRESSURE ON THE CAPTORS. HOWEVER, THE SYRIANS HAVE PLAYED A KEY FACILITATING ROLE IN TRANSLATING WASHINGTON'S POSITION TO TEHERAN AND IN GIVING THE IRANIANS COVER AND MORAL SUPPORT. EMBASSY DID NOT THINK THAT THE RELEASE COULD HAVE HAPPENED WITHOUT SYRIA. BUT EXACTLY HOW MUCH CREDIT SYRIA SHOULD BE GIVEN FOR STARTING THE PROCESS REMAINED UNCLEAR.

8. REED IS THE SECOND OF THE TWO HOSTAGES WHOM THE SYRIANS ORIGINALLY SAID WOULD BE RELEASED. EMBASSY WAS UNSURE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT. THE US ADMINISTRATION HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT IT WANTED ALL RPT ALL THE HOSTAGES RELEASED. ONLY THEN COULD US-IRANIAN RELATIONS IMPROVE. THE SYRIANS HAD BEEN TOLD THAT THE US WOULD NOT LISTEN TO, FAR LESS MEET ANY COUNTER DEMANDS FROM IRAN OR THE KIDNAPPERS UNTIL ALL THE HOSTAGES WERE OUT. THE SYRIANS SUGGESTION THAT THE RELEASE OF 2 HOSTAGES REQUIRED A RECIPROCAL GESTURE FROM WASHINGTON HAD BEEN FIRMLY REJECTED.

COMMENT

9. BOTH SYRIA AND IRAN STAND TO GAIN FROM ENDING THE HOSTAGE SAGA ONCE AND FOR ALL. AT THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, APART FROM PRESIDENT BUSH'S THANKS, THEY APPEAR UNLIKELY TO GET ANY SWEETENERS FROM WASHINGTON UNTIL THE REMAINING HOSTAGES ARE RELEASED. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER IRANIAN PRESIDENT RAFSANJANI IS ABLE OR WILLING TO EXERT THE NECESSARY AUTHORITY TO ACHIEVE THIS. HOW THE RELEASE DYNAMIC WILL DEVELOP IS THUS HARD TO PREDICT.

10. DESPITE THE INCONSISTENCIES IN REED'S FIRST DEBRIEF, IT APPEARS THAT 2 OF OUR POSSIBLE 5 (INCLUDING COLLETT) BRITISH HOSTAGES ARE ALIVE AND IN THE HANDS OF A GROUP WHICH MAY BE READY TO CONSIDER THEIR EARLY RELEASE. BIS' CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR HANDLING THEIR RELEASE THROUGH DAMASCUS ARE IN PLACE. WE HOPE YOU WILL STILL BE ABLE TO SUPPLY AN AIRCRAFT AT SHORT NOTICE TO PICK THEM UP IF REQUIRED.

11. WE ARE GIVING THIS TELEGRAM A HIGHLY RESTRICTED DISTRIBUTION SO THAT YOU CAN BE THE JUDGE OF HOW WIDELY ITS CONTENTS SHOULD BE DISSEMINATED. DO YOU WISH US TO BRIEF THE AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR?

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DAMASCUS TELNO 031: RELEASE OF REED

1. AMBASSADOR BUSBY, COUNTER TERRORISM AT STATE DEPARTMENT, BRIEFED ME ON 1 MAY ON REED'S RELEASE.
2. HIS ACCOUNT CONFIRMED ALL THE DETAILS IN DAMASCUS TUR BUT ADDED LITTLE TO IT. REED CERTAINLY THOUGHT HE WAS THE LAST US HOSTAGE TO BE RELEASED BUT ALSO THOUGHT THAT KEENAN AND MCCARTHY WERE GOING TO BE RELEASED WITH HIM. BUSBY CONFIRMED THAT REED HAD NEVER SEEN WAITE BUT THOUGHT HIM TO HAVE BEEN HELD AT ONE STAGE IN THE OLD IRANIAN EMBASSY BUILDING.
3. REED SAID THAT MCCARTHY AND KEENAN HAD BEEN SUBJECTED TO SEVERE BEATINGS ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS INCLUDING - ONCE - ON A CHRISTMAS DAY. HE HIMSELF HAD BEEN CHAINED TO HIS BED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO MAKE IT VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO SIT UP. HE HAD SEEN DAYLIGHT ONLY ONCE IN HIS ENTIRE CAPTIVITY. HE HAD RECEIVED ADEQUATE FRESH FOOD. MCCARTHY AND KEENAN WOULD HAVE RECEIVED SIMILAR TREATMENT.
4. REED IS ANXIOUS TO TELEPHONE KEENAN AND MCCARTHY'S FAMILIES. (YOU ARE PASSING US THE MCCARTHY NUMBER). BUSBY HAS NO OBJECTION TO YOUR INFORMING THEM OF WHAT REED HAD TO SAY ABOUT THEIR CONDITION. BUT HE MADE VERY CLEAR THAT THE US (AND REED) WOULD NOT WANT ANY OF THIS TO BECOME PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE AND UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD IT BE TRACEABLE TO REED. BUSBY WAS STRUCK BY THE CONCERN WHICH BOTH REED AND POLHILL SHARED THAT NOTHING WHICH THEY MIGHT SAY OR DO AFTER THEIR RELEASE SHOULD COMPLICATE MATTERS FOR THE REMAINING HOSTAGES.
5. AS TO THE WAY AHEAD, BUSBY SAID THAT THE SYRIANS HAD INITIALLY SAID THAT TWO HOSTAGES WOULD BE RELEASED WITHOUT CONDITIONS AND, DESPITE A HICCUP JUST PRIOR TO POLHILL'S RELEASE, THAT HAD HAPPENED. THEY WERE NOW TELLING THE ADMINISTRATION THAT, WITH THE HOSTAGE-TAKERS HAVING SHOWN THEIR GOOD FAITH, IT WAS NOW UP TO THE AMERICANS TO DO SOMETHING. WHAT THE IRANIANS WERE LOOKING FOR WAS THE RELEASE OF THE 400-500 SHIITE PRISONERS HELD BY ISRAEL, THE RELEASE OF OBEID, AND THE RETURN OF THE FOUR IRANIAN HOSTAGES (WHOM THE ADMINISTRATION HAVE LONG SINCE THOUGHT TO BE DEAD). BUSBY SAID THAT IT WAS CLEAR THAT BOTH SYRIA AND IRAN WANTED THE US TO ACT AS MIDDLEMAN TO BRING PRESSURE ON ISRAEL. BUT THE US WERE UNWILLING TO DO THIS. BUSBY DENIED THAT THERE HAD BEEN ANY PRESSURE ON OR SUGGESTION BY THE US TO ISRAEL TO ACCEDE TO IRAN'S DEMANDS, DESPITE SOME HEAVY HANDED HINTS BY SOME US SPOKESMEN YESTERDAY THAT RELEASES BY ISRAEL WOULD CAUSE THE US NO PROBLEMS.

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6. ACCORDING TO BUSBY, THE ADMINISTRATION ARE NOW STRUGGLING WITH THE PROBLEM OF HOW TO KEEP THE MOMENTUM GOING. SOME THINK THAT THE ADMINISTRATION SHOULD CONTINUE TO SIT STILL WHILE OTHERS THINK THEY SHOULD QUOTE DO SOMETHING UNQUOTE. BUT BUSBY SAID THAT IT WAS FAR FROM CLEAR WHAT THAT SOMETHING SHOULD BE. HE STRESSED REPEATEDLY THAT WHATEVER THE ADMINISTRATION DID (IF IT DID ANYTHING) WOULD NOT COMPROMISE ITS BASIC POSITION OF REFUSING TO NEGOTIATE. HE ARGUED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY OF CREATING CONDITIONS, IN WHICH THOSE COUNTRIES WHICH SUPPORTED THE HOSTAGE TAKERS CAME TO RECOGNIZE THAT THEIR POLICIES WERE LEADING NOWHERE AND WERE DAMAGING ONLY THEMSELVES, WAS BEARING FRUIT. IT WOULD BE FOOLISH FOR THE US TO START TRYING TO CUT DEALS AT THIS STAGE. BUSBY WAS CONCERNED THAT, EG, MEMBERS OF THE EC MIGHT RESPOND TO THE TWO RELEASES BY MOVING TO MODIFY SANCTIONS AGAINST IRAN. BUSBY THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE THE WORST POSSIBLE SIGNAL TO SEND.

7. BUSBY REPEATED THAT THE RECENT TWO RELEASES HAD BEEN THE EASY PART: PROGRESS FROM NOW ON WOULD BE MUCH HARDER. HE WAS NOT OPTIMISTIC ABOUT EARLY PROGRESS. OVER THE LONGER TERM, HOWEVER, HE THOUGHT THAT THERE WAS SOME EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT THE IRANIAN LEADERSHIP HAD DECIDED TO PUT THE HOSTAGE ISSUE BEHIND THEM, HAVING COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE PRESENT SITUATION WAS NO LONGER IN THEIR INTERESTS. IF THAT WERE SO, THERE WAS SOME HOPE THAT FURTHER RELEASES (AND EVENTUALLY THE RELEASE OF ALL WESTERN HOSTAGES) WOULD TAKE PLACE. MEANWHILE, AS WE WOULD HAVE SEEN ON OTHER CHANNELS, THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE EVIDENCE OF MANOEUVRING OVER THE SWISS AND POSSIBLY THE BELGIAN HOSTAGES.

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